

**What happens when an inner-city English primary school
attempts to introduce a professional learning community?**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Education**

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of what happened to an English inner-city primary school when leaders attempted to introduce a professional learning community (PLC).

This one year ethnographic-case study used a mixed methods approach to collecting data through the use of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observation. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

The data collection and analysis were conducted within a theoretical framework that assumed PLCs are learning organisations (Senge, 1990) and are situated as with Communities of Practice (CoPs) (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Furthermore, the conceptual framework used for the study viewed effective PLCs as situated, systematic, collaborative and transformational.

This research will contribute to the literature with regard to how schools approach the introduction of a PLC.

The findings demonstrated that a school introducing a PLC should consider having a clear and shared PLC vision, engaged staff members who understand professional learning, and well-informed leaders who remain focused on the goal of introducing a PLC and manage externally imposed pressures.

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I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my seven close family and friends who passed away during the time it took me to complete this study, especially to my two brothers Chris and Robin who left this earth far too young.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This ethnographic case study is focused on the journey taken by one English inner-city primary school when introducing a Professional Learning Community (PLC). There is no single process to introducing a PLC and therefore schools approach this very differently. A PLC provides a framework for the delivery of 'professional development' and 'professional learning' that positively impacts on the quality of teaching. This results in improved outcomes and attainment for learners and there is growing global evidence to suggest that PLCs ultimately improve pupil attainment (Vescio et al., 2008).

Professional development is perceived and delivered differently in schools, often dependent on the school's context, history, status or development, but essentially involves staff training and updating. 'Professional learning', closely aligned but different to professional development, is more focused on the individualised learning of the school's staff members (leaders, teachers and support staff members).

English primary schools are under increasing government pressure to improve teaching quality and to raise pupil attainment in response to the United Kingdom's (UK) position in international education performance tables (OECD, PISA, 2009, 2012). Although these tables are applicable to secondary aged pupils, there are implications for primary schools as they provide the foundation for secondary learning, hence a government focus on both primary and secondary schools.

International research (OECD Reports including PISA, 2004, 2009 and 2012 and the McKinsey and Co. reports, 2007, 2010) has concluded that progress in pupil attainment is reliant on teachers' individual and collective capacity and

therefore teacher quality is the single most powerful influence on pupil achievement (Ofsted, 1996; NESSC, 2012). What teachers know and are able to do is the most important factor influencing pupils' learning (Hattie, 2009).

Teacher 'continuous professional development and learning' (CPDL) is seen by governments around the world as essential to improving teacher performance (OECD, TALIS, 2009), but all too often approaches do not meet the needs of teachers due to irrelevant content or ineffective structures.

'A number of countries have a relatively weak evaluation structure and do not benefit from school evaluations and teacher appraisal and feedback (linked to professional development)'.

(OECD, TALIS Report, 2009:138)

At the core of teacher improvement, and indeed that of support staff members (Teaching Assistants, classroom assistants, Cover Supervisors and others who support learning in the classroom), is the need for each individual to be able to reflect on their practice, to understand how what they do impacts on the pupil's learning, know how to improve the quality of their teaching or support to ultimately enable each pupil to progress their learning at a pace and level appropriate to them.

In most English primary schools, improving professional practice to facilitate this is through traditional professional development approaches that have evolved over a number of years.

Although improving professional practice through 'professional learning' as opposed to 'professional development' is becoming more common-place, inconsistencies in understanding and interpretation across the education sector remain. Knowledge of professional development and learning, what each of these looks like and how they are delivered, offers a potential starting point for schools when reviewing practices or considering introducing a PLC.

I begin by outlining some of the main differences between professional 'development' and 'learning' before investigating how PLCs are viewed in England.

It should be noted that as this study is focused on a primary school, I will be using the term 'pupil' rather than 'student' as in England the term 'pupil' is more commonly applied to primary-aged children whilst the term 'student' is applied to young people attending secondary schools (Appendix 1).

1.1 Professional development and professional learning

The phrase 'professional development' was first used in the 1960s in the training of school staff in the United States of America (USA) and has since become synonymous with the process of improving teacher practice around the world. 'Continuous professional development' (CPD) is a related term that successive UK governments have adopted to apply to training and related activities throughout a teacher's, or support staff member's career. CPD is therefore the term that is most commonly used in English schools.

Much of the literature on professional development locates it 'within a realist ontology of learning' (Watson, 2012: 23) that also involves teacher professional learning, with the intent of positively impacting on pupil outcomes (Desimone, 2009). Professional development and professional learning are intrinsically linked, but are distinguishable due in part to how they evolved. Both are intentional, continuous and systematic but professional development has become something that many education professionals consider is 'done' to them in the belief that it will influence their practice for the better (Timperley, 2011).

Timperley et al (2007) describes professional development as involving processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of educators to positively impact on the learning of pupils.

Professional learning is described (Timperley, 2008) as an internal process

through which individuals create and process knowledge, but she concludes that like professional development, professional learning is best conducted collaboratively.

Professional development activities often include: whole staff training days, half-day training sessions, twilight training sessions, lesson observations, update meetings and subject focused training. These are generally one-off activities, possibly re-visited again throughout the year, but are not progressive by design. They are more reactive in nature in responding to need. The 'State of the Nation' (Pedder et al., 2008) review found that most approaches to professional development were not collaborative, classroom focused or research-informed. Also, coaching of teachers, to improve individual practice, was poor, ineffective, not linked to pupil outcomes and not specialist in content. Desimone's (2009:183) meta-analysis describes effective professional development as:

'....having a core set of characteristics that includes relevant subject or learning content, active learning, coherence with teacher knowledge and beliefs, sufficient duration for pedagogical and intellectual change and collective participation for supportive ongoing discourse'.

Desimone's (2009) work is supported by Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009). They conducted a professional development review that included examining 'pupil learning impacts' and concluded that improvements in pupils' outcomes occur when professional development is ongoing, connected to practice, focused on pupil learning, aligned with school priorities and involves building strong relationships between teachers.

Both professional development and professional learning contribute to an individual's improvement. The difference between the two is explained by Cordingley and Bell (CUREE report, 2012). Professional development is described as involving:

- 'Collaborative enquiry
- Coaching and mentoring
- Networks
- Structured dialogue and group work'

(Cordingley and Bell, 2012:4)

And professional learning is defined as personal:

'.... something that requires motivation, a commitment, a will to continually improve, and is more likely to be effective if it is collaborative, supported by specialist expertise, focused on aspirations for pupils, sustained overtime and exploring evidence from trying new things'.

