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**What support does teacher professional development policy  
offer professional learning communities?**

An analysis of the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for  
Teacher Development and Education in South Africa

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of

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## DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

University of Cape Town

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## ABSTRACT

Both international and local research acknowledges the role of the teacher in the improvement of learning. In this endeavor, professional learning communities have been identified as a key strategy in the project of developing the teacher and improving teaching with the goal of improving learning. Following this logic, the question that the current study asks is: how does South African education policy serve to develop and establish professional learning communities in order to improve teaching in schools?

The *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa* is the first policy in South Africa that explicitly acknowledges the value of professional learning communities (PLCs) in the professional development of teachers. The study utilises a document analysis to examine the value of the framework for the development and sustainability of PLCs and to compare the approach to professional development proposed in the framework to that associated with theoretical notions of PLCs. The policy text was analysed more specifically with regard to the policy's support and professional development for PLC and the sites for such support.

The study finds that the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa* does offer support appropriate for PLCs and for teacher professional development in already existing PLCs, if such PLCs have the internal coherence and culture of learning conducive to the utilisation of the processes proposed in the policy. However, the policy tends to be vague or incomplete regarding aspects that could provide valuable support for new PLCs and does not sufficiently promote collaborative processes and professional development processes at the level of the school. The policy is not deemed robust enough to support the establishment of new PLCs at the level of the school.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>CPTD</b>	Continuing Professional Teacher Development
<b>DTDC</b>	District Teacher Development Centre
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training
<b>IQMS</b>	Integrated Quality Management System
<b>NCS</b>	National Curriculum Statement
<b>NICPD</b>	National Institute for Continuing Professional Development
<b>NLC</b>	Networked Learning Community
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>PD</b>	Professional Development
<b>PLC</b>	Professional Learning Community
<b>PPS</b>	Professional Practice School
<b>PTDI</b>	Provincial Teacher Development Institute
<b>SACE</b>	South African Council of Educators
<b>TED ICT system</b>	Teacher Education and Development Information and Communication Technology system
<b>The Framework</b>	Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa
<b>TS</b>	Teaching School

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

What is the role of South African education policy in the improvement of learning in schools? Both international and local research acknowledges the role of the teacher in the improvement of learning and so the improvement of the teacher and teaching are paramount to the improvement of learning. In this endeavor, professional learning communities have been identified as a key strategy in the project of developing the teacher and improving teaching with the goal of improving learning. Following this logic the question becomes: does South African education policy serve to develop and establish professional learning communities in order to improve teaching in schools? And, if so, how? The *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa* (2011; hereafter referred to as the *Framework*) is the first policy in South Africa that explicitly acknowledges the value of professional learning communities (hereafter referred to as PLCs) in the professional development of teachers. The current study therefore analyses the approach to professional development proposed in the framework in the context of theoretical notions of professional learning communities, in order to determine whether the proposed approach to professional development is appropriate for the development of teachers in professional learning communities.

### **1.1 Rationale**

Teachers start to matter when their role in the improvement of learning is acknowledged. The promise that professional learning communities provide for the professional development of the teacher implies that the development and sustainability of professional learning communities is critical. However, education policy does not necessarily align with these insights. The current study is informed by the problems found at the crossroads of the improvement of learning, the professional development of the teacher and education policy. The rationale of the current study centres on these three issues in the context

of the South African education system. The following section offers a rationale for seeing PLCs as a vehicle for teacher professional development.

### **1.1.1 Teacher professional development and professional learning communities**

The matric pass rate in South Africa of 2010 was 67,8% and, even though it is higher than the pass rate in 2009, (News24, 2011) this still means that almost a third of learners are failing in the South African school system. A radical improvement in results is needed. Not only is the teacher the greatest influencing factor on student achievement (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 3), but the teacher in his/her individual capacity has more influence on learner outcomes than does the school as a whole (Hayes et al., 2006, p. 1). The teacher as a leverage point in the process of improving learning should not be underestimated.

If teachers are to achieve the monumental task of educating the youth of South Africa, then they need the support to empower them to realistically be able to do so (Hayes et al., 2006, pp. 203-204). How are teachers best supported? Effective professional learning communities (PLCs) have been identified as the most valuable form of support for teachers to improve learner achievement (Bolam, et al., 2005). Through collaboration within an effective PLC, teachers are provided with the support and the learning processes to render their teaching more valuable in improving learner outcomes (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

The notion of professional learning communities is distinguishable from concepts such as learning organisations or communities of practice. The key distinguishing feature of PLCs is the emphasis on *professional* elements. Professionalism signifies the focus on expert knowledge that is continuously updated and where members of the profession are held accountable to the professional standards while also exercising an appropriate degree of autonomy (Schalekamp, 2001). A community of practice suggests the sharing of knowledge and practice, but this introduces the risk of sharing unproductive, ineffective or unsuccessful practices if the knowledge on which such practices are based is not professionally determined.

The logic above leads to two conclusions. Firstly, the development and sustainability of PLCs are paramount in improving learning through the support that PLCs provide for the teacher. PLCs themselves need support to develop as effective PLCs as well as to be sustained as such. Internal and external support for PLC is essential (Stoll et al., 2006). Secondly, the professional development of the teacher is important if *professional* learning communities that are more useful than communities of practice and other similar notions are to be established and sustained. Such teacher professional development should be appropriate for PLCs and not simply adhere to traditional notions of professional development such as workshops.

### **1.1.2 Context: Education policy, professional learning communities and professional development in South Africa**

Can current South African education policy (1) support the development and sustainability of PLCs while also (2) developing teachers professionally in an appropriate manner for PLCs? The current study does not, in the first instance, seek to inform new policy development. While new policies could potentially focus specifically on PLCs and all that is necessary for PLCs to be developed and sustained, the introduction of new policies comes at a cost. DuFour (2004, p. 1) describes the process of reform as follows:

In this all-too-familiar cycle, initial enthusiasm gives way to confusion about the fundamental concepts driving the initiative, followed by inevitable implementation problems, the conclusion that the reform has failed to bring about the desired results, abandonment of the reform, and the launch of a new search for the next promising initiative. Another reform movement has come and gone, reinforcing the conventional education wisdom that promises, "This too shall pass."

Already existing policies may already implicitly offer some support for PLCs, even if such support is not comprehensive enough for PLC development and sustainability. The support offered by such policies that are already being implemented can be utilised without additional resources or costs<sup>1</sup>. The focus therefore shifts from the allocation of resources in favour of new policy formulation, to schools themselves and how they can utilise existing policies

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<sup>1</sup> The statement assumes that all else is equal. It does not account for ineffective execution of policies through, for example, ineffectual public administration or unsuccessful policy implementation.

in order to develop new PLCs or sustain already existing PLCs. The current study first and foremost focuses on the potential that already existing education policy has to inform the development and sustainability of PLCs.

South African education policy on teacher professional development that existed before the *Framework*, and as embodied in the *National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa* (Department of Education, 2006), addresses pre-service training as well as continuing professional teacher development (CPTD). The CPTD part of the policy comprises a combination of the *National Qualifications Framework* (NQF) and a professional development (PD) points system to aid the management of continuous professional development (Department of Education, 2005, p. 8). The points system requires that educators earn 150 professional development points during every rolling three year cycle and no more than 90 points in any given year. The points have to include 30 points per development category (CPTD Task Team, 2008, p. 5). Points are earned from SACE-endorsed courses that can be divided into compulsory courses and self-selected courses. Whereas credits gained as part of the NQF are permanent, credits built up from the points system expire (although points from NQF courses can also earn teachers PD points).

Some criticisms have been raised regarding gaps in the policy. One aspect that the policy addresses by capping the number of points per year is the possibility of diverting teachers' attention from actual teaching. A point of concern stated in the policy is not to overload teachers with the points system. The weaknesses of current policies discussed in the literature include the effects of the self-identification of the needs of the teacher and a concern that what the teacher identifies as a need may not correlate with the employer's needs or needs identified by research (CPTD Task Team, 2008, p. 35). Linked to the issue of aligning needs is Steyn's (2010, pp. 174-175) conclusion that:

The necessity of accumulating PD points in the National Policy Framework emphasizes the development of individual teachers, but neglects to show the importance of teacher collaboration and a more collegial culture in schools.

Thus the individual space that is addressed by the *Framework* is not sufficient for the rich continuing professional development of teachers and a more

comprehensive and aligned approach is necessary to prepare teachers for the diverse and changing South African context. Collaboration between teachers such as is needed in PLCs is lacking in teacher professional development policy that existed before the *Framework*.

The reality is that although current education policy speaks to the professionalisation of teachers in South Africa, it is not sufficient and intensification of official policy could be to the detriment of teachers who are already stretched to their limits (Christie, Butler, & Potterton, 2007). The establishment of effective PLCs for the purposes of developing teachers professionally will aid in the establishment of collaborative practices. PLCs can potentially provide for a more focused and aligned approach based on collaboration that is contrary to the culture of individual professional development that exists within the PD points system. However, the relevance of PLCs in South African education should be examined before proclaiming it to be appropriate for the improvement of teaching and learning in the South African context.

In an article reporting on a national study of South African schools performing well against the odds, Christie (2001) finds that one of the common elements in all of the schools that are outperforming schools in similar difficult circumstances is that the resilient schools have an unwavering and central focus on teaching and learning: so much so that even disciplinary action was linked to educational goals and not discipline as an end in itself.

A focus on results as an end in itself can be to the detriment of a focus on learning. The marketisation of education is a process that can lead to a focus on results which actually undermines much-needed student learning. As Jansen (2004) explains, matriculation results determine which schools are sought after. Consequently, such schools can have their pick of high-achieving learners, which increases their chances of once again achieving well in the next matric exams. Such schools become and remain the frontrunners in the competition for well-performing learners. The poor performing schools are locked in a cycle of attracting the least desirable students whose results perpetuate the cycle, as poor results remain inevitable. The importance of results means that teachers can shift their focus from learning that is required for students' further study and their preparation for

work, in favour of a strict focus on short-term achievements of learners. Schools succumb to external pressures to perform in the short term to the detriment of more important considerations, such as the development of learners in preparation for their future.

A central focus on student learning – rather than just results – is a characteristic of effective PLCs. This focus is kept through collective enquiry and reflective dialogue. The classroom is deprivatised and subjected to the scrutiny of colleagues in order to question whether learning takes place. PLCs can also potentially address the problem of focusing on achievement, sometimes to the detriment of learning, described by Jansen (2004).

A PLC approach suggests a move away from the focus on the individual that is implied in professional development policies that existed prior to the *Framework*.

The current study examines whether the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Development and Education in South Africa* – as a new policy – provides the support needed to develop and sustain PLCs. Furthermore, the study examines whether the professional development contained in the *Framework* is appropriate for PLCs.

## 1.2 Research questions

The main research question that the current study seeks to answer is:

In what way is the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Development and Education in South Africa* text aligned with the theoretical notions regarding what is appropriate for the development and sustainability of professional learning communities with a focus on teacher professional development?

The subquestions that further underpin the current study are:

1. How is the *Framework* aligned with theoretical notions of the support that is needed for PLCs?
2. How is the *Framework* aligned with theoretical notions of professional development that is appropriate for PLCs?
3. How does the *Framework* address locales of implementation appropriate for PLCs?

### **1.3 Chapter outline**

In this chapter, the purpose of the study was outlined and the research question was developed.

The next chapter provides a comprehensive review of international and South African literature on teacher professional development followed by a literature review on the characteristics of PLCs with a particular focus on policy support for PLCs. The chapter ends with a concise review of the literature on public policy and its implementation.

Chapter 3 proceeds to draw on the literature review to develop a theoretical framework for conceptualising support for PLCs, the appropriate professional development for PLCs and the locales of implementation that is appropriate for PLCs.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design for the current study: it describes the analytic framework that was developed from the theoretical framework and used to complete the document analysis and discusses issues of validity and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 5 provides an in-depth data analysis of the policy text organised around three themes: support for PLCs, professional development for PLCs and locales of implementation for PLCs. The chapter discusses three iterations of the data analysis: the initial analysis, the analysis conducted according to the analytic framework and the final analysis that focuses more deeply on insights derived from the second analysis.

The final chapter discusses the overall findings, the implications of the study and the final conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The main claims made as part of the rationale for the current study centre around the need for PLCs in South Africa, the consequent need for teacher professional development compatible with PLCs and the role of education policy in the development and sustainability of PLCs. The literature review answers the following questions: What are the notions of teacher professional development found in the literature? What is the state of teacher professional development in South Africa according to the literature? What are the characteristics of effective PLCs and how are they best supported?

The chapter lastly looks at the literature on the enactment of policy and asks: what considerations are important in the enactment of policy and how does the South African history and context influence the enactment of policy in the country?

### **2.1 Teacher professionalism in South Africa**

The professional status of teaching is a contested terrain. It is generally agreed that professionalism is premised on autonomy so that professionals are able to apply specialised knowledge and make expert judgements on matters relevant to the profession, independent of the state. Such judgements have to be based on expert knowledge that is continuously updated on an individual level as well as on the level of the profession. Also, peer accountability within the profession is crucial to ensure that standards are upheld by those who are fittingly knowledgeable. Professional development is therefore crucial so that professionals remain informed regarding the specialised knowledge of the profession so as to utilise their autonomy appropriately and ensure correct peer accountability. This section sets out to explore the history of teacher professional development in South Africa in order to sketch the current situation of professional development in the South African context.

Teacher professional development took different forms during the apartheid and post-apartheid system, although the legacy of apartheid

endures even during the post-apartheid period. The nature of apartheid professional development will be discussed in the section on policy enactment. What is relevant here is that, even after the advent of democracy in 1994, teacher professional development continues to be hampered by reliance on external agency (NAPTOSA, 2005), the suspicion of government policies (Jansen, 2004) and a lack of teacher knowledge in subject areas as a result of poor teacher education (Wits Education Policy Unit, 2005).