(Cordingley and Bell, 2012:4)

A series of reviews conducted by Cordingley et al. (2003, 2005 and 2007) identified characteristics of effective professional learning linked to positive pupil outcomes:

- collaborative – involves staff working together, identifying starting points, sharing evidence about practice and trying out new approaches;
- supported by specialist expertise, usually drawn from beyond the learning setting;
- focused on aspirations for students – which provides the moral imperative and shared focus;
- sustained over time – professional development sustained over weeks or months had substantially more impact on practice benefiting students than shorter engagement;
- exploring evidence from trying new things to connect practice to theory, enabling practitioners to transfer new approaches and practices and the concepts underpinning them to practice multiple contexts.'

(Cordingley and Bell, 2012:4)

Professional learning is focused on the individual and the term implies an internal ongoing process that continually increases knowledge and skills, challenges assumptions and creates new meanings resulting in experimentation that impacts on thinking and practice. It occurs when an individual takes responsibility for their own ongoing improvement on a day-to-day basis participating in-depth reflection and assessment of impact on learners. Professional learning involves learning how to learn through observation; immersion in exploration and enquiry orientated learning activities; active engagement; peer support; professional dialogue rooted in evidence; applying theory to practice, interaction with experts and through setting ambitious goals for learners (Cordingley and Bell, 2012). Therefore, these actions are personalised and require engagement.

Timperley (2008) studied in depth the inter-related conditions for effective professional development and professional learning and came up with ten key principles for effective professional learning that were underpinned by four important ‘understandings’: the link between student learning and what and how teachers teach, teachers moment-by-moment decisions, responding to how teachers learn and the context in which a teacher practices (Timperley et al, 2008:6). The ten principles were:

1. ‘Focus on valued student outcomes
2. Worthwhile content
3. Integration of knowledge and skills
4. Assessment for personal inquiry
5. Multiple opportunities to learn and apply information
6. Approaches responsive to learning processes
7. Opportunities to process new learning with others
8. Knowledgeable expertise
9. Active leadership
10. Maintaining momentum’

(Timperley, 2008:8-25)

Furthermore, professional learning was also discussed in the 'What makes great teaching' (Coe et.al, 2014) report commissioned by The Sutton Trust that emphasised the importance of effective, ongoing professional learning:

'Sustained professional learning is most likely to result when:

1. the focus is kept clearly on improving pupil outcomes;
2. feedback is related to clear, specific and challenging goals for the recipient;
3. attention is on the learning rather than to the person or to comparisons with others;
4. teachers are encouraged to be continual independent learners;
5. feedback is mediated by a mentor in an environment of trust and support;
6. an environment of professional learning and support is promoted by the school's leadership.'

(Coe et.al, 2014:5)

The importance of professional learning is supported by Vaughn et al. (1998) who suggested that teachers cannot, or are reluctant to, adopt new strategies if they did not have a deep understanding. All too often progress is not made as teachers have not received the 'depth' of training required to assure their 'mastery' of the initiative. A further barrier is the relevance of the training. Essentially, teachers' professional learning should be focused on the pupils as this provides the moral imperative and a shared focus when collaborating. Therefore, professional learning requires teachers to be committed and engaged in processes and not passive receivers as is often the case with professional development and training (Cordingley and Bell, 2012). But not all teachers and support staff members have the ability or knowledge to drive their own professional learning perhaps due to their experience and knowledge of reflective practices. The PLC provides the framework, culture and environment for these skills to be developed.

‘Professional learning’ is not a commonly used term or recognised as a formal process in English schools, although it has become popular in countries around the world, supported through the growth of PLCs.

Post-2005, saw the inclusion of the word ‘learning’ into the term CPD to create a new term, ‘Continuous Professional Development and Learning’ (CPDL), demonstrating that professional learning is recognised as part of a process that leads to improved teacher quality. However, in 2016 the government published a set of standards for ‘teachers’ professional development’ (DfE, 2016) that was inclusive of professional learning and INSET, illustrating that the national system-wide focus remains on professional development.

Whatever the drive, terminology or issues, there is a consensus across education literature that the need to improve teacher quality is essential to raising standards. There is also an understanding that this has a shared responsibility involving the individual and the school. The shift and focus towards professional learning having a greater impact than professional development is becoming increasingly evident through the research. The challenge to schools is how to encourage individuals to take the responsibility and equip them with the necessary skills to participate in effective professional learning. The PLC approach offers a potential solution to schools.

1.2 What are PLCs and why are they important in schools?

A PLC is created when practitioners come together and engage in ongoing inquiry-based teacher learning (Hord, 1997; DuFour et al., 2010). It involves educational professionals collaborating to identify challenges to pupil learning, to use data to inform discussions, to create, implement, monitor and review solutions and strategies to address these challenges. This is in the context of finding meaning and relevance of new knowledge in order to deepen understanding so that adapting, applying and updating practice becomes a continuous cycle.

PLCs provide a framework in which schools can operate to support all staff members by developing the learning skills of the individual as well as the learning of the collective.

Many education writers and researchers (Eaker et al, 2002, McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006; Killion and Roy, 2009) believe the PLC to be a powerful internal capacity-building model for 're-culturing' (Hargreaves, 1994) schools that involve developing new values, attitudes, beliefs, and actions to achieve a shared purpose and for fostering collective responsibility for school improvement, all significant issues at Oldtown Primary School.

PLCs are viewed as the 'most powerful strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement' (DuFour et al., 2005:7) and 'the best-known means by which we might achieve truly historic, wide-scale improvements in teaching and learning' (Schmoker, 2004:432). Why? Because the PLC concept is simple in that it can effect sustainable improvement in the practice of individuals and teams of teachers through collaboration that will positively impact on pupil outcomes as there is a 'clear and consistent focus on pupil learning through reflective dialogue' (Stoll et al, 2006: 229).

A PLC:

'....exists when groups of educationalists are involved in discussing, sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an on-going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-orientated, growth-promoting way.'

(Stoll and Louis, 2007:2)

The focus on pupil outcomes requires school systems to be in place to enable teachers and support staff members to transform their practice through effective and regular collaboration.

Hord (1997) defined five characteristics of an effective PLC:

- Supportive and shared leadership
- Shared values and vision

- Collective learning and the application of that learning
- Shared practice
- Supportive conditions for the maintenance of the learning community

Hord (1997) decided on these characteristics following her research in schools conducted on behalf of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) during the 1990s. Hord worked in a learning organisation (Senge, 1990) where she witnessed the impact of an effective nurturing culture that encouraged a high level of staff collaboration in order to bring about and understand change. Hord then worked with schools over a ten-year period carrying out research into effective school improvement models. The five characteristics resulted from this research.