From the early 1990s, South African education policy started to move away from the racialised policies of the apartheid years. In 1994, such changes were formalised and a process aimed at deracialisation and redressing past inequalities was set in motion (Keevy, 2006). Participation in policy making became possible through the establishment of the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) as well as through general consultation. The promotion of teacher professionalism became a priority with the establishment of the South African Council for Educators (SACE). The Norms and Standards for Educators (NSE) policy – which was replaced by the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications in 2011 – assigned roles to teachers, including that of curriculum developers, researchers and knowledge creators (Wits Education Policy Unit, 2005). The space for professional autonomy was created through the NSE, although the policy itself was seen as a tall order (Robinson, 2003). The Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) was instituted to replace inspectors with a system of external evaluation that is accompanied by self-evaluation and incorporates the Whole-School Evaluation (WSE), the Performance Measurement System and the Developmental Appraisal System. The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) allowed space for professional judgement as it expects of teachers to develop their own presentation of the curriculum (Wits Education Policy Unit, 2005), but has since been replaced by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) in 2011. The PD points system discussed in the first chapter is a management system for continuing professional development.

A report by the Wits Education Policy Unit (2005) summarises the state of teacher professionalism in South Africa as follows:

the post-apartheid policies have contradictory effects on the nature of teachers' work. Firstly, the policy framework seems to encourage teacher professionalism on paper, but its implementation tends to contradict professionalisation. Secondly, the policy overload and the intensification of teachers' work have contributed to the loss of space for teachers to develop themselves. This has a negative impact on teacher professionalism because one of the central tenets of professionalism is knowledge and creativity. (Wits Education Policy Unit, 2005, p. 26)

A review of the literature may shed light on the support that PLCs can provide, given the current state of teacher professionalism in South Africa.

## **2.2 Professional learning communities**

The literature on PLCs offers criteria for determining both whether a school is an effective PLC as well as what support the school needs in order to sustain such a PLC. Bolam and colleagues (2005, p. 145) define an effective PLC as one which

has the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning.

An effective PLC creates internal coherence in a school community through quality collaborative efforts. Such efforts can be located at the level of the school, at the level of teachers across schools in a specific subject area, in a department of a school or across schools in a networked learning community. Whatever form the PLC takes, the manifested outcome of an effective PLC is improvements in learner achievement through the improvement of teaching practices (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008, p. 82).

### **2.2.1 Characteristics of an effective professional learning community**

There is some agreement in the literature that four basic elements are essential for an effective PLC: a central focus on student learning; a shared mission, vision and values; collective enquiry, reflective dialogue and deprivatising practice; and collaboration (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008, p. 81). Each of these characteristics is elaborated on below.

Firstly, a central focus on student learning shifts the focus from teaching to a focus on learning. Secondly, a strong and consistent focus on learning should inform the mission, vision and the values of a PLC. All members of the

PLC should hold a common view of the purpose of the PLC. The absence of such a shared purpose promote individual discretion that is harmful to the objectives of the PLC, especially with regards to the central focus on student learning. Individual discretion “is seen as potentially reducing teacher efficacy when teachers cannot count on colleagues to reinforce objectives” (Bolam, et al., 2005, p. 8).

Thirdly, reflective dialogue directed towards problem solving and conversations around significant educational issues as well as the processing of new knowledge renders a PLC effective. The literature suggests that new knowledge is gained through collective enquiry into student learning that is or is not taking place within the PLC. Collective action along such lines ensures shared responsibility for student learning and optimizes participation in the PLC on the part of teachers, while maximising sustained commitment through peer pressure. In order to ensure accountability and collective knowledge sharing, practice must be opened up for learning from best practices and subjected to scrutiny regarding the efficacy of teaching for the improvement of learning. Deprivatised practice includes:

Frequent examining of teachers’ practice, through mutual observation and case analysis, joint planning and curriculum development; the seeking of new knowledge (Hord, 2004); tacit knowledge that is constantly converted into shared knowledge through interaction (Fullan, 2001); and applying new ideas and information to problem solving and solutions that address pupils’ needs (Hord, 1997). (Bolam, et al., 2005, p. 8)

Lastly, the collaboration needed for an effective PLC can take many forms, but the common denominator is that collaboration within learning communities encompasses activities for developmental purposes in which staff members are involved. It is also vital for collaboration to be focused on the shared purpose of the PLC (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 227). However, collaboration should not be contrived. Collaboration should be a natural occurrence within the learning community where trust and mutual respect are the results of relationship building between staff members (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 240). This does not presume that a learning community is a conflict-free zone, but rather assumes a setting of constructive debate and conflict resolution (Hargreaves in Stoll et al., 2006, p. 227).

### **2.2.2 Support for the development and sustainability of an effective professional learning community**

Even if all four characteristics outlined above exist in a school, an effective PLC still needs support in order to be sustainable. Support for PLCs can be categorised into internal support and external support. With regards to internal support, Louis, Marks and Kruse (1996) categorise support for PLCs into structural conditions as well as human and social resources. The former includes size, where smaller is better; staffing complexity as more specialisation among staff translates into less communication because of less shared roles and purposes; scheduled planning time that is necessary if significant change is to take root; and teacher empowerment where school based management leads to more decision making on the part of teachers and specific classroom issues can be solved by the teacher. Human and social resources refers to supportive leadership that keeps the focus on the vision and mission and informs change; openness to innovation translating into a willingness to take supported risks; respect for the expertise of others that builds professional community; frequent feedback on instructional performance that is valuable and specific; and professional development that ensures that teachers have a professional skills base, as obtained through processes such as peer coaching and in-service training (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996).

Bolam et al. (2005), in their study of whether and how useful and feasible the idea of a PLCs is as well as the practical lessons that can be learnt from PLCs, also provide a framework for the necessary support for PLCs as identified by them in a literature review. They firstly identify the processes that are used to create and develop PLCs and, secondly, they identify other factors that help or hinder the creation and development of PLCs. In the first category they group such processes under the four headings of focusing on learning processes, leading PLCs, developing other social resources, managing structural resources and interacting with and drawing on external agents. The second category focuses on individuals' orientation to change, group dynamics, school context influences and external influences. Although there are many similarities to the supports identified by Louis, Marks and Kruse (1996), Bolam and his colleagues provide valuable

additional insight into the support needed to create and develop PLCs. It is worthwhile for the purposes of this study to outline in more depth the framework that Bolam et al. (2005) sketch.

### **Processes for creating and sustaining professional learning communities**

Firstly, the main processes for creating and sustaining PLCs include a focus on learning processes, incorporating the following elements:

*Professional development opportunities.* Continuing professional development stands as central to the development of PLCs. Professional development should incorporate development of expert knowledge and skills and a professionalisation of teachers' work (Bolam, et al., 2005, pp. 11-12). Professional development should also echo the focus on student learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009) that characterises the PLC.

*Work-based and incidental learning opportunities* are very effective, as they are based on experiences in the workplace and on self-development. Bolam et al. (2005, p. 13) list practical tools for implementing such opportunities: professional development profiles, action research, action learning, coaching, mentoring and peer-assisted learning, best practice scholarships, professional development bursaries, sabbaticals, and individual learning accounts. Teachers need to see their workplaces (schools) as spaces of learning not just for students, but also for themselves.

*Self-evaluation and enquiry as a learning source.* If the workplace is to become a place of learning for teachers, then reflective dialogue and enquiry should lead to valuable evidence and data that can inform teaching strategies.

*From individual learning to group learning.* Group learning, as derived from reflective dialogue and collective enquiry, is a distinguishing factor of PLCs. Group learning, rather than individual learning, leads to the creation of collective knowledge. Transferring knowledge from the individual to the group is only desirable if such knowledge is correct and appropriate. Desirable group learning assumes a level of professional knowledge on the part of teachers as well as access to ways of improving knowledge, because "we cannot attempt to change the way in which things are done without continuously informing ourselves of what already exists" (The Dinokeng

Scenarios, Bridge, 2009, p. 10). Continuous professional development (CPD) provides continuous access to appropriate knowledge. CPD as a group learning process includes: school-based activity informed by external expertise; feedback; observation; peer support; allowing teachers to develop their own CPD focus; processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue and processes for sustaining CPD so that practices are consolidated in classroom practices. (Bolam, et al., 2005, pp. 13-15). Processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue can include the use of artefacts, for example using test data to analyse learner errors in order to inform collaborative lesson planning (Shalem et al., 2011).

Secondly, the main processes identified by Bolam and his colleagues include leadership within a PLC. This involves principals creating the conditions that can promote a learning culture; ensuring that learning occurs on the level of the learner, the teacher and the organisation; enquiry-minded leadership that promotes research within the school, promotes system-wide research and uses external research; managing professional activities in such a way so as to ensure an environment where such activities are promoted without making teachers feel that they are losing autonomy; and distributed leadership where teachers take the lead in certain tasks and where instructional leadership is promoted. The necessity of a focus on learning from leaders as well as the need for a distributed, rather than individual, perspective on leadership incorporating instructional leadership is echoed in other literature than that which focuses on PLCs (Christie & Lingard, 2001; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001; Timperley, 2005). Distributed leadership denotes an approach where the task or situation – instead of traditional or formal hierarchical roles – dictates who leads, and where the focus is on instructional leadership (Timperley, 2005). Earl & Katz (2007) emphasise the need for distributed leadership in a networked learning community.

Thirdly, the development of other social resources includes an awareness of the working relationships and group dynamics within a PLC. Whereas the former addresses the trust and respect necessary for teachers to feel safe enough to render themselves professionally vulnerable to their colleagues, the latter addresses the internal politics that can have a significant

impact on the creation and development of a PLC (Bolam et al., 2005, pp. 18-19).

As a fourth point, managing structural resources such as time and space is critical when creating and developing PLCs. Members of a PLC need to have the time available to meaningfully interact with their colleagues on a professional level. Furthermore, it can significantly impede the existence of these exchanges if the physical space for such meaningful interactions is unavailable.

Lastly, interacting with and drawing on external agents is vital, especially in the South African education system where schools are – for the most part - under resourced. Fullan (2000) advocates the importance of schools' internal change that needs to be supplemented by a consideration of external forces as well as a consideration on the part of external agents to contemplate their role in bringing about change at the school level. Thus, relationships with external agents – specifically district support structures – as well as participation in partnerships and networks, such as networked learning communities, is important if schools are to sustain their PLCs (Bolam, et al., 2005, pp. 20-22).

### **Processes that help or hinder the creation of professional learning communities**

Bolam et al. (2005) further identify processes that have the potential to help or hinder the creation and development of PLCs. Firstly, the orientation to change of members of the PLC is key. PLCs require positive participation on the part of all members in the community and therefore individual commitment to the PLC is crucial (Bolam, et al., 2005, p. 23). Secondly, PLCs need to find productive ways of dealing with conflict and opposing beliefs, otherwise group dynamics may impede further development (Bolam, et al., 2005, pp. 23-24).

Thirdly, there are considerations regarding the context of the school. School size can influence the creation and development of PLCs, as it is more challenging to collaborate in a large school. Similarly, secondary schools seem to be more likely to form sub-cultures instead of one single uniform culture as different groups of experts function within the school. This is not to

say that specialisation and expert knowledge is not important in PLCs. Indeed, the expert knowledge and skills associated with professionalism is exactly what distinguishes *professional* learning communities from communities of practice. The concern regarding the phase of the school and the specialisation in secondary schools is simply a concern that teachers may be prone to work in silos and that this is detrimental to collaboration in a PLC. If teachers function in their specialised silos rather than collaborate between specialist subjects, then the phase of the school is seen to be to the detriment of collaboration necessary in a PLC.

Furthermore, the location of the school influences the school's ability to form links to external partners or networks. Rural schools have more difficulty with travel, which impedes meaningful collaboration. Particular mixes of pupils in terms of gender, social class, ethnicity, religion or special needs also influence the establishment of a PLC, as it determines the sum of the peer groups and therefore the actions of the group as a whole. In the same way, the history of the school partly determines the culture of the school as well as teachers' receptiveness to reform. (Bolam, et al., 2005, pp. 24-25)

Lastly, there are external influences that help or hinder the creation and development of PLCs. Features of a school's local community (such as the socio-economic circumstances of the community), the broader community (including the broader view of the teaching profession) as well as policy decisions and whether these place extra pressure on teachers that can lead to stress, overload and burnout all determine whether the external environment is supportive of, rather than detrimental to, a PLC. (Bolam, et al., 2005, pp. 25-26)

In conclusion, it would be of use for the current study to distinguish between processes that develop PLCs and processes that sustain PLCs. However, not enough research has been conducted on this matter. Bryk, Camburn and Louis suggest "when internal socialization routines are working properly, they should provide a self-renewal mechanism for professional communities" (1999, p. 754). However, early research in England, North America and Europe has indicated that in some cases what was regarded as effective PLCs have subsequently experienced decline (Imants in Bolam, et al., 2005, p. 26). Certain factors seem to promote sustainability: succession

planning in leadership so as to reduce the effects of change in senior leadership in schools (Hargreaves & Fink, *Sustaining Leadership*, 2003); sustaining deep learning; chains of influence that include a wide range of people; improvements that stretch past individual schools; not burning people out; basing improvements on existing resources rather than on funding that has the potential to dry up; sharing responsibility; securing outside support through activist engagement; and developing capacity that enables adaptation, prosperity and interpersonal learning in complex environments on the part of people (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).

This section has described what is agreed on in the literature as the characteristics of PLCs. It also sketched two frameworks of support for PLCs found in the literature. Lastly it took a look at factors influencing the sustainability of PLCs, although literature is scarce on this subject. The next section briefly outlines the literature on public policy implementation and its problems.

### **2.3 Public policy and its implementation**

Even if South African education policy provides for the development and support of PLCs, it is no guarantee that the policies will be implemented accordingly. There are many problems associated with policy implementation at the local level. Education policy implementation is of specific concern because the problems that such policies deal with are usually 'wicked', the target group (schools) is large and the political milieu shifts and changes often – with every change in government or show of delivery prior to elections. In such a setting, what politicians want and what administrators do can be two very different things (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003, pp. 191-193). And yet, local variability can be seen not as an anathema, but rather as advantageous for the consideration of specific local conditions as local policy enactors possess knowledge of local conditions (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 73). However, the micro context where local variability in policy enactment manifest may not be aligned to the macro context in which policy makers function. PLCs are exactly such spaces of local policy implementation where local variability can either be an occasion for PLCs to utilise the opportunity of local policy

implementation to their advantage or not. For example, the legacy of suspicion of authority on the part of teachers in South Africa may work to the detriment of the opportunity presented by local policy implementation, if effective PLCs are not able to override such suspicion to promote the development of the PLC.