PLCs gathered momentum in the 1990s as the imperative to improve teacher practice was realised by governments and schools around the world, particularly following the introduction and growth of the international tables on pupil performance (OECD, PISA, 2004, 2008 and 2012). Overtime PLCs have been proven to contribute towards improved teaching quality when they are effectively established and sustained (Vescio et al, 2008; Rawlyk, 2012; Owen, 2014). They have the potential to increase levels of teacher motivation; develop shared leadership; improve conflict resolution strategies; have a positive impact on the school community and most importantly enable teachers to work collaboratively in order to improve pupil attainment (Hines, 2008; Katz and Earl, 2010). It is this potential impact on pupil learning and achievement that gives the concept of a PLC the credibility to be deemed as a school improvement strategy (Louis et al, 1996). Viewing PLCs 'as a powerful staff development approach and as a potent strategy for school and system improvement' (Harris and Jones, 2010:173) situates PLCs in the realms of school effectiveness and school and system improvement literature (Stoll and Louis, 2007; Harris and Chrispeels, 2008).

The concept of PLCs is different to that of traditional professional development approaches as it is based on two assumptions. Firstly, knowledge is situated in

day-to-day lived experiences, understood through critical reflection with others who share similar or the same experiences (Buysee et al., 2003). Secondly, that actively engaging with other professionals will increase professional knowledge and confidence that will in turn positively impact on pupil learning outcomes. In order for such communities to be formed the staff members need time to collaborate, have ongoing leadership support, up to date information and access to colleagues (Senge et al., 1994; Blankstein et al., 2008; Hord and Sommers, 2008). Therefore, the school-based PLC concept is highly focused on improving pupil learning and pupil achievement (Louis and Marks, 1998; Bolam et al., 2005) through developing individual teachers' learning and knowledge within the context of a collaborative group; focusing on a collective knowledge that is shared and operating within an ethical, inter-reliant and caring forum and that permeates the life of teachers, other educational professionals, leaders and pupils. Therefore, schools need to have formal processes to become a PLC and those that do not will have limited capacity to become an effective PLC (Lashway, 1997; Ingram et al., 2004).

Many PLCs have successfully been established both within and across schools in the USA, Singapore, China, Canada, Wales and Finland. So how are PLCs perceived in England?

1.3 PLCs in England

Despite overwhelming international evidence (Lee et al. 1995; Newmann and Wehlage, 1995; Vescio et al, 2008) in support of PLCs as a means to achieve sustainable improvement in educational professional's ongoing practice, they have not been embraced in England with the same enthusiasm. This may be because successive governments have not introduced a system-wide approach or overtly promoted PLCs as in other countries and as a result it may be due to the lack of knowledge of PLCs and of their potential.

Efforts have been made to introduce PLCs in the other parts of the UK. For example, in Wales the Welsh Assembly Government has provided a system-wide structure towards implementing a School Effectiveness Framework that includes schools as PLCs. Support materials and guidance have been provided to all Welsh schools. Harris and Jones (2010: 173) discuss:

‘...professional learning communities within, between and across schools being established in Wales to build the necessary capacity for change’.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the regional Governments have provided guidance and materials and allowed schools the opportunity to pursue a PLC, but have not introduced a system-wide approach as in Wales.

In England a report commissioned by the General Teaching Council England (GTCe), National College of School Leadership (NCSL) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (Bolam et al, 2005) provided significant evidence in support of a system-wide approach for PLCs based on impact on improved collaborative practices and pupil outcomes. The ‘key message’ from the study suggested that all schools:

‘...should seriously consider adopting the PLC approach and methodology...and that the idea of a PLC is one well worth pursuing as a means of promoting school and system wide capacity building for sustainable improvement and pupil learning’.

(Bolam et al., 2005: x)

But following the publication of the report there was no introduction of a system-wide approach. It was left to the NCSL to market PLCs and produce guidance and support materials. The scarcity of take-up by schools nationally demonstrates the lack of success of this approach. However, Watson (2014:18) argues that the PLC concept has been ‘embraced widely in schools’, but

evidence demonstrates that this is not the case in English schools. Bolam et al. (2005: iii) confirmed this when conducting their research as ‘not many (of those who participated in their research) were familiar with the term PLC or used it in their everyday professional conversations’.

The government’s reticence to implement a system-wide approach to PLCs has been somewhat puzzling, particularly when the UK standings in the international PISA surveys (2008, 2012) demonstrated that the country was somewhat ‘stuck’ and not making the advances in pupil attainment apparent in other countries, such as Singapore and China, who had embraced PLCs on a system-wide level.

The UK government’s ‘A World Class Teaching Profession’ consultation report (DfE, 2015) that was focused on school and teacher improvement, made no reference to teachers working in communities nor did it mention the phrase professional learning communities. Politicians have continued to ignore the international evidence (Vescio et al, 2008; Rawlyk, 2012; Owen, 2014) and the advice of Fullan (2007) arguing for a system-wide approach in England. In essence, PLCs have been overlooked in favour of policies that encourage head teacher autonomy and school marketisation.

The absence of a system-wide approach has meant that schools continue to adopt different, and often historic models to what is still described by many as ‘professional development’. However, what government policy has done since 2000 was to raise the importance of professional development and to enable schools to be more inventive in how they find time and support staff development. Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time, introduced by the government as an entitlement for all staff members in 2005 and has provided schools with opportunities to be creative in how they bring teachers together. Schools have also been enabled to change their status and become, for example, an Academy that has allowed schools to re-organise the timing of school day and holidays in order to be more flexible with managing systems and human resources for collaborative working.

Schools have also been empowered to change management structures so that they could introduce distributed leadership. Chains of schools have been developed for sharing expertise across school networks.

Distributing leadership empowers staff members and supports the PLC ethos of knowledge creation and sharing. Hord (1997), Stoll (1999) and DuFour and DuFour (2012) encourage schools who intend to become PLCs to adopt the distributed leadership model as it also encourages shared decision-making, genuine collaborative working, mutual enquiry and learning with a focus on pupils' academic and personal development. The model allows staff members to become empowered and determine working methods. In doing so they make decisions, agree protocols and procedures and reject others.

So schools have the opportunity to use freedoms and flexibilities legislated by the government which introduce systems and structures for a PLC. But this will only happen if school leaders are aware of, understand and see the potential of the PLC.

This study focuses on what happened when one English inner-city primary school embarked on introducing a PLC, the approach taken by leaders and the influences (institutional, local and national) that affected the school on its journey. My reason for conducting this study results from my experience of working in, and with, inner-city schools over a number of years that have found it difficult to bring about significant and sustainable transformations that positively impact on pupil attainment.

1.4 Rationale for this study

My thirty-seven years' experience of teaching and leading in inner-city schools, including in my current role as an Executive Director of a unique inner-city cross-phase educational partnership (pseudonym – The Saturn Partnership) has led me to realise the importance, particularly in an inner-city context, of

ongoing professional learning and collaboration to improve teaching and pupil attainment.

The Saturn Partnership is a membership organisation of Children's Centres, nursery, primary, secondary, special schools and Further and Higher Education institutions and provides support to schools including Initial Teacher Training (ITT), Communities of Practice (CoPs), staff training activities, Head teacher support, school improvement and inspection advice in addition to a range of activities for pupils that includes inter-school sports and arts events, residential experiences and inter-school challenges.

The partnership has the potential to support schools to become a PLC and is ideally placed to create an area-wide PLC across the partnership's member organisations.

1.5 Purpose of this study

The purpose of this research is to contribute to existing academic literature on how schools introduce a PLC. The study is also relevant to leaders considering how to approach introducing a PLC in their school as the data collected for this study focused on the views, attitudes and experiences of the professionals working in the school, notably the school leaders, teachers and support staff members.

1.6 Research questions

This research aims to answer the question:

What happens when an inner-city English primary school attempts to introduce a professional learning community (PLC)?

Four research sub-questions guided this study:

1. What are the current levels of understanding across the staff members of a PLC and its potential for sustained improvement?
2. Does the school have the capacity to establish a PLC?
3. How can existing professional development practices be developed in order to support an emergent PLC?
4. What are the significant challenges or barriers to establishing a PLC in this school located in an inner-city context?

1.7 School context

In research of this nature it is important to understand the context of the school, which I will name Oldtown Primary School (pseudonym) in order to protect the anonymity of the school. The Head teacher, who became the 'Principal' in 2012, responded to my plea in 2011 for a school to participate in this study. When questioned as to why she volunteered the school, the Principal explained her reasons which were aligned to the need to improve staff members' collective responsibility for pupil outcomes and for their own professional learning. She saw the PLC as the vehicle for delivering this. I informed her of PLCs and their potential and provided her with resources so she could better inform her SLT.

The school is located in a socially and economically deprived inner-city area of a large English midland city. At the time of the research the school was a one and a half form entry school. Economic deprivation was evident through the high number of pupils eligible for free school meals due to no or low family income (65% of pupils were in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) compared to the city average of 32.2%, 20.7% in the county and 18.1% nationally). A further 10% of pupils, who were refugee and asylum seekers and who would normally qualify in terms of being in the deprivation group, did not qualify for FSM as their parents were unable to apply for benefits or have the right to work. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities was also

high in relation to other city schools and to schools nationally (54% of pupils had a registered need as compared to city average 30% and 26% nationally) (Appendix 3).

The school had a high proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, the majority from Black Caribbean (26.9%) or Black African (37.5%) heritage. This reflected the local population (87.9% from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to a city average of 58%). The number of pupils who spoke English as an additional language, or were at the early stages of learning to speak English, was well above average for English primary schools (76.3% as compared to 42.9% in the city and 18.1% nationally). Overall the school population of just over 300 pupils was made up of 35 different nationalities speaking 44 different languages. The movement of pupils in and out of the school at different times of the year (mobility) was significant and much higher than that in other city schools. For example, in the year 2010-11 the school admitted an additional 30 pupils across all ages into the school, an extra class of pupils. However, after six months 18 of these pupils had left to move to other schools. The influx of 30 for a school of 300 is 10% whilst the city average was less than 1% and other local schools around 3%.

The school had specially resourced provision for pupils with extreme behaviour needs, known as the Nurture Centre (also referred to as the Behaviour Unit) which opened in January 2011. It was managed by the school and had places for six pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Numerous leadership changes and externally imposed interventions had created instability and provided staff members with a reason to 'opt out' of responsibility. A number of the interventions had been perceived by some staff members to be unsuccessful and unnecessary. Ten staff members (33.3%) (Appendix 2) had been on the staff of the school for five years or more and had been affected by these issues. The Principal summarised the numerous interventions:

‘...when I started here, the school was entering its second year in Special Measures; there were lots of forced interventions placed on the school, things that were never carried through. At first it was ‘Hard to shift’ (Government initiative to support failing schools), we put the action plan together, we talked with staff then the Hard-to-Shift initiative finished. Then it became ‘raising floor targets’. We did the action plan for that and we started to talk to staff and before we got round to it that was stopped. Then it became ‘World-class Primary’. So then we did another action plan went through that and talked to the staff. The staff are of the attitude that every time we bring something new in, why should they buy-in to it because by the time they’ve invested the time it’s stopped any way.’

From 2008 onwards, the more stable leadership acknowledged the issues created through regular and externally imposed interventions, and at a meeting in June 2013 (unable to quote from the minutes of the meeting as permission withheld by the Principal as minutes were deemed confidential) the SLT decided to address this by encouraging a cultural change whereby the school staff members took ownership of improvements and change.

1.7.1 The Research Year

The priorities for the school were to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupil attainment. To improve teaching quality during the research year (2012-13), one focus was to continue with ‘lesson study’ (jugyuu means lesson, kenkyuu is research or study) which had been introduced into the school during the previous year and involved teachers in observing lessons, both within this school and at other schools.

The lesson study model originated in Japan in the 1870s and centred on teachers sharing practice through collaborative teaching approaches (Cajkler and Wood, 2016). It is credited with making a significant impact on improving the practice of elementary school teachers in particular. A major

accomplishment over a twenty-year period was the shift from teacher-led to pupil-led learning in mathematics and science.

Lesson study has the potential to lead to:

‘Greater teacher collaboration, sharper focus among teachers on students’ learning, development of teacher knowledge, practice and professionalism and improved quality of classroom teaching and pupil learning outcomes’.

(Cajkler et al., 2015:194)

They are all perceived requirements by leaders at Oldtown Primary School.

Lesson study involves a continuous process whereby teachers regularly re-visit their practice in order to bring about improvements. It provides teams with systematic support that could lead to transformation in practice through ‘reflexive, recursive and collaborative’ processes (Dudley, 2011:5). Teachers define long term goals for pupils’ learning and they focus their planning and teaching based on research and observation. They critically observe the level of pupils’ progress, behaviour and engagement and then collectively review and reflect upon the lesson. The approach includes a ‘research lesson’ that involves the team of teachers planning a single lesson which is taught by one of the team and collectively analysed. Overtime team members become more observant and more knowledgeable regarding what is happening in lessons and how factors within a lesson affect the direction and behaviour of pupils. The team analyse the practice, challenge their own and others ideas and views, review the lesson from the pupil’s perspective and generally benefit from the professional dialogue with their colleagues.

The lesson study experience was viewed by the Principal as one foundation on which the PLC could be built and the lesson study collaborative learning processes was embedded in the PLC way of working. This ‘learning team’ (Hyacinthe, 2011) approach could be extended to support the school to review its other practices for professional development, pupil data analysis, leadership

development and collaborative working practices. However, at the time of the research only six staff members were actively involved in lesson study as it was in the early stages of introduction.