The problems with policy implementation and the importance of local policy implementation for the success of the policy came to light – especially in the work of Pressman and Wildavsky (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003, p. 185) – following the disastrous implementation of the Great Society federal education reforms in the US (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 70). The field of policy implementation subsequently became prominent. At the end of the 1970s the focus shifted to Lipsky's seminal work on *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (1980) that investigated the influence of street-level bureaucrats, such as teachers, who "interact with and have wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits or the allocation of public sanctions" (1980, p. xi). This work was followed with empirical research on successful policy implementation that showed the dependence of success on local capacity and will, for "How can the state control the bureaucracy if the bureaucrats can't be controlled?" (Ricucci, 2003, p. 75). Both capacity and will are relevant in the South African context where the schools are under-resourced (capacity) and teachers are suspicious of government involvement (will). Collaboration and alignment within an effective PLC can be utilised to direct the will of teachers and school leaders to enact existing policy for the support of the PLC. Except for the capacity and will of policy enactors, policy makers also need to ensure that policy enactors are provided with the correct combination of pressure and support (Zald & Jacobs, 1978; Montjoy & O'Toole, 1979). Neither pressure nor support is sufficient on its own or effective when one weighs more heavily than the other.

Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) suggest a theory meant to supplement already existing theories on policy implementation that points to the importance of individual and situated sensemaking in the translation process of policy by policy enactors. Sensemaking is based on individuals' prior knowledge, values, emotions, motivations and situations that act as a lens dictating what cues the individual picks up on; what the individual notices

and does not notice. Related concepts link together in schemas to form a personal understanding that forms the basis from which to make sense of the world.

Sensemaking by practitioners occurs in the interpretive space between the policy intent and its implementation with inevitable distortions occurring throughout the process. (Timperley & Parr, 2009, p. 138)

Sensemaking as situated occurs in different layers: individual, the immediate context, the broader context and in worldviews. This focuses education policy implementation research in three ways: meetings and classroom instruction is the central focus; the activity system and not the individual is the appropriate level of analysis; the situation defines the implementation practice (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). The PLC represents a combination of levels that form a context for situated sensemaking: the teacher as individual, the school as a whole, as well as the broader community in which the PLC functions. Therefore, the PLC is an appropriate combination of levels of analysis for policy and its implementation as the activity system functions within the PLC and the PLC defines the situation.

The implication of the literature on policy implementation – and particularly sensemaking – for the implementation of the *Framework* is that local context and its influence on the will and capacity as well as the sensemaking of policy enactors may play a considerable role in the implementation of the *Framework*. What emerges from a focus on sensemaking with regards to the formulation of policy (that part of policy that is most relevant for the current study) is that policymakers face a daunting task: policy enactors understand policy differently. On the one hand, the way in which policy is formulated is crucial in rendering the policy accessible to the key policy enactors and thereby facilitating the desired understanding of policy (Spillane & Zeuli, 1999; Spillane, 2000). On the other hand, the necessary factors to consider in the design of policy cannot fully address the individual's situated sensemaking of the policy. In short, policy implementation research highlights three issues that should be kept in mind for the current study: policy enactors tend to highlight certain aspects of policy and background other aspects depending on the discretion, capacity, will, pressure, support and sensemaking at play; the way in which policy is formulated influences

understanding of policy; and individual situated sensemaking in the end remains an influential factor in policy implementation. In terms of the role of PLCs in policy implementation, PLCs may provide a way of establishing capacity in schools through collaboration, while directing the will of teachers and the way in which teachers and school leaders make sense of policy and understand policy such that it is utilised for the main goal of the school: the improvement of learning.

### **2.3.1 The apartheid legacy and policy enactment**

The effect of the legacy of apartheid on the education system in South Africa is important as it still, to a certain extent, moulds the enactment of education policy in South Africa. The state enforced a racially divided system of tight control over teachers during the apartheid era. As Jansen (2004, p. 52) describes the state's influence during apartheid:

The separate racial and ethnic systems of educational administration could broadly be described as one of coordinated control and regulation for white teachers and one of benign neglect and paternalism for black teachers.

For all teachers, this meant a system of inspectors who subdued teachers and held them strictly to account as well as unrepresentative government-appointed school boards. Racialised teaching, racialised teacher education and the exclusion of black teachers from policymaking were the main forms of the racialisation of the teaching profession (Wits Education Policy Unit, 2005, p. 14).

The rigidly controlled education system under apartheid enforced racialised teaching. Under the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the Coloured Education Act of 1964 and the Indian Education Act of 1966, black students, coloured learners, Indian learners and white learners got differentiated education. The effects of racialised teaching policies on teacher professionalism were pervasive. It allowed for little – if any – space for professional judgement and teacher autonomy. On the one hand, teachers became reliant on external agency – such as the state – for direction in their practices (NAPTOSA, 2005). On the other hand, the system made them deeply suspicious of government intervention (Jansen, 2004). Democratic professionalism and professional accountability had no place in the racialised

teaching system and bureaucratic accountability reigned (Wits Education Policy Unit, 2005, p. 15).

In terms of teacher education, racialised teaching was perpetuated through teacher education that was hierarchized according to race. Just as learners' education guided them towards an unquestioning attitude towards government, the government's desired outcome of teacher education was a teacher who was obedient to authority and a passive vehicle for fundamental pedagogy (Wits Education Policy Unit, 2005, p. 15) such that independent professional autonomy would be suppressed (Baxen & Soudien, 1998).

The effect of the legacy of apartheid on policy enactment should not be ignored in the formulation of South African education policies. Policy makers must consider the attitudes of teachers and the context created by the history of teacher education in South Africa in the formulation of new education policy.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This review has looked at literature relating to professional development broadly as well as in South Africa specifically. The discussion on PLCs has shown what the characteristics of effective PLCs are as well as the supports that PLCs need to be developed and sustained. The notion of professional development used in the current study is professional development appropriate in the context of the PLC and its culture of collaboration and reflective interactions in a deprivatised setting. The culture created by an effective PLC can be useful for policy enactment at the local level that can be targeted at appropriately addressing specific local issues, while stimulating resistance and critique of policies which are deemed harmful to the goal of the PLC: the improvement of learning.

The literature highlights the potential usefulness of effective PLCs in the development of teachers in South Africa, given the history and current state of teacher professional development in the country. However, the literature also informs of the necessity of support for PLCs in their endeavours to develop teachers professionally. The literature provides clear guidelines on the professional development that is specifically appropriate for PLCs. Policy can provide for the support of PLCs and professional development appropriate for

PLCs. On the one hand, the issues relating to local policy implementation as well as the legacy of apartheid in South Africa can negate such useful support for PLCs from education policy. On the other hand, the issues of policy implementation highlight the role that PLCs can play in the sensemaking of policy enactors. The internal coherence of PLCs can guide the interpretation of policy to the advantage of the PLC such that PLCs can make use of the support that policy can provide, while assisting in suitable teacher professional development. This is especially relevant given the history of education policy and teacher development in South Africa. The formulation of policy is important in the South African context where the will of enactors may provide resistance to the successful implementation of education policies.

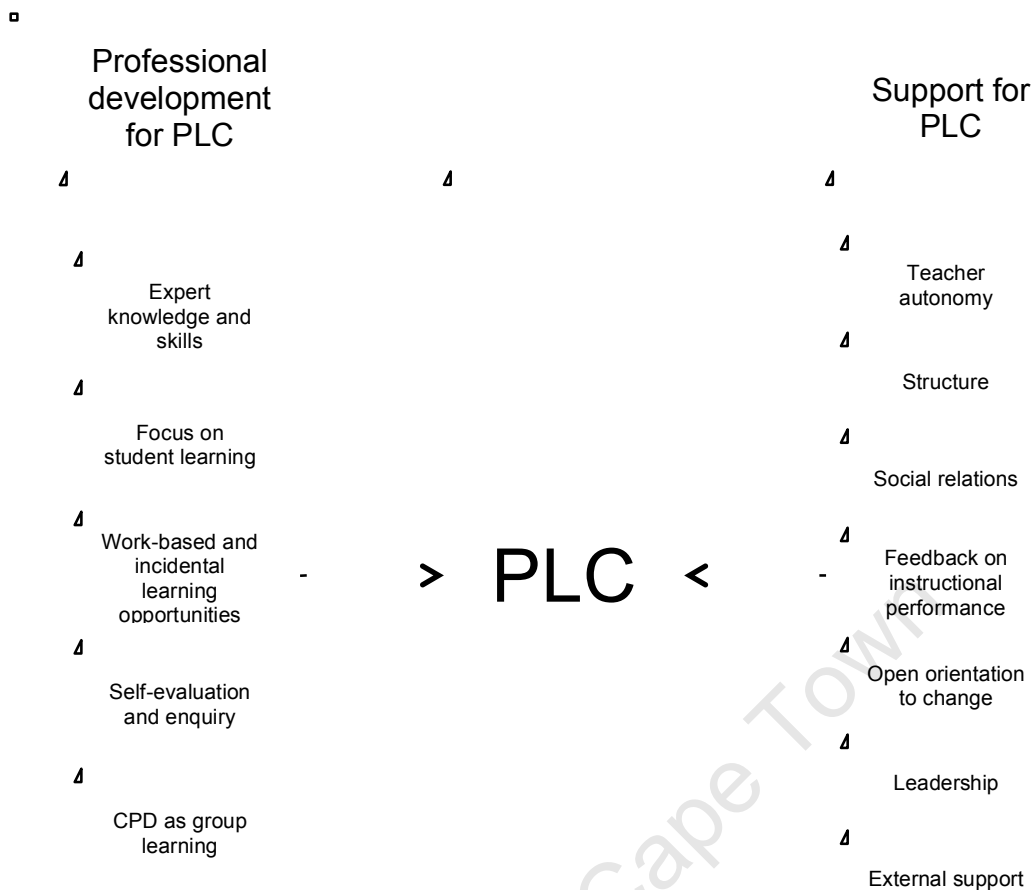
## 2.5 Theoretical framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework that underpins the analytical framework that was used to analyse the data gathered from the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development*. The theoretical framework consists of three themes.

The first theme lists the support for PLCs as identified in the literature. The supports are built up of two sets of criteria from the literature: Bolam et al.'s (2005) criteria and Louis, Marks and Kruse's (1996) framework. The second theme is a list of the forms of professional development that are appropriate for PLCs as identified by Bolam et al. (2005). *FIGURE 1* illustrates the concepts associated with support for a PLC as well as forms of professional development compatible with PLC. The third theme relates to the appropriate locales of implementation for PLC support and professional development.

Below is an explanation of how the two frameworks from Bolam et al. (2005) and Louis, Marks and Kruse (1996) were integrated to form the themes mentioned above. The first part provides an explanation for each category of support for PLCs as illustrated in *FIGURE 1* before moving on to an explanation of the forms of professional development that are appropriate for PLCs.

Firstly, teacher autonomy includes teacher empowerment that forms part of Louis, Marks and Kruse's (1996) framework of supports for PLCs. Teacher



**FIGURE 1: Support and appropriate professional development for a PLC**

empowerment is found where there is evidence of school-based management that leads to decision making on the part of teachers, although the literature cited here does not specifically state what kind of decision making is envisaged on the part of teachers. One would imagine that such decision making would include decisions regarding the kind of textbooks that are to be used in class as well as other decisions that have to do with the management of the school. Bolam et al. (2005) includes teacher empowerment with reference to self-evaluation as a learning source. Instances where self-evaluation is used as a source of learning through, for example, the use of evidence to inform teaching practices, are also regarded as a component of teacher autonomy specifically relating to their professional development.

Secondly, structure refers to the size of the school (where smaller schools are more likely to form PLCs), scheduled planning time and staffing

complexity (where less specialisation can lead to better communication and role sharing) from Louis, Marks and Kruse's (1996) work. Bolam et al. (2005) also includes size and time as factors but adds phase of the school (as primary schools are more likely to build a uniform culture), location of the school (as rural schools have infrastructural impediments to collaboration), the complexities relating to a diverse mix of pupils, the history of the school and its impact on the reigning culture of the school and space.

Thirdly, social relations refer to respect that forms part of both Louis, Marks and Kruse (1996) and Bolam et al.'s (2005) work. Bolam et al. (2005) add positive working relations and group dynamics that include, on a more concrete level, procedures for dealing with conflict as well as trust. Social relations as part of the theoretical framework therefore includes trust and respect as well as procedures for dealing with conflict.

The fourth category is feedback on instructional performance that forms part of Louis, Marks and Kruse's (1996) framework. Feedback on instructional performance refers to any instance where peers provide feedback to a teacher on his/her instructional performance. This should be distinguished from the self-evaluation that informs teaching practices mentioned above in relation to teacher autonomy. Rather, feedback on instructional performance relates to feedback received from sources external to the individual whose instruction is being assessed.

The fifth relevant support for PLCs refers to individuals' orientation to change which is found in different forms in Bolam et al. (2005) and Louis, Marks and Kruse's (1996) frameworks. For Bolam et al. (2005), individuals' orientation to change includes instances where teachers are encouraged to take risks, where there is evidence of an appreciation or reward for innovation and where teacher learning is facilitated so as to take into account the background, circumstances, prior experiences and needs of the individual teacher. Louis, Marks and Kruse (1996) mention the need for openness to innovation on the part of teachers.

Leadership as the sixth category is found in both Louis, Marks and Kruse's (1996) work as well as in Bolam et al.'s (2005) work. Such leadership should be supportive of PLC development.

External support for a PLC, as found in Bolam et al.'s (2005) work, includes whether the policy provides for collaboration between schools regarding professional development as well as whether policy puts extra pressure on teachers, as opposed to providing support without additional time commitments. Related to this issue is whether policy provides for time scheduled specifically for planning or whether the time spent on professional development and lesson planning is in addition to normal work hours.

The aspects of the theoretical framework that have to do with professional development that is appropriate for PLCs is based on Bolam et al.'s (2005) work. Relevant professional development in a PLC includes the development of expert knowledge and skills, a focus on student learning, work-based and incidental learning opportunities, self-evaluation and enquiry and group learning. Bolam et al. (2005) provide examples of two of the five categories of professional development relevant to PLCs: firstly, examples of work-based and incidental learning opportunities include professional development profiles, action research, action learning, coaching, mentoring and peer-assisted learning, best practice scholarships, professional development bursaries, sabbaticals, and individual learning accounts. Secondly, CPD as a group learning process includes: school-based activity informed by external expertise; feedback; observation; peer support; allowing teachers to develop their own CPD focus; processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue, including the use of artefacts such as video recording and test results; processes for sustaining CPD so that practices are consolidated in classroom practices.