A second opportunity to develop existing practice to support the PLC introduction was through the newly introduced coaching and mentoring scheme. But as with lesson study, coaching and mentoring was in its infancy and only five staff members had been trained and no formal time had been allocated for sessions to take place. However, the concept had been introduced and the foundations were in place.

Changes were also occurring through the re-modelling of the leadership team structure which would lead to the introduction of distributed leadership. This had involved the appointment of middle leaders for the Key Stage teams and a broadening of the senior leadership team. More staff members were empowered through additional responsibilities or leadership of whole-school themed-curriculum topics. Distributing leadership also provided an opportunity to develop team structures and to change how teams operated, transforming where possible procedural teams to become learning teams (Hyacinthe, 2011) focused on sharing practice, knowledge creation and experimentation.

Introducing lesson study and coaching and mentoring were significant changes in approach to staff training, development and learning. The school staff had been used to more traditional professional development activities, often dictated by circumstance and related to interventions or national directives. But both lesson study and coaching and mentoring provided practical activities on which to build the PLC.

Galoke (2013) conducted research into how a school's informal and formal systems could be developed to introduce a PLC. What he concluded was that through effective leadership, it was possible for an effective PLC to be introduced based on refining existing systems. PLCs have the potential to personalise professional development and learning by increasing socialisation that reduced teachers' sense of isolation (Yamraj, 2008).

‘Informal’ learning and development through unplanned conversations and/or reading and exchanging ideas or resources with others, usually involving friendship groups and/or those working in close proximity, provided a less formal structure on which to develop PLC practice. However, informal learning opportunities were restricted at Old Town Primary School due to access issues to other staff members created by lunchtime or proximity arrangements.

The school had developed systems that supported the agendas of externally imposed interventions over a number of years and therefore there was little ownership and a culture of being done to!

1.7.2 A Brief School History

The school had experienced a long history of instability. Ten years of leadership changes, a succession of different acting or full-time Principals and numerous nationally and locally introduced failed interventions influenced where the school was at the start of the research year. Failed government initiatives included ‘world class primary school’ and ‘hard to shift’ which set the academic standards to be achieved. Unsuccessful local initiatives included school-to-school support which involved temporary or acting Head teachers and senior staff members from ‘successful’ schools leading and/or advising this failing school. This was unsuccessful due to poor co-ordination by the Local Authority, the short period of time that these colleagues could afford to spend in the school and/or to their lack of understanding of this school’s context.

The failure of interventions led to a high turn-over of leaders and staff members. As a consequence of the continued low academic standards and the inability to retain effective teachers, the Principal led the school through a re-branding process in September 2010 in an attempt to provide a ‘fresh start’. This involved re-naming the school, the introduction of a new school uniform, developing marketing materials and providing opportunities for more positive interactions with parents and the community.

The position that the school found itself in when the new Principal (named Head teacher on appointment) arrived, had been caused by significant issues that had been ignored or poorly managed over time, and as a consequence left a legacy that affected much that went on during the research year. These issues included poor leadership, a lack of collective responsibility or accountability, high staff turn-over rates (33% per year on average between 2009-2012), low staff morale, low pupil attainment against expected targets (DfE attainment data, 2012) and a lack of in-school monitoring (school Ofsted reports, School Improvement Partner reports).

In 2008 Old Town Primary School was identified as failing and placed in an Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) category of Special Measures (meaning that the school was required to improve within a given time-frame or face closure) following an inspection of the school. The school had suffered systemic underachievement over a ten-year period that had led to poor pupil attainment and subsequently had experienced seven Head teachers over that period. These changes at senior leadership level meant that many staff members felt insecure in their posts leading to high rates of staff turn-over. It was this long history of failure and change, and the current leadership team's endeavours to improve the school that shaped staff members' attitudes and opinions.

The Principal had been appointed by the Governors and Local Authority in 2008 with the specific remit of taking the school out of 'Special Measures' and leading the school to improve overtime. I am uncertain as to whether or not specific targets for the rate of that improvement were agreed as I did not ask this question and information was not volunteered. Prior to 2008 (2003-2008) the school had been subjected to a number of local and national interventions. For example, the school had a Local Authority School Improvement Partner (SIP) whose role it was to support the Principal with introducing improvements and monitoring attainment.

It took two years for the school to be declared as 'out' of the Special Measures category. In her third year the Principal had persuaded the Governors to re-brand the school and in her fourth year, to offset the risk of the school again falling into Special Measures, the Principal led the Governors to opt to become an Academy and find its own sponsor rather than become a forced Academy initiated by the Local Authority. She successfully found Academy sponsors who were a local secondary school and a local College of Further and Higher Education. This research was undertaken in her fifth year in post and the first year of Academy status.

The move to Academy status meant that the 'Head teacher' became the 'Principal' in title, commensurate with the majority of Academy leads. I will therefore refer to her as the Principal for the remainder of this study. Academy status also brought with it a number of tensions, some of which emanated from differences in opinion regarding responsibilities and accountabilities of the school and Academy leaders. These tensions were noted when I talked individually to the Principal and to the Academy sponsor.

Under governance arrangements, Academy sponsors take on the responsibility for oversight and support of the school and manage the governing body. The sustainability and improvement of the school is the goal, but within the English inspection system Academy sponsors are also under pressure to improve schools under their control as quickly as possible. They are also scrutinised under inspection processes.

The role and power of the Academy leaders over the school appeared not to be clear to the Principal and this led to tensions arising as the Academy sponsors increasingly began to 'interfere' (Principal's word) in the school's day-to-day operation.

However, it was not only the Academy sponsors that were exerting pressure on the school as the Local Authority was also keen for the school to improve levels of attainment. Ofsted inspections, and the need to avoid becoming a 'Special

Measures' or 'requiring improvement' school, also put pressure on the school leaders and the staff members.

During the period from 2000-2008, engagement with the local community and other schools was exceptionally limited and this resulted in the school being very isolated. The school had a poor reputation within the local community and with parents, mainly due to the low academic standards, and was therefore perceived as a failing school. Recruitment of pupils and staff was therefore an ongoing challenge. Working with families was important to the school's recovery. The need to support families in the education of their child was highlighted in the school improvement plan (2012-13) as a central tenet of the school's improvement strategy. As part of this strategy the school adopted the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme that originated in the USA and was brought over to the UK by the Save the Children charity who were funding pilot projects in UK cities. This programme provided a structure for parents and pupils to participate in joint activities, such as creative arts projects including baking, using new technologies or developing confidence in mathematics or language, based in the school both in and out of normal school hours (8.45 a.m. to 3.15 p.m.). FAST promoted family cohesion using the school as a location for meetings and training and as a broker of support by bringing families together to meet with external agencies (Police, Council officials, Social Services, Family Health workers). The school staff received training on FAST and on how to work effectively with parents.

The collection of research data took place in the academic year 2012-2013. The school had been out of Special Measures for one year prior to the start of my study (2011). The school had joined a Teaching School Alliance led by a primary school and a second Teaching School Alliance led by a Special School. Teaching School Alliances were introduced by the government to create local structures to share best practice, support school-based ITT and to coordinate professional development. Teaching schools are schools deemed to be 'outstanding' through Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspection. Therefore, Old Town Primary School was reliant on the two Alliances to support

their improvements in general and recruitment of high quality teachers in particular.

1.7.3 School staff profile

During the research year, the school employed thirteen teachers, eleven leaders and nineteen classroom support staff members (teaching assistants, integration assistants and a learning mentor). Eight teachers/leaders had joined the staff in September 2012 (33.3% of the school's leaders and teachers) illustrating the high staff turn-over compared to other local primary schools (average of 8.7%).

The school's leadership structure had been re-organised at the start of the research year into three tiers as part of the restructuring towards distributed leadership:

- The senior leadership team comprised one Principal (in fifth year), one Deputy Principal (started September 2012), the School Business Manager, and two Assistant Principals, one newly appointed to oversee Early Years and Key Stage 1 (started September 2012), the other managed the Nurture Centre.
- The middle leadership team comprised newly internally appointed Key Stage Co-ordinators (Upper Key Stage 2, Lower Key Stage 2) and the literacy co-ordinator.
- The wider leadership team comprised of: the SENCO/Inclusion leader and the parental engagement co-ordinator (part-time).

The appointment of two new senior staff members (Deputy Principal and Assistant Principal for Early Years and Key Stage 1) did make a significant impact on the school with the newly appointed Deputy Principal taking

responsibilities from the Principal and with the Assistant Principal appointed to lead the Early Years and Key Stage 1 areas and contribute to whole-school development.

The fact that eight new leaders and teachers joined the school at the start of the research year must be considered when reading this study as their experience, opinions and knowledge of the school would affect the data.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the context of professional learning and the role of PLCs, the focus for my research and the context of the school in which the research was conducted. The importance of professional learning in the context of improving teacher quality and in raising pupil attainment is an important underpinning factor for schools who introduce a PLC as teacher effectiveness, informed by their learning, is at the heart of the school improvement agenda and central to PLCs. Ensuring all teachers are of a high quality is important if schools are to improve pupil attainment and PLCs are proven to support these improvements.

International evidence (Vescio et al, 2008; Rawlyk, 2012; Owen, 2014) demonstrates that PLCs contribute to improving pupil attainment as a consequence of improved teaching in schools. However, English schools are not overtly encouraged by the government to establish PLCs, so decisions are left to school leaders.

This study focuses on the journey taken by one inner-city primary school that did make that independent decision. It is organised into a number of chapters: Chapter 2 reviews the current literature on PLCs. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology used in this study. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 report

the findings from the data and Chapter 7 focuses on the implications of the findings and captures recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review focuses on how teacher professional development and professional learning evolved, what PLCs are, how they developed to support professional development and learning and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for this study.

As explained in chapter 1, 'professional development' is the phrase most commonly used in English schools and, for the purpose of this study, will be the phrase that I use to encompass continuous professional development (CPD) and In-Service training (INSET). Both these terms have been used over the years to describe the ongoing training of qualified teachers and more latterly support staff members.

I begin by outlining my literature review strategy before investigating how professional development, influenced by government policies, evolved since the Butler Education Act of 1944.

2.2 Literature Review Strategy

A literature search was carried out using key words or phrases related to these specific areas:

- Professional Learning Communities
- Establishing/Introducing Professional Learning Communities
- Learning communities
- Professional Learning
- Teacher learning
- Professional development
- Improving professional knowledge
- Schools as learning organisations

- Adult social learning
- Transformation in schools
- Urban/Inner-city schools
- Situated learning
- Collaborative learning
- Systematic change

Electronic databases were interrogated including Academic Search Premier, ERIC, Digital Dissertations, World Cat, University journal search and Google Scholar. I also arranged for alerts through Google Scholar which provided a regular supply of updates on journal articles, newly published texts and on practices (blogs, events, etc). I used Qiqqa to support the organisation and interrogation of PDF articles.

An archive search of practitioner research methods publications was also undertaken. I focused on the most relevant texts and proceeded to read each article's reference list and citations to seek more possibilities. I continued to be updated through electronic alerts, newly published books and through reading journals.

Before discussing PLCs, I begin my literature review with an overview of professional development in England.

2.3 Teacher Professional Development in England Since 1944

I have used the 1944 'Butler Education Act' as a starting point for this review as it was considered by many educationalists and politicians as a significant piece of legislation that shaped the education system in England and Wales into the structure that we are familiar with today. This Act introduced the concept of primary, secondary and Further Education thereby establishing a structure in which teachers work and the public understands. It defined the compulsory school age as 5-15 years and introduced full-time and free education for all secondary aged pupils. By establishing these 'phases' of education, the Act

provided structures for curriculum, assessment and professional development to be decided. The Act also legislated for the appointment of a Minister of Education to lead a new Ministry of Education and for the establishment of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) who were charged with establishing, resourcing and monitoring primary and secondary schools.

The year 1944 also saw the McNair Committee (investigating Teacher and Youth Worker supply) recommend that the government should include in-service training that involved all teachers being offered a sabbatical term on full pay when they had taught for five years. Nationally the importance of professional development for teachers had been raised.

By the 1950s there were three types of in-service courses, usually delivered by the Area Training Organisation (ATO) (the LEA, university or the National Union of Teachers). These were supplementary courses (general and subject specific aimed at non-graduates), special courses (one year courses aimed at advanced work which encouraging individuals to become more involved in leading teacher training) and short refresher courses (for practicing teachers and teacher trainers, generally over two weeks and aimed at improving pedagogy).

‘Short courses’ developed throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Newsom Report, 1963). The LEAs saw the delivery of these courses as an opportunity to extend their influence and generate income. As a result, it was the LEAs that took a lead on most ‘short’ and day-long courses (69.2%) with the universities, the NUT and other teacher unions (National Association of Schoolmasters – NAS - and the Union of Women Teachers - UWT), delivering the majority of the other thirty percent. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the LEAs established Teacher Centres (Davis, 1979) as venues to hold courses, house advisers and locate teacher resource bases. Initially these Centres also provided support with curriculum development as it was the LEAs that produced curriculum guidelines for schools at this time (Weindling et al., 1983). By 1972 there were 600 Teacher Centres nationally.

Throughout the 1960s the number of teachers was growing. Many held limited qualifications and this was recognised by the government. In 1967, the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) recommended in-service training included a Bachelor of Education (BEd.) degree for serving teachers, along with other substantive training throughout their career and at least every five years. The Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) also suggested that every opportunity for teachers to meet should be provided in order to enable teachers to discuss and share practice and to know how and why to change it.