A third relevant theme besides the two themes of support for PLC and appropriate professional development within a PLC can be identified from the literature. The locales of implementation are important, as district-based support seems to be the most critical form of support for PLCs. Together, these three themes form the theoretical framework for the current study. The first two themes each consist of categories that have been discussed in this chapter. The theoretical framework outlined above forms the basis of the analytic framework that was developed.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

The problem that the current study examines is the alignment of South African education policy to the professional development needs of the teacher through well-supported PLCs. The specific policy text that is of relevance to the study is the *Integrated Strategic Framework for Teacher Education and Development* in South Africa that was first made available in 2011.

In this chapter the current study is taken past its stated purpose and theoretical framework to the level of an action plan for the research that was undertaken. The chapter identifies the research method, which is a document analysis, and explains the rationale behind the approach to the analysis of the document. The analytic framework is discussed and the particular way in which the categories as discussed in the theoretical framework and refined in the analytic framework were used is explained. Finally, issues pertaining to validity and the limitations to the study are explored.

### 3.1 Research method

The current study employs document analysis as a stand-alone method. The document was not only analysed as a source of evidence but as *the* source of evidence. According to Bowen, the advantages of a document analysis is that “It requires data selection, instead of data collection”, “Documents are ‘unobtrusive’ and ‘non-reactive’” and documents are stable (2009, p. 31). Documents are therefore easily and repetitively accessible and the researcher does not influence the document in the same way as an interviewer can influence an interviewee’s responses.

The *Framework* was selected as the policy relevant for the current study for three reasons: firstly, the *Framework* is concerned with the professional development of teachers, it is the first national education policy in South African to explicitly mention PLCs and it is a very recent policy. Secondly, the *Framework* links professional development to PLCs, which is very significant for the study. And thirdly, the *Framework* is going to be around to inform South African teacher professional development for a while, which means that

the current study will retain its relevance for longer than it would have, had a relatively older policy been studied.

## **3.2 Data analysis**

Bowen maintains that

Document analysis involves skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation. This iterative process combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is the process of organising information into categories related to the central questions of the research. (2009, p. 32)

This study followed a similar procedure. Three iterations of document analysis were conducted: a preliminary analysis, an analysis for the purpose of selection of data segments relevant to analytic themes and a final analysis.

### **3.2.1 First iteration of the analysis**

The first iteration of the document analysis involved skimming the document as a preliminary analysis. The goal of the preliminary analysis was twofold: the relevance of the *Framework* for the study had to be confirmed and the relevance of the themes that formed part of the theoretical framework had to be established. Subsequently, the theoretical framework was developed into an analytic framework after the *Framework* was verified to be relevant to the study.

Similar to the theoretical framework, the analytic framework contained the three themes that structured the second iteration of the analysis: support for PLCs, professional development within PLCs and locales of implementation. The analytic framework further specified the categories for analysis within each theme. The broad categories that formed part of the analytic framework remained unchanged from those specified in the theoretical framework. The analytic framework also specified the markers within each category. The markers were used as pointers towards information in the *Framework* text that is relevant for the category within which the specific marker falls. A few adjustments from what was found in the literature were made in the creation of a set of markers for some of the categories based on what was observed during the preliminary analysis.

The product of the first iteration of the analysis was a complete analytic framework comprising three themes that in turn consisted of categories with markers for each category. This was necessary in order to complete the second iteration of the analysis.

### **3.2.2 Second iteration of the analysis**

The second iteration involved a thorough examination of the document by reading carefully through the *Framework* for the purpose of selecting and analysing data segments according to the analytic framework categories. The second iteration included three steps: data selection and sorting, data analysis and writing down the first layer of findings of the analysis.

Firstly, the markers in the analytic framework were used to select data segments for the categories within each of the three themes. This was done by carefully reading through the document, highlighting each instance that was deemed relevant according to one or more markers and labeling each instance according to which markers the instance was relevant for. The data could then be sorted by populating a table for each theme of the analytic framework containing each category and its marker (refer to APPENDIX A for the three tables). For example, the following instances were recorded under the marker 'processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue':

The TED ICT support system will be developed and managed by the NICPD to serve the following functions: ...Interactive courses that teachers can work through individually or collectively in order to develop their own competence will be available through the ICT system. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 7)

And

e. PLCs will allow groups of teachers to engage in a variety of activities including: • Developing expertise in the analysis of learner results on evidence-based assessments such as ANA and the NSC, among others, in order to determine teachers' own development trajectories; • Curriculum orientation activities e.g. activities to develop understanding of, and the ability to use, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements; • Learning how to interpret and use curriculum support materials such as the workbooks currently being developed and distributed to teachers and schools by the DBE; and • Working together to learn from video records of practice and other learning materials. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14)

I adhered to two rules in identifying the instances:

1. The smallest unit of which an instance could consist was a sentence. Most instances were paragraphs, because the use of longer passages meant that instances could be analysed in context without constantly going back to the original text to identify the context (although during the document analysis, the original text was constantly consulted).
2. Not only instances that reflected appropriate PLC support and development were recorded, as I anticipated that there would be findings that would arise from instances that were not necessarily directly appropriate for PLCs according to the analytic framework and therefore went further than simply recording segments of the *Framework* that are appropriate in terms of the different markers. This proved to be true: the degree to which each instance was explicit and the level of detail contained in the instance became important in determining to what extent the *Framework* is lacking in terms of the three themes of the analytic framework. Because instances that were not necessarily directly appropriate were recorded, I could draw conclusions about not only what aspects of the analytic framework was in the *Framework*, but also what was in the *Framework* that could be formulated differently in order to render the *Framework* of more use to PLCs. For example, only one instance was recorded under ‘locales of implementation inside the school’: “Time for teachers to participate in PLCs and engage in quality school-based teacher development could be scheduled into the school year” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 20). The instance does mention that something will be implemented at school level, but does not elaborate on what kind of teacher development will be implemented. It could therefore not really be gauged whether the instance was appropriate for PLCs, but it could still be used to draw conclusions about how the *Framework* could address the issue of locales of implementation inside the school more comprehensively.

The upshot of Rule 2 was that a quantitative analysis of the instances was not very useful. Even though I conducted a quantitative analysis that looked at the number of instances per marker, it proved to not be useful in

determining how many instances there were for each marker of the analytical framework. A quantitative analysis would not have given an accurate view of how appropriate particular proposals are for PLC support and professional development, as some instances were not appropriate for PLCs, even though they referred to some aspect of the marker.

The data was sorted in a spreadsheet with tables according to markers (named M1 to M48) that fell within broader categories (see Appendix A). The categories were divided into three main themes: support for PLCs relevant to professional development, professional development relevant to PLCs and locales of implementation. Instances were also separated according to the structure of the document along the lines of outputs, problem statements, activities and other units found in the broader text. Instances were sorted firstly according to the relevant marker, markers were sorted into categories and categories formed part of one of the three themes. Attention was paid to where in the document the instance was found so that, during the document analysis, conclusions could be drawn regarding the priority of information. For example, if an output (that is one of the main goals of the policy) was found to be relevant to a marker, then that marker refers to something that is a high priority in the document.

So, by way of example, the two instances recorded under the marker 'processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue' mentioned above were recorded in the table for the theme professional development that is appropriate for PLCs in the relevant marker's row, as highlighted below:

CPD as group learning	School-based activity informed by external expertise	M30
	Feedback	M31
	Observation	M32
	Peer support	M33
	Allowing teachers to develop their own CPD focus	M34
	<b>Processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue</b>	<b>M35</b>
	Processes for sustaining CPD so that practices are consolidated in classroom practices	M36

So all instances relating to a specific marker were recorded in an Excel spread sheet under the heading of the relevant marker. Having all instances of a marker grouped together enabled me to get a clear picture of how the whole marker was being addressed in the document.

The next step involved an interpretation of the data categorised under the different markers. The analysis was broken up into three main parts according to the three main themes of the analysis: support for PLCs, professional development in PLCs and locales of implementation. The data analysis in each theme was conducted in three layers. Firstly, I considered the range of data segments pertaining to a marker so as to get the big picture of the marker as a whole. Secondly, I reflected on all markers in a category, drawing conclusions regarding not only the markers for which instances were found, but also the markers for which no instances were recorded and what gaps were present in the document. Only thereafter could the categories within one of the three themes be studied in order to draw conclusions about the theme as a whole. Taking the example of the two instances of 'processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue' further, each of the two instances were firstly considered to draw conclusions about the marker as a whole. Thereafter the marker of 'processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue' was considered together with all the other markers of CPD as group learning in order to draw conclusions regarding the category CPD as group learning. Finally, CPD as group learning was studied together with all categories within the theme of professional development appropriate for PLC, in order to draw conclusions regarding the theme as a whole.

All data segments that were selected had to be analysed using the same procedure. I asked the following questions of all instances selected from the document, regardless of the marker to which it was relevant. The answers to the questions guided the conclusions that could be drawn from the data with regards to the markers, the categories and then the themes of the analysis:

1. Does the instance contradict or substantiate what is needed for PLC support, PLC professional development or the appropriate locales of implementation?

2. How and to what extent does the instance contradict or substantiate what is needed for PLC support, PLC professional development or the appropriate locales of implementation?
3. If the instance contradicts what is needed for PLC support, PLC professional development or locales of implementation, or is incomplete in some way, what is needed for the instance to be appropriate and complete in terms of what is needed for PLC support, PLC professional development or appropriate locales of implementation?

The questions guided the analysis so that each instance was subjected to the same process of examination. For example, the two instances of 'processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue' were found to be in line with what is needed for PLC professional development (the answer to the first question), although the instances will only be in line with what is needed for PLC professional development if they are implemented in certain ways which are not specified in the *Framework* text. Therefore, the instances are not aligned with what is needed for PLC professional development (the answer to the second question). Neither of the instances contradicts appropriate PLC professional development and therefore the third question does not apply. This process was followed for each instance individually and together for the specific marker as a whole. So each of the two instances for 'processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue' were done individually and as a group for the marker.

### **3.2.3 Third iteration of the analysis**

The overall findings of the analysis (that are discussed in the final chapter) were the result of a thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009, p. 32) that was the product of the third iteration of the data analysis. A thematic analysis is an analysis along the lines of emergent themes that form new categories for analysis. My second iteration of the analysis per theme, category and marker revealed insights from within all three main parts of the analysis: the relevance of the degree of presence and explicitness of each of the three original themes of the analytic framework. The degree of presence and explicitness of the group as a unit of collaboration as well as the degree of

presence and explicitness of the school as a locale of implementation were most prominent as part of this insight. The emergent insight from the third iteration of the analysis meant that conclusions could be reached in terms of the three themes. Subsequently, conclusions could be drawn regarding the *Framework* text as a whole and the degree of alignment of the *Framework* to the support needed for PLCs, appropriate professional development in a PLC and the desired locales of implementation for PLCs as is asked by the research question.

### **3.3 Validity**

The validity of the study is enhanced by the rigorous procedures that were followed during data selection and analysis and that are described in detail in this chapter. However, validity “has long been a key issue in debates over the legitimacy of qualitative research” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 279). It is imperative to ensure that a qualitative study, such as the current one, meets accepted validity criteria.

Maxwell (1992) links validity with understanding. He proposes five categories of validity that correspond to five types of understanding. Firstly, descriptive validity refers to the factual accuracy of the researcher’s account. Such validity issues can be resolved by intersubjective agreement if the appropriate data is made available. The descriptive analysis of the current study is ensured by my factual interpretation and representation of the data gathered from the *Framework* text. Where possible, I have quoted the relevant passages from the document so that the reader can deliver judgement on the factual accuracy of the interpretation.

Secondly, interpretive validity has to do with how consistent the researcher’s interpretation of the data is with the perspective of the studied phenomenon (Maxwell, 1992). The current study is concerned with a document that cannot have a subjective interpretation itself. Although the policymakers had a specific intention with the document, the current study disregards the policymakers’ intentions and asks what the document text and the way in which it has been formulated by the policymakers means for policy implementation in terms of PLC support and professional development.

Interpretive validity is therefore not problematic, as the study is exactly about how the *Framework* is open to interpretation.

Thirdly, theoretical validity “is concerned with...the legitimacy of the application of a given concept or theory to establish facts” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 292) and can be associated with construct validity as well as internal validity (Yin, 2009). While the former addresses issues of whether the concepts themselves are valid, the latter is concerned with the relationships between the concepts themselves. The current study is concerned with applying the theory regarding PLC support and professional development to determine whether the *Framework* is appropriate for PLC support and professional development. A careful account of the literature ensures that the concepts included as supports for PLCs as well as professional development in a PLC themselves are valid. The study does not attempt to form relationships between the concepts themselves.

Fourthly, generalisability is an important consideration in qualitative studies in order to assess whether the findings of a study can be transferred to other particular situations. Two types of generalisability can be distinguished: internal generalisability that is concerned with the extrapolation of results to other members of the population, community, group or institution that were not directly studied; external generalisability that generalises to other populations, communities, groups or institutions. The population relevant to the current study is the *Framework* text. In order to avoid issues of internal generalisability, the study included the whole of the document as part of the analysis. External validity is not of concern because, although the analytical framework and the research design can be applied to other policy documents, the current study only seeks to analyse the *Framework* and does not attempt to extrapolate to other policy documents.

Lastly, evaluative validity is concerned with the evaluation of that which is being studied. However, the current study is not concerned with evaluation and therefore evaluative validity is not an issue.

### 3.4 Limitations of the study

The *Framework* was the only source of evidence used in the current study. Interviews with relevant people involved in the policy making process would have been necessary had the study been about the intentions of the policy makers that are relevant for PLC support and professional development. However, the *Framework* is relevant insofar as PLCs can use the *Framework* for support and for relevant professional development. The appropriate lens for analysis was therefore from policy enactors' point of view. Such individuals or groups would not necessarily be able to approach policy makers to enquire about their intentions and therefore the study also did not incorporate such consultations. The sensemaking processes of policy enactors suggest the importance of the way in which policy is formulated. Instances where sensemaking processes could clearly lead to multiple or undesired understandings were identified. The stand-alone evidence of the document analysis aided the identification of sensemaking disadvantages and minimised bias in interpretation derived from policy makers' input.

The limitations of the study in terms of time and resources were such that additional document analyses of all South African education policies could not be done. Such policies were used for background knowledge and to understand the *Framework* in context. However, the findings and conclusions of the study are relevant regardless of whether other policy documents were analysed. In other words, the conclusions reached about the relevance of the *Framework* for PLC development and sustainability are accurate regardless of other South African teacher development policies.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

The document analysis was conducted as described in the previous chapter. The current chapter outlines the knowledge that was gained through the first iteration of the analysis and stipulates the translation of the theoretical framework to an analytic framework as a product of the initial analysis. Thereafter, the set of initial findings per theme that was the product of the second iteration of the data analysis is discussed. The chapter concludes with a preliminary exploration of the insights gained from the third iteration of the data analysis that forms the subject of the next chapter.

### 4.1 First iteration of the analysis

The first iteration of the analysis provided me with a clear understanding of the structure of the document and how the structure is relevant to the way in which the data segments should be organised. The theoretical framework was translated into an analytical framework during the first iteration of the analysis.

#### 4.1.1 Structure of the *Framework*

The *Framework* in its entirety is concerned with one outcome: to “improve the quality of teacher education and development in order to improve the quality of teachers and teaching” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 4). In order to reach this outcome, four outputs are identified that each contains activities relating to that output. This forms the main body of the *Framework*. The section of the *Framework* following the outputs and activities is concerned with enablement of the implementation of the *Framework*.

Data segments were not drawn from all sections of the *Framework* text. Sections where relevant instances were not recorded during the document analysis include: the foreword, the introduction, the strategic planning map found at the end of the document that mostly contain diagrams on the timeframe of implementation, all diagrams found in the document and the section on *Output 2: Increased numbers of high achieving school leavers are*

*attracted into teaching*. Except for the last point, the sections were deemed irrelevant based on their function as either providing background to the document or presenting summaries of sections. Recording instances in such sections would have led to unnecessary duplication. As for *Output 2*, as the current study is concerned with in-service training (or CPD), pre-service training as addressed in *Output 2* is irrelevant, unless it states something of relevance to CPD, which it did not.

The section that follows below elaborates in detail on the document analysis of the main body as well as the section on the enablement of the implementation of the *Framework* that was included in the document analysis. The section is divided according to the three main parts of the analytic framework: (1) support for PLCs, (2) professional development that is relevant for PLCs and (3) locales of implementation. It should be noted at the outset that some markers proved very similar: self-evaluation as a source of learning, self-evaluation and enquiry and allowing teachers to develop their own CPD focus were found to be alike, which manifested in the instances found to be of relevance to these markers. Instances recorded for one marker were also recorded for the other similar markers. Therefore, what is discussed under the one marker is not repeated for the other markers, unless the nature of the marker requires differences in the discussions. The same similarities were found in peer feedback under the heading of feedback on instructional performance and feedback under the heading of CPD as group learning.

#### **4.1.2 The translation of the theoretical framework to an analytic framework**

The final analytic framework used in the analysis of the document included adjustments by means of merging of markers or addition to existing markers in the theoretical framework. Such adjustments were mostly made as a result of the first iteration of the analysis, although minor changes still occurred during the second iteration of the analysis.

The external support category as part of the framework for the support for PLCs includes external expertise, external tools for professional development and external institutions as markers that represent examples of

external support for PLCs. Originally external support only included collaboration between schools as a marker, however markers were added as they were identified during the initial analysis in order to broaden the coverage of external support to include what was found in the document and deemed relevant as external support for PLCs.

Mentoring and peer-assisted learning as well as coaching were merged into a single marker, as the distinction between coaching and mentoring is problematic and irrelevant for the current study. The document also did not reveal exactly what is meant by mentoring – of which more than one instance was found in the document – and therefore such instances were recorded under one marker.

Locales of implementation were originally recorded as one marker. However, the preliminary document analysis revealed that the majority of instances pertaining to locales of implementation were relevant for locales of implementation outside of the school. Two markers were therefore developed: locales of implementation outside of the school and locales of implementation inside the school. The separation of the two markers meant a clearer view of the document's references to locales of implementation.

In addition to the markers that were changed, a rule was applied to not include any instances of pre-service training in the analytic framework used. The motivation for this decision was that the current study focuses on continuing professional development of teachers that are already in schools.

All instances where the term PLC is mentioned were also recorded in order to get a broad view of the *Framework's* understanding of and intention with PLCs.

## **4.2 Second iteration of the analysis**

The second iteration of the analysis is discussed below. The initial findings are organized in three main sections based on the three themes of the analytic framework. They are further organised under the headings of the categories within the relevant theme. The data gathered under each marker within the category are then analysed.

#### **4.2.1 Support for professional learning communities**

According to the analytic framework, support for PLCs includes teacher autonomy, structures that could support or impede PLC development, fostering of the desired social relations between members of a PLC, feedback on instructional performance, individuals' orientation to change that is conducive to PLC activities and processes, supportive leadership and external support for the PLC. The document analysis reveals no references to social relations that are desired in a PLC or the needed orientation to change on the part of members of a PLC. The categories of which instances were found in the text – autonomy, structure, feedback on instructional performance, leadership and external support – are discussed below.

##### **Teacher autonomy**

In terms of teacher autonomy, policy can provide for the establishment of decision-making on the part of teachers, decision-making regarding classroom issues and self-evaluation as a source of learning. These three indicators of autonomy were identified and used as markers in the current study, but of all the markers only self-evaluation as a source of learning was found in the *Framework*.

Self-evaluation is captured in the *Framework* in the form of diagnostic self-assessments required by Activity 1.2 under *Outcome 1: Individual and systemic teacher development needs are identified and addressed* (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 4). The self-assessments are covered in depth in terms of why the diagnostic self-assessments are necessary; what the self-assessments are and what they consist of; whose responsibility the self-assessments will be; who will develop them; what will inform the development; what the outcome of the self-assessments are; the funding for the self-assessments; access to the self-assessments; as well as the role of PLCs in the use of the self-assessments.

Self-evaluation through the diagnostic self-assessments can be a source of learning for teachers – which is a requirement for self-evaluation to be of use in supporting PLCs. The self-assessments are a move away from the ineffective identification of teachers' developmental needs through the IQMS. Instead of “conflating developmental appraisal and performance appraisal”

(Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 4) such as is done through the IQMS, the diagnostic self-assessments are aimed at enabling “individual teachers to identify their own learning and professional development needs and to access opportunities to address these needs” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 4) in a non-punitive way. The tests will be short and will provide real-time feedback in terms of what the teacher needs, which makes the assessments appropriate for teachers who have limited time available in their work schedule for CPD. The outcome of the tests is the identification of SACE-endorsed short courses that the teacher can attend in order to address his/her developmental needs. Teachers will be able to complete formal qualifications where the developmental needs are wide-ranging. In this way the process of self-evaluation through the assessments can lead to learning as is appropriate for the support of PLCs.

The *Framework* stipulates that teachers are to be able to use the tests “confidentially and in a safe and non-threatening environment”. The identification of an online TED ICT system linked to the SACE CPTD Management System as the mechanism by which the test are completed and appropriate short courses or formal qualifications are selected. This indicates a commitment to retain the anonymity of teachers. Anonymity is necessary in order for the process to improve on the weakness of the IQMS where teachers did not feel comfortable with being forthcoming regarding their professional needs. In addition, the tests will be available in a paper-based form for those teachers who do not have access to computers or for those teachers who do not possess the skills to access computers.

Although the responsibility of the National Institute for Curriculum and Professional Development (NICPD), the diagnostic self-assessments will be developed by bringing together

expertise across the system, including teacher educators, academic subject specialists, excellent practising teachers, NGOs and other knowledgeable organisations [who will] analyse the results of national assessments (including the National Senior Certificate examinations and the Grades 3 and 6 Annual National Assessments) and other reviews. The objective will be to identify areas of the curriculum specifically, or teachers’ work generally, in which learner performance is inadequate, and where performance is likely to improve if teachers are able to access appropriate

development opportunities. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 6, emphasis added)

Critical to the relevance of the *Framework* to PLCs is the focus on student learning. The professional development activities within a PLC will be directly informed by learner performance, as the *Framework* uses learner performance data to develop the diagnostic self-assessments. Thus, self-assessments – besides promoting self-evaluation as a source of learning – support the focus on student learning in a PLC.

Furthermore, the *Framework* explicitly identifies PLCs as a way in which to utilise expertise for the development of teachers in the specific areas in which development is required as identified in the diagnostic self-assessments:

While diagnostic self-assessments will help to identify areas that individual teachers must address, and engagement with appropriate CPD courses will be one way in which development will happen, the PLCs will also assist in this regard. Individual teachers will be able to highlight areas of weakness, and use expertise within the PLCs to help address their difficulties. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14)

The *Framework* intends for teachers' autonomy to be guided by the PLC by using the expertise in the PLC to address the weaknesses of individual teachers. In this sense the diagnostic self-assessments can really support the PLC in the identification of difficulties that individual members of the PLC have in their professional development.

The current study is concerned only with PLC support that is relevant for professional development. The self evaluation that can support PLCs is relevant for professional development within the PLC as is clear from the way in which the diagnostic self-assessments will be developed as well as from the outcomes of the assessments. The assessments are to be developed by experts in the field of teaching and will therefore be based on the specialist knowledge required in the teaching profession. The outcomes of the assessments will lead to short CPD courses and are therefore very relevant for professional development. As the self-assessments are relevant insofar as they improve autonomy and autonomy is necessary for professionalism, the self-assessments are relevant for autonomy that allows teachers to control their own CPD.

However, the analytic framework includes decision-making on the part of teachers and decision-making regarding classroom issues, which are both absent in the *Framework*. Although the *Framework* allows for autonomy in terms of teachers' own CPD focus through the diagnostic self-assessments, it does not develop teachers professionally through the allowance for autonomy with regards to decision-making. Teachers as professionals are therefore not allowed more decision-making power as is desired in a PLC.

### **Structure**

The analytic framework specifies the structural conditions that can impede or aid the comfortable functioning of PLCs: schools' staffing complexity, size, phase, location, history, mix of pupils, time and space. Of these markers, only size of the school, phase of the school, mix of pupils, time and space were addressed in the *Framework* and at low levels of relevance for PLCs.

Only one instance that speaks to the size of the school is found in the *Framework*:

In order to make the most impact on the system, approximately 3 000 underperforming secondary schools (those with a pass rate of less than 60% in the NSC examinations) and their feeder primary schools will be identified and their teachers – together with the curriculum advisors in the districts in which they are located – targeted for immediate short-course or part-qualification interventions. If insufficient funding is available to cover all the schools identified, the largest secondary schools, and their feeder primary schools, will be selected. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 9)

The instance therefore only speaks to prioritising large schools for intervention in the case of insufficient funding. The relevance to PLCs lies in the impediments that large schools offer to collaboration. Large schools might therefore be less receptive to PLC development than small schools. However, the instance only speaks to the professional development that will be made available to the largest underperforming secondary schools and their feeder primary schools and does not relate directly to the formation of PLCs in these schools. The *Framework* does not directly speak to the appropriate considerations for PLCs in terms of the size of the school.

Similar observations can be made regarding references to the phase of the school in the *Framework*: although there is space for addressing problems of school phase that is of relevance to PLCs, it does not mean that decisions based on the *Framework* will lead to the appropriate support for PLCs in terms of school phase. The phase of the school is relevant insofar as secondary schools are less receptive to PLCs than primary schools, because of the higher level of specialisation of teachers in the former which presents barriers to collaboration. The *Framework* addresses specific needs, per subject area, of different phases (foundation phase, intermediate phase, senior phase and FET) but not the problems of PLC formation in secondary schools. The teacher knowledge and practice standards that are to be developed as a consequence of the *Framework* will be “specific to a subject area and school phase or to a specific extended role, for example, school leadership” and do not allow for skills necessary to overcome a silo syndrome because of specialisation in PLC. As discussed in the literature review, what is at issue with regards to secondary schools is not that specialised knowledge and skills is unwanted or unnecessary, but concerns regarding the phase of the school, the specialisation associated with secondary schools and the possible barriers to collaboration that such specialisation can mean in PLCs are not addressed in the *Framework*.

The *Framework* does speak to specific mixes of pupils and the skills necessary to address these: these include skills needed in schools with pupils with special needs as well as teaching strategies for teachers in schools where “multi-grade teaching is the norm”. The mix of pupils in a school is relevant for a PLC insofar as diverse student groups can affect cohesion in a PLC. The *Framework* does not address the cohesion issues that may result in schools with particular mixes of pupils or any issues regarding mixes of pupils in conventional schools.

Time and space for PLC activities are appropriately addressed in the *Framework*. With regards to time, a section in the *Framework* is dedicated to factors that will enable the implementation of the *Framework* and where the importance of time for teacher development is recognised:

There are at least four essential requirements for successful implementation of the [one of which is] adequate time for quality

teacher development. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 19)

Even more specifically, time is recognised as necessary for teachers to develop professionally through participation in a PLC:

Time for teachers to participate in professional learning communities and engage in quality school-based teacher development could be scheduled into the school year. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 20)

Such scheduled time could go a long way to supporting the development of PLCs as spaces for teacher professional development. Two possible ways of making time available to teachers is noted: pre- and post-term periods or integration into the school timetable. As PLC interactions would need to occur throughout the year, the latter suggestion would be most appropriate for PLC development. Space is made available to teachers and other members of PLCs at the District Teacher Development Centres (DTDCs) that will be “manageably accessible” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 13) and “adequately resourced to support PLC activities” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14), although no clarification is provided as to what resources will be available to support PLC activities.

Thus, with the exception of time and space, instances of relevance to structural support for PLCs are scarce. Time will be made available to teachers, hopefully as part of the timetable, and space will be made available, albeit not at the schools themselves. Other prospective impediments or aids in terms of structure (size, phase, mix of pupils, history, location) are not appropriately addressed.