Throughout the 1970s the importance of in-service training for professional development grew. The James Report (1972), which brought together initial and in-service training, recommended that:

‘....teacher training should be seen as falling into three consecutive 'cycles': the first, personal education, the second, pre-service training and induction, the third, in-service education and training’.

(DES, 1972a: 107)

It was the third cycle that attracted most interest at the time of publication. One reason was that it suggested teachers be released for professional development for a minimum of a term at least every five years, as also recommended by the McNair Committee (1944). The James Report (1972) also emphasised the need for in-service training to be owned by, and delivered in, the school. The resultant White Paper ‘Education: A Framework for Expansion’ (DES, 1972b) based on the findings of the report, suggested a national target of three percent of teachers to be released for a term’s training by 1981. But due to the economic climate this did not happen and neither the James Report (1972) or the White Paper recommendations were fully implemented. However, the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Training of Teachers (ACSTT) (1974), established from a recommendation made by the James Report (1972),

produced a paper entitled 'In-service Education and Training: some considerations'. This paper suggested teachers required INSET at different stages in their career and that the Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) year(s) was/were seen as the first part of an ongoing CPD process that lasted throughout a teacher's career.

During the 1970s control over professional development was shifting. In 1974 there was a reduction in the number of LEAs resulting in larger and more powerful ones emerging. These LEAs assumed increased ownership of teacher in-service training. The country's poor economic situation along with falling school rolls impacted on school budgets and led to schools approaching professional development differently, taking increased responsibility for training, much of which was delivered 'in-house'. Formally introduced teacher appraisal also brought about changes as performance was related to development and became the main driver for dictating an individual's professional development needs.

Externally delivered training, by LEAs, teacher unions and universities, was receiving increased criticism for not meeting the needs of individual teachers and therefore the impact of their training was viewed as minimal (Morant, 1981). The change towards a school-centred approach meant that the LEA-controlled Teacher Centres had to review what they were offering. Attention was turning to the different emerging school-based professional development models (Henderson, 1979) as schools sought the most effective methods for delivering greatest impact at little cost.

Improvements were not happening quickly enough for the government. The Green Paper of 1977, 'Education in Schools: A Consultative Document', claimed that 'teachers lacked adequate professional skills' (DES, 1977:2) and was written in the context of declining public faith in the education system and in the decreasing confidence of the government in LEAs. This again drew attention to the quality of teacher professional development.

The government's changing attitude towards the LEAs, and to a lesser extent towards universities and teacher unions, was highlighted in James Callaghan's

Ruskin College Speech (1976) where he claimed that there were 'educational inadequacies' across the system and he alluded to a 'secret garden' (the school curriculum) that was not adequately preparing young people for the world of work. 'The Great Debate' that followed resulted in the tightening of government controls over teacher quality as related to curriculum and assessment and put increasing accountabilities onto LEAs.

From 1979 onwards, successive Conservative governments moved to creating an 'education marketplace' which was focused, at least in part, on challenging the influence of the LEAs, universities and teacher unions. They also included 'progressive schools' as a focus for their attention. The resultant tensions drove a wedge between the government, LEAs and universities that since post-1944 'cosily oversaw policy developments' (Glover and Law, 1996).

The 1980s saw a growth in in-service training including twilight sessions, teacher into industry placements and in-classroom support. Award-bearing university courses remained popular amongst teachers and the uptake of these courses resulted in the government reviewing how INSET and training was funded.

In 1983 the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher announced changes that restricted secondments and long-term placements, courses and training and in 1985 the government divided funding between in-service training for national priority areas (80%) managed centrally, and locally assessed priorities (20%) managed by LEAs (DES, 1985). In 1986 this funding became known as GRIST (Grant-Related In-Service Training) (DES, 1986). This new funding regime had a significant impact on INSET by shifting more power to central government and away from LEAs. By opening up a market place for new and different organisations to tender for contracts, the government had facilitated competition for the LEAs and universities. As a consequence, university delivery of training in schools became rare as schools were provided with more choice and flexibility managed through the newly introduced 'In-service or Professional Development Coordinator'.

The formal teacher appraisal process focused on individual teacher performance in response to the criticism of teachers lacking skills. In 1986 the Education (No.2) Act legislated that teacher appraisal was a statutory requirement and this became the main driver for determining teachers' professional development needs.

A new code that outlined teachers' pay and conditions of service (Education (No.2) Act, 1986) was introduced in 1987 that stipulated five non-contact days for teacher development and became known as 'Baker Days', named after Kenneth Baker, the Minister for Education at the time. These days enabled school leaders some flexibility to decide when and what to offer to meet their schools and staff needs. The new code also specified the number of days (195) and hours (1265) that teachers were to work.

The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), the most significant Act since the Butler Education Act of 1944, initiated a government review of the funding structure for in-service training as the grants system had become increasingly over-complex. The resultant Glickman and Dale (1990) report suggested a simplified unitary grants system which later became known as GEST (Grants for Education, Support and Training). Through the introduction of GEST, the government took control of teacher in-service training by centralising funding that favoured national priorities and removed LEA funding for local priorities, although the LEAs did retain some funding for designated courses that needed to be approved by the DES. GEST devolved funding directly into schools enabling In-service Co-ordinators and Head teachers to fund professional development including teacher research (Rosenholtz, 1989).

The early 1990s saw the Conservative government under John Major continue with the market-driven philosophies of the previous government. There was an overhaul of teacher training that created School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) provision delivered by groups of schools as an option to higher education-led teacher training. These were introduced by the government, at least in part, to reduce the influence of universities on the education sector and to provide more autonomy to school leaders. The introduction of the SCITT

programme enabled schools to review their approaches towards ITT and to ongoing professional development as a coherent process.

In 1993 the National Commission on Education (NCE) suggested that all schools should have a staff development policy and consider evolving into American-style 'learning shops' (Glover and Law, 1996), an environment in which all teachers, support staff members and children are expected to learn on a daily basis. Schools that had identified the link between teacher competence and the rise in pupil attainment, did more than just introduce a policy. They attempted to embed professional development through mechanisms such as those offered by Joyce (1991) who identified 'five doors' to school improvement: collegiality, research, site-specific information, curriculum initiatives and instructional initiatives. Joyce (1991) claimed that schools that did not integrate and embed professional development were in danger of it remaining a 'bolt on', often seen by teachers as irrelevant and not valued.