### **Feedback on instructional performance**

Feedback on instructional performance – specifically from peers – that leads to the improvement of teaching practices is important in order to maintain PLCs and their central focus on learning. As part of Activity 3.3 that is concerned with the establishment of PLCs, the *Framework* refers to one form of peer feedback on instructional performance as part of a list of appropriate activities for PLCs:

PLCs will allow groups of teachers to engage in a variety of activities including...working together to learn from video records of practice and other learning materials. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14)

If such video records are of teaching practices of teachers within the PLC (or within the NLC), then discussions around such recordings constitute peer feedback on instructional recordings as an example of the use of artefacts for the improvement of teaching practices. However, the *Framework* does not explicitly state the need for or use of peer feedback on instructional performance that would support PLCs and professional development within the PLC.

### **Supportive leadership**

PLCs need to be supported by appropriate leadership – a set of competencies in education that is often considered to be lacking in South Africa. The *Framework* recognises the need for principals and other school leaders in South Africa to be developed, and identifies school leaders to be one of six focus categories of intervention within the first five years of implementation of the *Framework*. Principals, deputy principals and heads of department are to be developed through short course interventions or formal qualifications such as the Advanced Certificate in School Leadership and Management. The leadership development planned for is to take the following forms:

The findings of the NCS review highlighted the need for principals and school leaders (Category A) who are able to lead and support productive learning environments, to work together with committed communities of teachers, in order to teach and assess the school curriculum effectively. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 10)

The reference to the support of “productive learning environments” may imply the development of leaders who are able to provide instructional leadership in PLCs. There is, however, no explicit mention of the development of or need for instructional leadership as is appropriate for supporting PLCs.

In addition to the development of leadership, the teacher knowledge and practice standards that are to be developed as a consequence of the *Framework* will also include specific standards for school leadership. Such standards may specify instructional leadership as appropriate. Unfortunately,

it is not explicitly stated that instructional leadership will form part of the teacher knowledge and practice standards.

### **External support**

External support for schools in South Africa is very important, as discussed in the previous chapter. In the current study, the analytic framework defines external support to include collaboration between schools, external expertise, external tools for professional development and external institutions. All these markers were addressed in the policy.

The *Framework* does not so much refer to collaboration between schools as provide the necessary space for collaboration between schools at the District Teacher Development Centres (DTDCs) which will “serve as the local central meeting venue for the PLCs, as they will be adequately resourced to support PLC activities” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14). Space available for interaction between PLCs can either be a catalyst for the development of NLCs through the interactions between teachers from different schools at the DTDCs or it can be supportive of already existing NLCs by making space available that provide an environment that is conducive to collaboration. An example of the former is when teachers with the same area of specialisation, such as mathematics, meet at the DTDCs when completing their diagnostic self-assessments. Initial interaction may lead to collaboration between mathematics teachers across schools. Although the *Framework* does not provide specifically for collaboration between schools, the space provided for such interactions may lead to intra-school collaborations.

The DTDCs will also serve as venues for completing the diagnostic self-assessments that will have as outcome the identification of appropriate short courses. The subject specific short courses will be developed by the NICPD taking into consideration external expertise by:

taking advantage of expertise from across the system, including those NGOs and organisations with specialist knowledge of the specific focus areas. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 6)

PLCs can use this external expertise, if only in an indirect way. Teachers and school leaders who attend subject specific short courses will be bringing

external expertise into the PLC. The advantage in the utilisation of external expertise lies in its role in ensuring the continual updating of professional knowledge in the PLC, without which the professionalism of the teachers and school leaders may be weakened. The PLC ensures that it remains a *professional* learning community where erroneous knowledge is not reinforced but addressed. As is captured in the *Framework*:

PLCs will assist teachers to integrate their own professional knowledge with the latest research-based knowledge about content and practice. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14)

However, the Framework does not explicitly state that professional development from short courses can be enriched by utilising the external expertise in PLCs to gain economies of scale.

The *Framework* also identifies the need for facilitators in the development of PLCs:

In the initial stages PLCs will require substantial external input through well-trained facilitators (who could be subject advisors or trained mentor teachers); however, these facilitators must assist teachers to take control of their own development within a manageable timeframe. Specific projects, some already in existence, will be supported at the local level to enable the development and spread of PLCs. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14)

External expertise is thereby utilised to initiate the development of PLCs. The policy also states that PLCs should not be dependent on such facilitators and that members of a PLC should take control of their own professional development. Such external support for the development of PLCs is crucial in South Africa where school-based resources are stretched thin.

In the same way, external tools for professional development are important as external resources for PLCs. The TED ICT can be utilised by the PLC because

The ICT system will serve as a point from which open source materials developed by the NICPD can be accessed by anyone who might want to use them for teacher development. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 7)

PLCs can access the ICT system for materials that were developed by experts in order to inform professional development and use these materials

for updating knowledge in the PLC, for addressing weaknesses identified through peer feedback in individual teachers or groups of teachers in the PLC, for developing leaders in the PLC, etcetera. The *Framework* identifies the NICPD as the external institution that “will support the work of PLCs by developing activities and materials that can help to stimulate their work” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14). Therefore, the requirements of PLCs will be a central consideration in the development of the materials. The necessary aspects of development for PLCs will be taken into account if the insights from the literature on PLCs are used in the development of the materials – materials that will be easily accessible through the ICT system.

The NICPD will be an external institution that is of relevance to the support of PLCs in South Africa. As discussed above, DTDCs will also serve as external institutions where PLCs can meet. The presence of subject advisors and teacher mentors who will be based at these centres means that support for PLCs will be available at the district level which is the external locale of most impact for PLCs as identified in the literature.

External support from the policy is therefore strong in terms of: the utilisation of external expertise in the development of short courses that members of PLCs can attend and the use of facilitators in establishing PLCs; access to the TED ICT system for materials to inform PLC activities, knowledge and practices; and district support available at the DTDCs.

### **Concluding comments on support for professional learning communities that is relevant for professional development**

The categories of support of which instances were found are of varying degrees of relevance to support for PLCs according to how they are discussed in the *Framework*. The greatest degree of relevance to PLC support is found in the external support for PLCs addressed in the *Framework* where external expertise will be assigned to the development of PLCs, district support is mentioned as important for the support of PLCs and external tools in the form of the ICT system will be made available to PLCs. Secondly, autonomy for teachers to determine their own developmental paths based on self-evaluation is robust in the form of the diagnostic self-assessments, but no

decision-making autonomy is awarded to teachers. Autonomy that is supportive of a PLC is therefore selectively found in the text – although that which is found in the *Framework* is useful to PLCs. Instances referring to the structure of schools and those structures that are supportive of PLCs are scarce, although instances referring to time and space for professional development– outside of the school – were found in the *Framework*. One instance of feedback on instructional performance was found, although the relevance to PLCs is dependent on the understanding (the sensemaking) and the consequent implementation of that part of the *Framework*. Similarly, the leadership issues addressed in the *Framework* provide the space for useful interpretation for PLCs, although relevant leadership considerations are not explicitly addressed in the *Framework*. Support for appropriate social relations or to address individuals' orientation to change was not found anywhere in the *Framework*.

Overall, therefore, support for PLCs that is relevant to professional development is found to varying degrees of relevance in the *Framework*. The *Framework* states explicitly through Activity 3.3 that the intention is to establish PLCs. However, if the *Framework* is to be successful in establishing PLCs, then the lack of specifications in terms of some of the supports could mean that the *Framework* does not reach its stated goal of establishing PLCs. In other words, the *Framework* and how it is formulated, does not serve to fully substantiate its own intentions.

#### **4.2.2 Professional development that is relevant for professional learning communities**

Analytic categories relating to professional development appropriate for PLC are expert knowledge and skills, a focus on student learning, work-based and incidental learning opportunities, self-evaluation and enquiry and continuing professional development as group learning. Some of the instances relating to these categories have already been discussed but, where necessary, the instances are analysed again for clearer insight into the markers relevant in this section.

## Expert knowledge and skills

The development and continual updating of expert knowledge and skills is a vital part of PLC professional development (and indeed of any professional development). Professionalism presupposes that the professional possesses the specialised knowledge of the field. The instances from the *Framework* recorded under expert knowledge and skills during data selection amounts to a substantial process aimed at the development of teachers' expert knowledge and skills. The process described by these instances are in reaction to two important acknowledgements as found in the introductory sentences of two of the four outputs in the *Framework*: the recognition of the lack of teacher knowledge and skills in the South African education system as well as the recognition that materials and resources are only useful insofar as teachers possess the proper knowledge and skills to use them.

The first step in the process of improving the expert knowledge and skills of teachers is the development of content frameworks by the NICPD. The NICPD will “bring together expert teacher educators, academic subject specialists, excellent practising teachers, NGOs and other organisations” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 5) to develop the content frameworks which will

describe the content (theory and practice), specifically related to the school curriculum, that teachers need to know in order to teach the curriculum effectively” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 5)

The *Framework* recognises the need to raise teacher quality and therefore Activity 4.1 is dedicated to the development of teacher knowledge and practice standards that

describe what a teacher needs to know and be able to do to carry out their core function professionally and effectively. The statements are specific to a subject area and school phase or to a specific extended role, for example, school leadership. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 16)

The standards do not relate to any specific school curriculum (such as OBE), but rather

relate more to the academic and practical knowledge required to teach a particular subject or discipline well and, if met by teachers,

will allow them to deliver the curriculum that is in place at a specific time, and to adapt effectively when the curriculum changes. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 16)

Out of the teacher knowledge and practice standards as well as the content frameworks will flow the development of the diagnostic self-assessments as well as short CPD courses. The diagnostic self-assessments will identify the areas in which a teacher needs development with regards to the knowledge and skills that he/she needs in order to teach effectively. The self-assessments will direct the teacher towards suitable CPD short courses that will address his/her weaknesses. The content frameworks, self-assessments and short courses will be developed at the national level.

Subject advisors will be developed in order to assist teachers at the level of the district: one of the specific categories of individuals identified for development is subject advisors who “will attend courses to help them to assist teachers in specialist areas”. Subject advisors who show potential as leaders will be encouraged to complete formal qualifications that are

designed to enhance their knowledge of teaching and learning in their specialist area and their ability to provide support to practising teachers and leadership to other advisors in the system. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 10)

Over and above the normal flow of the system described above, specific groups of practicing teachers are identified in the *Framework* as priority groups to complete short courses. Firstly, teachers who require knowledge and skills to implement the NCS. Secondly, teachers of

subjects [that] have been identified as key levers for improving quality across the system: For the Foundation Phase: 1) numeracy; home language/ literacy (all African languages); and English first additional language. 2) For the Intermediate, Senior and Further Education Phases: mathematics; and English first additional language. 3) For FET, in addition to the above: mathematical literacy; accounting; and physical science. 4) For all phases and specialisations above: multi-level/ inclusive teaching (focused in particular on curriculum adaptation).

Also included in the list of teachers who will enjoy special attention are teachers who teach learners with special needs.

The whole of the development process runs along the lines of expert knowledge and skills needed in each specialist subject area: the content

frameworks, the diagnostic self-assessments, the short courses, the subject advisors and the teacher knowledge and practice standards are developed according to subject areas.

The last step in the process of developing teachers' expert knowledge and skills occurs in the PLC as

PLCs will assist teachers to integrate their own professional knowledge with the latest research-based knowledge about content and practice. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14)

Thus the process of developing teachers' expert knowledge and skills outlined in the *Framework* is comprehensive in terms of the basis from which courses are developed (content frameworks and teacher knowledge and practice standards that are relevant to all curricula), the specialised knowledge that will be the focus of the short courses, the support provided at district level as well as the updating of teachers' knowledge via PLCs. The expert knowledge and skills addressed in the *Framework* seems to be appropriate for professional development in a PLC.

### **Focus on student learning**

A central focus on student learning is one of the characteristics of an effective PLC. Professional development in a PLC should therefore also look at student learning in order to determine what professional development is necessary. There are two instances in the *Framework* where a focus on student learning guides the professional development stipulated in the *Framework*. The first relates not to a focus on student learning by the PLC itself, but rather the use of learner results by the experts that the NICPD will bring together

to identify areas of the curriculum specifically, or teachers' work generally, in which learner performance is inadequate, and where performance is likely to improve if teachers are able to access appropriate development opportunities. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 6)

The analysis of learner results will be used in conjunction with the content frameworks and the teacher knowledge and practice standards to develop the diagnostic self-assessments.

The second instance relates to the importance of a focus on student learning on the part of the PLC itself. The *Framework* states that

PLCs will allow groups of teachers to engage in a variety of activities including: Developing expertise in the analysis of learner results on evidence-based assessments such as ANA and the NSC, among others, in order to determine teachers' own development trajectories

In this way the *Framework* allows for learner results to inform professional development in PLCs.

A focus on student learning therefore not only informs the development of the process of professional development outlined in the *Framework* that occurs at national level, but also makes reference to the role of PLCs in aligning professional development to learner results.

### **Work-based and incidental learning opportunities**

Professional development profiles, action research, action learning, coaching, mentoring and peer-assisted learning, professional development bursaries, sabbaticals and individual learning accounts all form part of work-based and incidental learning opportunities. However, instances of only two categories were found in the document: coaching, mentoring and peer-assisted learning and professional development bursaries.

Firstly, coaching, mentoring and peer-assisted learning were found in the form of facilitators of initial PLC development and mentors of lead teachers. Such mentors are to be identified amongst the ranks of "teaching and learning specialists, senior teaching and learning specialists, and subject advisors" (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 9). The identified mentors form part of one of the priority categories for development. The prospective mentors will be developed at Provincial Teacher Development Institutes (PTDIs) and will be supported to complete "specialised subject-focused Advanced Certificate in Education or B.Ed. (Hons) programmes (and in the future advanced diplomas and professional post-graduate diplomas)" (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 10). The allowance for facilitators of initial PLC development may prove to be essential in establishing PLCs in South Africa, especially since the intention is not for PLCs to become

dependent on such facilitators, but to rather ultimately function independent of intense external intervention.

Secondly, professional development bursaries are to be made available through the following mechanism: teachers who complete the diagnostic self-assessments and are directed to relevant SACE-endorsed short courses to complete, can apply for funding either through the TED ICT support system or by paper-based applications. District teacher development officials assist teachers to access the funding. There are priorities in terms of funding such as for the first five years of implementation of the *Framework* the teachers identified in five categories will be prioritised. It is duly noted in the *Framework* that the five categories cover all teachers in the system and therefore funding will have to be sequenced. This is contradictory to stating that all five categories will be prioritised in the first five years of the *Framework*. Is the sequencing of funding in these categories then supposed to take place within the first five years? The intention here is unclear.

A statement regarding the kind of training that will be prioritised was also found:

the bulk of funds available for teacher development programmes will be allocated to programmes that deepen the subject specialisation knowledge of teachers. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 21)

The funding made available by the provinces does mean that bursaries for professional development will be available, albeit selectively and thus not necessarily for all individuals who participate in PLCs (although this is also not clear because of the five categories that cover all teachers in the system).

Work-based and incidental learning opportunities by means of coaching, mentoring and peer-assisted learning in the form of district-based support and especially facilitators of initial PLC development carry the promise of robust PLC development in South Africa. The *Framework* is unclear regarding the necessary funding for the endeavours stipulated in the *Framework* because of the contradictions in terms of priorities.

### **Self-evaluation and enquiry**

Instances recorded for the 'self-evaluation as a source of learning' marker that falls under the category of autonomy as a support for PLCs were

also recorded for the 'self-evaluation and enquiry' category. The form of self-evaluation found in the *Framework* is the diagnostic self-assessments that have been discussed at length in the previous sections. The discussion in section 5.2.1 on self-evaluation as a source of learning is therefore also relevant here.

### **Continuing professional development as group learning**

The analytic framework identifies school-based activity informed by external expertise, feedback, observation, peer support, allowing teachers to develop their own CPD focus, processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue and processes for sustaining CPD so that practices are consolidated in classroom practices as markers of continuing professional development as group learning. No instances were found for observation or for processes for sustaining CPD so that practices are consolidated as classroom practices. The markers for which instances were found are discussed below.

The introduction of facilitators who will be responsible for initiating PLC development is seen as an example of school-based activity that is informed by external expertise. With regards to PLC activities that are based at the school itself but are informed by external expertise, the *Framework* makes reference to the role of PLCs in assisting “teachers to integrate their own professional knowledge with the latest research-based knowledge about content and practice” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14). Furthermore, “the NICPD will support the work of PLCs by developing activities and materials that can help to stimulate their work”, thereby also allowing for external expertise to inform school-based endeavours.

Peer support in the *Framework* is found in the statements on the activities of groups of teachers under Activity 3.3 that discusses the formation of PLCs: groups of teachers will together undertake “curriculum orientation activities”, learn “how to interpret curriculum support materials”, develop “expertise in the analysis of learner results” and “learn from video records of practice and other learning materials” – the last two of which constitute the use of artefacts for analysis in a group. There is a level of peer support

implied in these activities, as teachers are to approach these activities in groups.

Feedback is found in one instance in the *Framework* that is the same instance as that elaborated on in the marker on feedback on instructional performance under the section on support for PLC above:

PLCs will allow groups of teachers to engage in a variety of activities including...working together to learn from video records of practice and other learning materials. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14)

As stated previously, the instance only constitutes an instance of feedback if the video recordings are of members of the PLC itself and feedback to the teacher is provided during the analysis of the video recordings.

The same instance recorded under feedback was recorded as a process that encourages and structures professional dialogue. Here, whether the video recordings are of peers in the PLC or not is not relevant. Analysing video recordings as an artefact in a group encourages professional dialogue. Such analyses may even structure professional dialogue by locating it in a discussion on video recordings of practice and other learning materials. The *Framework* also provides for

Interactive courses that teachers can work through individually or collectively in order to develop their own competence will be available through the ICT system. (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 7)

Such courses encourage and structure professional dialogue if the courses are not done by individuals but in groups. There are therefore two examples of processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue in the text – if these processes are approached in specific ways.

Teachers' CPD focus will be determined through the diagnostic self-assessments. The question of whether teachers will be allowed to develop their own CPD focus is dependent on the process of self-evaluation that has been discussed under two previous headings (self-evaluation as a source of learning under autonomy and self-evaluation and enquiry as a form of professional development relevant to PLCs). The process involves identification of areas needing development by means of the diagnostic self-assessments, the identification of relevant SACE-endorsed CPD short courses and application for funding for the courses. Each step in the process

informs the next step and the process occurs in a somewhat automated form through the TED ICT support system or in paper-based form where necessary. It is therefore unlikely that teachers will be able to develop their own CPD focus. This is more unlikely given the limited amount of funding available for the execution of the *Framework*. Teachers who identify their own CPD focus outside of the diagnostic self-assessments will not necessarily have access to funding for the completion of courses or qualifications that are made available as part of the professional development addressed in the *Framework*. It is therefore doubtful, even if teachers are allowed to develop their own CPD focus (which is itself not addressed in the *Framework*), that they will have the means to develop professionally in the areas identified by themselves.

CPD as outlined in the *Framework* does not always involve development in a group of teachers. Activities are specified for groups of teachers in PLCs, but the focus of CPD in the *Framework* is not on groups of teachers developing together professionally – even though the *Framework* aims to develop PLCs.

### **Concluding comments on professional development that is relevant for professional learning communities**

Parts of the intended professional development addressed in the *Framework* are relevant to PLCs. Expert knowledge and skills are comprehensively addressed. There is a focus on student learning in some professional development strategies that focus on the skills necessary to analyse learner results to determine teachers' areas of development. There are some contradictory statements in terms of work-based and incidental learning opportunities, but – if such issues can be clarified – there is promise of robustly relevant professional development for PLCs through facilitators of PLC development as well as appropriate funding for individuals' development paths.

Self-evaluation is well supported by a whole system of self-assessments, available short-courses and funding for the courses with assistance for the process provided at district level.

CPD in the *Framework* sometimes provides the space for completing activities in a group, although group learning is not the focus of the CPD found

in the *Framework*. In a *Framework* that also asks for the development of PLCs, one would expect to find professional development that supports such an aspiration. The approach to professional development in the *Framework* could be more relevant to PLCs through a clearer focus on group learning, as collaboration in a PLC is central to an effective PLC. A more vigorous relationship between learner results and professional development as a clear focus on student learning is also crucial for effective PLC development.

#### **4.2.3 Locales of implementation**

The *Framework* identifies outputs and activities to be led at national level (by either the Department of Basic Education or by the Department of Higher Education and training), at provincial level and at district level. Teaching Schools (TSs) and Professional Practice Schools (PPSs) are to be established as a consequence of the *Framework*. There are no activities that are explicitly stated as being based at the school level. All locales of implementation addressed in the *Framework* are outside of the school. This does not mean that the activities have no influence on the school – the outcome of the *Framework* is to improve teaching through quality TED and therefore the focus is the teachers in the school.

The *Framework* recognises the problem of access to professional development opportunities for teachers – especially in rural areas. Teacher support structures are to be put in place at provincial and district level. Provincial Teacher Development Institutes (PTDIs) as well as District Teacher Development Centres (DTDCs) will be established. PTDIs will be the point from which teacher development initiatives will be coordinated and will also serve as delivery sites for CPD programmes as developed by the NICPD. DTDCs will be accessible to teachers from surrounding schools and

will serve as local support sites for teachers, as sites from which curriculum support staff can operate, as sites where teachers can access shared resources, as sites of delivery for continuing professional development courses and as meeting points for teacher professional learning communities.

For example, support for the completion of the diagnostic self-assessments, the identification of appropriate courses based on the results of the

assessments, applying for CPD courses and applying for funding for the courses will take place at the DTDCs.

Regarding the explicit mention of PLCs in places where locales for implementation are identified, the *Framework* identifies key players who will be involved in the establishment of PLCs: “the provinces, districts, teacher organisations, subject-based professional teacher associations and, equally importantly, the teachers themselves” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14). The NICPD “will assist with the development of meaningful activities to stimulate the development of the learning communities” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 5), the provinces will be responsible for establishing PLCs, the DTDCs “will be able to serve as the local central meeting venue for the PLCs, as they will be adequately resourced to support PLC activities” and PPSs will be used “as hubs for the development of professional learning communities” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 18). The *Framework* does not elaborate on what a hub is.

Districts therefore play a role in PLC development in South Africa. District support is important for PLCs, as identified in the literature. Unfortunately, the *Framework* is rather vague as to how the DTDCs will serve as meeting places for PLCs and how they will be resourced with the goal of supporting PLCs. A clearer statement of DTDCs’ roles would be useful in determining whether the support provided by DTDCs will be appropriate. Also, district support will not be sufficient if schools themselves are not appropriately resourced. It is not clear whether schools will be resourced to support their development as PLCs, as schools are not mentioned as locales of implementation at all.

### **4.3 Third iteration of the analysis**

The third iteration of the analysis focused on drawing more general insights from the second iteration of the analysis. The insights therefore went beyond the structure of the analytic framework in order to find evidence of patterns that stretch across more than one theme of the analytic framework.

The insights gained from the third iteration inform a higher level of findings that moves closer to the main findings and conclusions of the study.

The main insight gained from the third iteration of the analysis related to the different degrees of presence and explicitness in the *Framework* of the categories and markers of the analytic framework: the supports for PLC, the appropriate professional development within a PLC and the appropriate locales of implementation in a PLC. According to the research design, all instances that were found for a marker were recorded, regardless of whether the instance is appropriate for PLCs. This was done in order to record contradictions but also led to different degrees of presence and explicitness for each marker. The degrees of presence and explicitness gathered for each marker could be categorised as follows:

1. No instances of the marker were identified in the *Framework*.
2. Instances of the marker were identified in the *Framework*, but the instances are not appropriate for the three categories of the analytic framework. In other words, the proposals were not conducive to sustaining or developing PLCs.
3. Instances of the marker were identified, but the instances are contradictory to the requirements for the three categories of the analytic framework.
4. Instances of the marker were identified in the *Framework*, and at least some of the instances are appropriate for one or more of the three categories of the analytic framework. However, either not all of the instances are appropriate or the way in which the *Framework* is formulated leaves room for interpretation.
5. Instances of the marker were identified in the *Framework* and the instances are relevant for one or more of the three categories. The instances are appropriately formulated.

Several markers delivered Category 1 level of information where no instances were recorded. No data segments were recorded for the following markers that fall under PLC support: two markers for autonomy, three markers under structure and no instances were found under any markers under social relations and individuals' orientation to change. No data segments were recorded for the following markers of PLC professional

development: two markers for CPD as group learning and all but two markers under work-based and incidental learning opportunities. The absence of data segments pertaining to these markers has implications either for PLC support or PLC development, as their absence indicates gaps in the support and professional development for PLCs provided by the *Framework*.

Data segments recorded for two markers relating to structure as a support for PLCs can be regarded as Category 2 level of information (where there is information but the information is not appropriate). Both the phase of the school as well as the mix of pupils were addressed in the *Framework*, but were not appropriate for PLC support. No instances recorded during data selection were found to be contradictory to any of the markers and therefore none of the data segments recorded had a Category 3 level of information.

Category 4 level of information was recorded for numerous markers in all three categories of the analytic framework. In terms of the support for PLC, the size of the school (as a marker relevant to structural factors) was addressed in the *Framework* by prioritising the largest secondary schools and their feeder primary schools for intervention in the form of short courses or part-qualifications. However, it is unclear whether such interventions will address the impediments to collaboration associated with large schools such as is needed for PLC support. Time is also appropriately addressed, but the *Framework* states two possibilities of scheduling professional development time into teachers' work schedules, only one of which will be appropriate for PLC support. It remains to be seen how professional development time will be scheduled in. Feedback on instructional performance is appropriately addressed if such feedback is based on video recordings of teachers' own classes – this is not clearly stated in the *Framework*. Proposals regarding leadership seem appropriate as the *Framework* commits to developing leaders who can lead productive learning environments and communities of teachers. However, the *Framework* fails to specifically address instructional leadership as is needed in PLCs. CPD as group learning is also appropriately addressed, except for the important consideration of a focus on group learning rather than on the individual. Finally, with regard to locales of implementation, the *Framework* fittingly focuses on the district as an important locale for implementation – as is needed for PLC. Unfortunately, the

*Framework* fails to mention the school – that is the major locale for PLCs – as an important local for implementation. Thus, the *Framework* lacks information at crucial points of support and professional development for PLCs.

Markers where data segments were recorded that contain a Category 5 level of information (appropriately and comprehensively addressed) and that to PLC support includes: the space that is provided for PLC activities and external support for PLCs in the form of collaboration between schools, external expertise, external tools for professional development and external institutions. One marker under autonomy, self-evaluation as a source of learning, is comprehensively addressed, even though autonomy is not fully covered in terms of the decision making necessary for appropriate autonomy for PLC support. In terms of professional development: the *Framework* provides for the development of expert knowledge and skills, a strong focus on student learning, mentoring, coaching and peer-assisted learning, comprehensive self-evaluation and enquiry as well as allowing teachers to develop their own CPD focus.

Thus, there are different degrees of information in the *Framework* with regards to particular forms of support and professional development for PLCs. Some aspects of support and professional development for PLCs are not addressed at all. Other aspects are appropriately and explicitly addressed while still others could be deemed as appropriately addressed but are not entirely explicit such that the appropriateness is dependent on the interpretation and implementation of those parts of the *Framework*.

Looking beyond the initial three themes of the analytic framework, I found two emerging themes that are derived from the existence of differing degrees of presence and explicitness of the different elements of the analytic framework: the focus on the individual development of the teacher rather than the professional development of the teacher within a group as well as the lack of the school as a locale of implementation in the *Framework*.

#### **4.3.1 A focus on the individual**

Firstly, looking at the differing degrees of presence and explicitness of data segments relating to analytic categories in light of the characteristics of a PLC provides a further insight: the individual is much more of a focus of the

*Framework* text than is the group. All but one of the characteristics of an effective PLC have to do with the group (the group consisting of any number more than one individual). A shared mission, vision and values, reflective dialogue, collective enquiry and deprivatised practice as well as collaboration all directly imply the existence of the group and its cohesion rather than the individual. Indeed, the group is central to the idea of a PLC and only a central focus on student learning as a characteristic of an effective PLC does not directly imply the existence of the group.

All markers in the analytic framework that had to do with the professional development of the teacher as an individual were addressed in detail. The markers include, under PLC support, self-evaluation as a source of learning and, under PLC professional development, self-evaluation and allowing teachers to develop their own CPD focus. All three of these markers were comprehensively addressed because of the centrality of the diagnostic self-assessments to the teacher professional development described in the *Framework*. The diagnostic self-assessments are relevant for, and therefore discussed in, three of the four main outputs of the *Framework*. The assessments are appropriate for self-evaluation (as a source of learning or for any other goal) as well as a tool in the process of allowing teachers to develop their own CPD focus.

Markers that are part of the analytic framework and that are the most relevant for the development of the group and the collaboration within the group in a PLC include – under PLC support – trust and respect, procedures for dealing with conflict and peer feedback and – under PLC professional development – mentoring, coaching and peer-assisted learning, feedback, observation, peer support and processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue. Only one of these markers, mentoring, coaching and peer assisted learning was addressed with an appropriate and comprehensive level of information (Category 5). The rest of the markers were either not mentioned (Category 1), not appropriately addressed (Category 2), or appropriately but not fully addressed (Category 4). If the level of information in the *Framework* with regards to markers that are important for group development is compared to the level of information with regards to markers that are important for individual development, then it follows that the

professional development of the individual teacher is a greater priority in the *Framework* than the collaborative work of a group of teachers.

A focus on the professional development of the individual teacher is crucial in South Africa where many teachers are unqualified or under-qualified to teach. As the *Framework* states: “While it must be recognised that a wide variety of factors interact to impact on the quality of the education system in South Africa, teachers’ poor subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are important contributors” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 4). The value of the PLC for the professional development of the teacher lies in the collaborative and focused way that it guides the development of the teacher in the context of the unit in which the PLC functions – whether it be the school, the subject area or the networked learning community. A focus on the group functioning within a PLC is not to detract from the attention of the individual’s professional development, but to direct and reinforce individual development within the PLC.

The lack of focus on the group and its cohesion and collaboration is important in light of the characteristics of an effective PLC and also has direct implications for the *Framework’s* own intention to establish PLCs in South Africa. For the *Framework* to succeed in promoting the establishment of PLCs, more focus needs to be directed towards groups of teachers that function collaboratively in order to develop professionally as individuals. This is not to say that the *Framework* does not admit to the role of PLCs in collaboration between teachers for the professional development of teachers: “PLCs are 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” (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 14). What is rather at issue here is the lack of focus on the group as a unit in which professional development should take place. Professional development groups can take different forms, as the unit in which the PLC functions can take different forms: teachers across schools in a specific subject area, teachers from one department in a school, a networked learning community

consisting of multiple schools or just one school. However, the *Framework* fails to mention professional development at a group level in any form. The section dedicated to the establishment of PLCs is the only section in which individual development through any form of a group rather than individual development on an individual basis is the focus. The detail relating to individual development on an individual basis is much more elaborate in the *Framework* (except for the one page on the establishment of PLCs) than the individual professional development in a collaborative group setting.

This does not mean to say that more focus on groups and the collaboration in groups that is characteristic of PLC activities should shift the focus away from the professional development of the individual. On the contrary, individual professional development is strengthened by such focused collaboration, as is clear from the literature on PLCs.

#### **4.3.2 A focus on external locales of implementation**

Secondly, further investigation provides insight into the implication of the lack of mention of the school as a locale of implementation while there is abundant mention of external locales of implementation. The only direct mention of the school as a locale of implementation is: "In order to ensure that time is available for teacher development a number of strategies could be followed: Time for teachers to participate in professional learning communities and engage in quality *school-based* teacher development could be scheduled into the school year" (Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 20, emphasis added). The *Framework* does not elaborate on the school-based teacher development that is to occur, as no other professional development discussed in the text is explicitly said to occur at the school itself.

How are effective PLCs to be established if none of the professional development stated in the *Framework* is to occur at the school itself? One of the problems may be that nowhere in the *Framework* is the unit in which PLCs will function stated. Are PLCs to function at the level of the school, at the level of the subject across a district or at all the different levels possible? If PLCs are only to function at the level of a subject such as mathematics and all mathematics teachers in a district are to participate in a PLC, then the

*Framework* adequately accounts for the development of such PLCs. The establishment of the DTDCs as meeting venues and support centres as well as the importance of the subject advisors as facilitators of PLC development discussed in the text should go a long way in establishing such subject-based district-wide PLCs. However, if the PLC is to be based at the school, then the *Framework* does not adequately account for the establishment of such PLCs. No specific implementation is invited at the school level.

A further problem associated with a lack of mention of the school as the unit of implementation is the consequent lack of funding at school level. The *Framework* provides for funding for every activity in the policy<sup>2</sup>. However, as the school is not mentioned as a locale of implementation in any activity, funding will also not be made available at the school level. Consequently, no funding will be allocated directly to PLCs that function at the level of the school.

A focus on the school as a locale of implementation is not meant to downplay the importance of external support in the development of PLCs. As noted above, external support is appropriately and comprehensively discussed in the *Framework*. External support in the form of external expertise, external institutions, external tools for professional development and collaboration between schools at the DTDCs are all addressed in order to provide what can be considered as adequate support for PLCs. Suitable external support is especially crucial in the abundance of South African schools that are underresourced. For this purpose, the Teaching Schools and Professional Practice Schools will be useful in the development of student teachers, while the DTDCs serve as appropriate venues for district-based support for continuing teacher professional development.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The data analysis revealed that all three of the major themes in the analytic framework – support for PLCs, professional development relevant to PLCs and locales of implementation – are addressed in the *Framework* text.

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<sup>2</sup> The source of funding for each activity separately is indicated in the tables at the end of the *Framework*.

The second iteration of the analysis produced a basis for the third iteration of the analysis, which studied the initial findings and the emergent patterns from those findings in order to gain further insight: the three themes of the analytic framework are addressed at different levels of detail and explicitness, in some places leaving room for wider interpretation in terms of implementation than in other parts of the text. This has implications for policy enactment. Furthermore, some elements of the analytic framework are addressed such that they are more appropriate for PLC development and sustainability than are other elements of the analytic framework. Two areas are especially noteworthy in this regard: neither professional development at the level of the group nor school-based implementation is appropriately addressed in the Plan. The next chapter discusses the implications of the data analysis – and especially the third iteration thereof.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The study commenced with the question of what the role of South African education policy is in the improvement of learning. The *Framework* text was analysed in order to gain insights into its alignment with what is needed for PLCs as a vehicle for improving learning through developing teachers professionally. In this chapter I discuss the main findings from the data analysis and the implications thereof in order to answer the research question. The last part of the chapter considers the conclusions that can be drawn.

### 5.1 Differing degrees of presence and explicitness

The third iteration of the analysis revealed how even those parts of the *Framework* that can possibly be deemed as appropriate for the support of PLCs and the professional development in PLCs, are sometimes vague. The lack of detail on PLC support and professional development has three implications. Firstly, the lack of detail in the *Framework* means that one cannot judge whether the support and professional development for PLCs that is addressed in the *Framework*, but not addressed in detail, will in the end prove to promote appropriate PLC support and professional development. If such aspects in the *Framework* were to be elaborated on in a way that is not appropriate for PLC support and professional development, then the *Framework* would be deemed less relevant for PLC support and professional development. In other words, the lack of detail means that conclusions as to the appropriateness of the *Framework* for PLC support and professional development cannot be deemed to be conclusive in terms of those aspects of PLC support and professional development that are not addressed explicitly and in detail in the *Framework*.

Secondly, the vague way in which some of the support and professional development for PLCs found in the *Framework* is addressed, leaves room for interpretation on the part of policy enactors. Policy enactment is indeed dependent – to a degree – on policy formulation, because of the danger that

exists in the discretion and sensemaking processes of individuals and groups. Policy enactors' sensemaking could allow the enactment of policy to veer away from the original intention of policy makers. Besides the gaps in PLC support and professional development, the lack of specific information or incomplete information – although appropriate for PLC support and professional development – presents dangers for the enactment of policy.

Thirdly, both the inconclusiveness in terms of PLC support and professional development as well as the dangers to the enactment of the *Framework* that the lack of explicitness implies, has consequences for the goals of the *Framework* in and of itself. The implications of absent or incomplete information must be seen in light of the fact that the *Framework* itself is concerned with the development of PLCs. In order to be more successful in the implementation of its stated activities – and especially Activity 3.3, the development of PLCs – the *Framework* should be more specific in terms of the support and professional development that is appropriate for PLCs.

Two issues are of specific relevance in terms of the degree to which the *Framework* is likely to achieve its stated goals. Firstly, the singular focus on individual professional development on an individual basis is lacking an emphasis on collaborative development in a group. Secondly, more clarification of school-based professional development activities and processes are necessary if the *Framework* is to be successful in establishing PLCs at the school level.

Thus, speaking to some of the gaps in the information provided in terms of support and professional development for a PLC can go a long way in ensuring the success of the *Framework* in developing PLCs. A clearer formulation and more robust instructions on certain issues could provide for more focused implementation in order to further promote PLC development.

## **5.2 Implications of the study**

The current study set out to examine whether the *Framework* text is aligned with the theoretical notions of support and professional development necessary for the development and sustainability of PLCs. Insights from the

data analysis suggest elements of the *Framework* that will serve to provide support for PLCs and promote professional development appropriate to PLCs. For example, given the importance of district support as stated in the literature, the external locales of implementation that occur in the *Framework* are appropriate.

Such elements suggest that already existing PLCs can utilise PLC support captured in the *Framework* in order to promote their sustainability. For example, the robust individual teacher professional development put forward in the *Framework* can be applied in existing PLCs to the advantage of groups of teachers and in order to update their professional knowledge accordingly. In other words, existing PLCs that are functioning effectively already have elements of collaboration, reflective dialogue, collective enquiry, deprivatised practice, shared mission, vision and values and a focus on student learning that are characteristic of effective PLCs. As such, they are not entirely dependent on the establishment of the collaborative processes that are currently lacking in the *Framework* text. Existing PLCs can utilise those aspects of the Framework that have been identified in the current study to be appropriate for PLC support and professional development in order to sustain the internal coherence and collaboration they have already developed.

However, the lack of collaborative and other group processes in the *Framework* text renders the development of new PLCs rather difficult, as such collaborative group activities are an essential characteristic of effective PLCs. If the *Framework* is to succeed in its stated goal of establishing PLCs, then certain crucial elements that are currently lacking in the *Framework* will have to be accounted for. Furthermore, the lack of mention of the school as a locale of implementation makes it difficult to envisage how PLCs are practically to be developed in schools. Either the gaps of lacking group processes and school-based implementation should be filled by other means or the *Framework* should include such crucial elements. Otherwise, it is difficult to see how the *Framework* will succeed in its stated goal of establishing PLCs.

As a general implication of a lack of specific details or explicitness – as is the case with some elements of the analytic framework that are addressed in the Framework – the more room there is for interpretation, the wider the variety of possible enactments of the *Framework* text. In the interest of

enactment, being more explicit in the formulation of the *Framework* may lead to enactment of it that is closer to the original intentions of the policymakers, one goal of which is to establish PLCs. This is especially true because of the legacy of apartheid in terms of South African teacher education and its implications for the enactment of South African educational policy and for the enactment of the *Framework* specifically.

Already existing PLCs may already have the internal coherence to correctly interpret the policy – even where specifications are lacking. And, as there is a lot of space for different understandings because things are not stated specifically, the internal coherence of PLCs may be essential in order to ensure that the policy accomplishes the stated outcome. Even so, it will be crucial for the development of new PLCs and useful for existing PLCs if information on certain elements of PLC support and PLC professional development are either included or elaborated on where clarification is lacking.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In terms of the development of PLCs, the *Framework* is not a robust strategy as it is not fully aligned to the theoretical notions of support and professional development that is appropriate for PLCs. In terms of the support of already existing PLCs, the *Framework* contains elements of support and appropriate professional development that could be of great use to established PLCs. In that sense, the *Framework* is somewhat aligned to PLC support and professional development. The internal coherence and focus of effective PLCs could direct the implementation of the *Framework* to support the PLC and to guide the professional development of its members.

The *Framework* is the first policy in South Africa that explicitly refers to professional learning communities. As the *Framework* does not include a robust strategy for the development of PLCs, there is little that exists in formal policy to ensure effective PLC development in South Africa. However, the *Framework* is a step in the right direction as it acknowledges the usefulness of PLCs for teacher professional development. Because of the *Framework*, there are processes and activities that will make up part of the South African education system which can be of great use in the support for PLC and the

appropriate professional development in a PLC. If PLCs develop in South Africa, such processes could be of use in ensuring the effective functioning of PLCs. The crucial goal of the PLC would then be more accessible: the improvement of teaching practices in order to improve student learning.

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## APPENDIX A: THE ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

**Table 1: Support for professional learning communities**

Category	Marker	
Autonomy	Decision-making on the part of teachers	M1
	Decision-making regarding classroom issues	M2
	Self-evaluation as a source of learning	M3
Structure	Staffing complexity	M4
	Size of the school	M5
	Phase of the school	M6
	Location of the school	M7
	Mix of pupils	M8
	History of the school	M9
	Time	M10
	Space	M45
Social relations	Trust and respect	M11
	Procedures for dealing with conflict	M12
Feedback on instructional performance	Peer feedback	M13
Individuals' orientation to change	Encouraged to take risks	M14
	Appreciation/reward for innovation	M15
	Individualised teacher learning facilitation	M16
Leadership	Supportive leadership	M43
External support	Collaboration between schools	M17
	External expertise	M41
	External tools for professional development	M42
	External institutions	M46

**Table 2: Professional development for professional learning communities**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Marker</b>	
Expert knowledge and skills	Expert knowledge and skills	M18
Focus on student learning	Focus on student learning	M19
Work-based and incidental learning opportunities	Professional development profiles	M20
	Action research	M21
	Action learning	M22
	Coaching	M23
	Coaching, mentoring and peer-assisted learning	M24
	Best practice scholarships	M25
	Professional development bursaries	M26
	Sabbaticals	M27
	Individual learning accounts	M28
Self-evaluation and enquiry	Self-evaluation and enquiry	M29
CPD as group learning	School-based activity informed by external expertise	M30
	Feedback	M31
	Observation	M32
	Peer support	M33
	Allowing teachers to develop their own CPD focus	M34
	Processes that encourage and structure professional dialogue	M35
	Processes for sustaining CPD so that practices are consolidated in classroom practices	M36

**Table 3: Locales of implementation**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Marker</b>	
Locales of implementation	Locales of implementation inside the school	M47
	Locales of implementation outside of the school	M48

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