Under the Labour governments of the later 1990s, there was an emphasis on high quality in-service training and on supporting schools through the National Strategies initiative that aimed to raise standards in the national priorities of literacy, numeracy and ICT (Excellence in Schools, DfEE, 1997a). The Excellence in Schools (DfEE, 1997a) White Paper restated professional development as being at the heart of teachers' professionalism and continuing throughout their career. The government continued to provide schools with funding for professional development through what became known as the Standards Fund. This fund was focused on the national priorities rather than on the individual teacher's needs, so in 2001, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) published a revised strategy to fund and support teacher professional development on the basis that this was seen as career-long learning for teachers. The revised strategy re-introduced sabbaticals, teacher bursaries and funding for courses linked to pay and promotion through the appraisal process.

The 'Learning and Teaching; a strategy for professional development' (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001) White Paper raised the

importance of professional development further. This was due in part to responding to teacher recruitment and retention issues (Eraut, 1999), to the quality of professional development managed by schools and to the need to better inform and prepare teachers for perpetual change. The White Paper (2001) therefore recommended a step change in conceptualising and realising a richer repertoire of professional development for the duration of the teacher's career' (Goodall et al., 2005:25). It also discussed the promotion of continuous reflection and re-examination of professional learning, a significant move forward in highlighting the importance of professional learning rather than purely focusing on INSET or professional development.

Following the White Paper, a study by Hustler et al (2003) was commissioned by the DfES that focused on teachers' attitudes and perceptions of professional development. This report demonstrated extensive variation in teachers' opinions, knowledge and understanding of what constitutes professional development much of which explained by individual's experience. What the report did conclude was that 'one size does not fit all'.

In 2005 the government quango, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), was given responsibility for managing school workforce development (DfES, 2005). The TTA consolidated the understanding that professional development was part of the annual performance management cycle informed by the newly introduced Teacher Standards (Training and Development Agency (TDA), 2007c). The Teacher Standards outlined what was expected of teachers and provided a national mechanism for teacher assessment. Through the standards teachers had a statutory requirement to engage in professional development, but significantly there was no reference to teacher's professional learning. The revised Teacher Standards (2011) stated that the teacher should:

'...take responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development, responding to advice and feedback from colleagues'.

(Standard 8, Teacher Standards, 2011)

Throughout the 2000s, a growth in teacher accountability through pupil performance data, performance management, inspections and growing media scrutiny all had implications for schools and the quality of teaching. As a consequence, 'learning communities' were suggested in the Goodall et al., (2005) evaluation of the impact of professional development to bring staff members together to address these issues. In 2005, teachers were allocated planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time through changes in legislation and contracts. This provided schools with the opportunity to be innovative with time and in bringing staff members together to form 'learning communities'.

The economic depression of the late 2000s and early 2010s saw significant changes in education policy with the main focus, by the Conservative-Liberal Coalition government (2010-2015) and the Conservative government (2015 to present), on the academisation of schools. It is the government's intention for the majority of schools to become an Academy by 2020 with each school being independent from the Local Authority (LA). As an Academy school leaders have control over budgets and all school management including professional development. Schools within Academy chains share practice, share staff and aim for stronger schools to support weaker ones.

Government policy also supported Teaching School Alliances (see section 1.7.2 above) to encourage school-to-school support and for schools to manage professional development as a collective.

Under the Coalition and recent Conservative governments, the pressures on school leaders and teachers to continually improve has increased substantially. Ofsted inspection processes focus on the progress of each pupil and consequently leaders, teachers and support staff members have had to re-examine their practices.

Astute Head teachers have analysed how the professional development of individual teachers has impacted upon learning. Others have also looked at the relationship between professional development and professional learning and have introduced new strategies to improve teacher and support staff members'

performance through a more focused and explicit approach to professional learning. Some have introduced PLCs. However, with accountability on individual teachers ever-increasing (The Education (School Teachers' Appraisal) (England) Regulations, 2012), the majority of English schools retain the link between performance management and professional development. As a consequence, the structures in many schools remain unchanged and teacher's and support staff member's individual needs are not met. They are not formally expected to 'learn' nor are they supported to develop the skills to do so. Expectations across the English school system of teachers and support staff members to engage in 'professional learning' remains ambiguous and confused. However, through the development of PLCs the concept of professional learning is becoming more widely known (Bolam et al., 2005).

My literature review failed to unearth any clear guidance on the responsibility for professional learning. In fact, it is not a formal 'requirement' of being a teacher, but participation in professional development is (Teacher Standards, 2011), and has been since 1987 (Code: Teachers Pay and Conditions). Professional learning appears to be the responsibility of the individual, 'implicit' or 'assumed' in the teacher's role or in professional development. If this 'appearance' is correct, teachers are expected to know how to learn, deeply reflect (Fullan, 2001) to inform improvement, evaluate and benchmark their practice and know how to manage reluctant learners and those who do not understand. The system at present assumes teachers and support staff members have the skills to do this.

2.3.1 Summary

So into the future, it is likely the roles of professional development and professional learning will continue to be dictated by government policy, the economic climate, school leaders' awareness and decisions and staff members understanding and capacity. Professional development, professional learning and PLCs will be driven by context and will differ from school to school.

The changing beliefs and ideologies of successive governments and fluctuations in the nation's economic well-being have shaped teacher professional development. The growing centralisation and government control and the demise of the power of LEAs, teacher unions and universities in managing and delivering teacher professional development has influenced how professional development has been delivered and funded. Over the decades, professional development has shifted from being personal to delivered to the masses and now becoming more personalised again through professional learning, but, in essence, professional development has remained focused on information sharing and training.

The awareness, understanding and subsequent growth of professional learning as a potential driver for improvement in teacher quality has been slow in English primary schools. This has not helped the awareness of PLCs as a potential school improvement framework for professional learning and development. The Learning and Teaching White Paper (2001) did state that professional development was to meet the needs of individuals and discussed the need for schools to enable professional learning and promote more diverse professional development activities. But these recommendations are still not embedded in English schools today.

The marketisation of education, as introduced by the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher in the 1970s and 1980s, continued by the Labour governments of the 1990s under Tony Blair and again by the Labour and Conservative governments through the 2000s and 2010s, did change the way in which teacher professional development was perceived, funded and delivered. Most significantly professional development moved from being externally delivered to school-led with ownership of decisions and delivery shifting to schools.

Literature post-1990 reflects a rise in the importance of professional learning and how schools should support this (Hord, 1997; DuFour and Eaker, 1998; Stoll, 1999). This change in focus from INSET and professional development towards professional learning was due, at least in part, to the rising global

interest in schools as learning organisations and PLCs but has not significantly changed practice in the majority of English schools to date.

With growing levels of accountability for teachers and governors, the pressure on teachers to continually improve their practice and pupil's outcomes is likely to be the driver for school improvement for some-time to come. How this is led will inevitably be decided by Head teachers.

A suggested process of improving teacher quality to impact on improved pupil outcomes is:

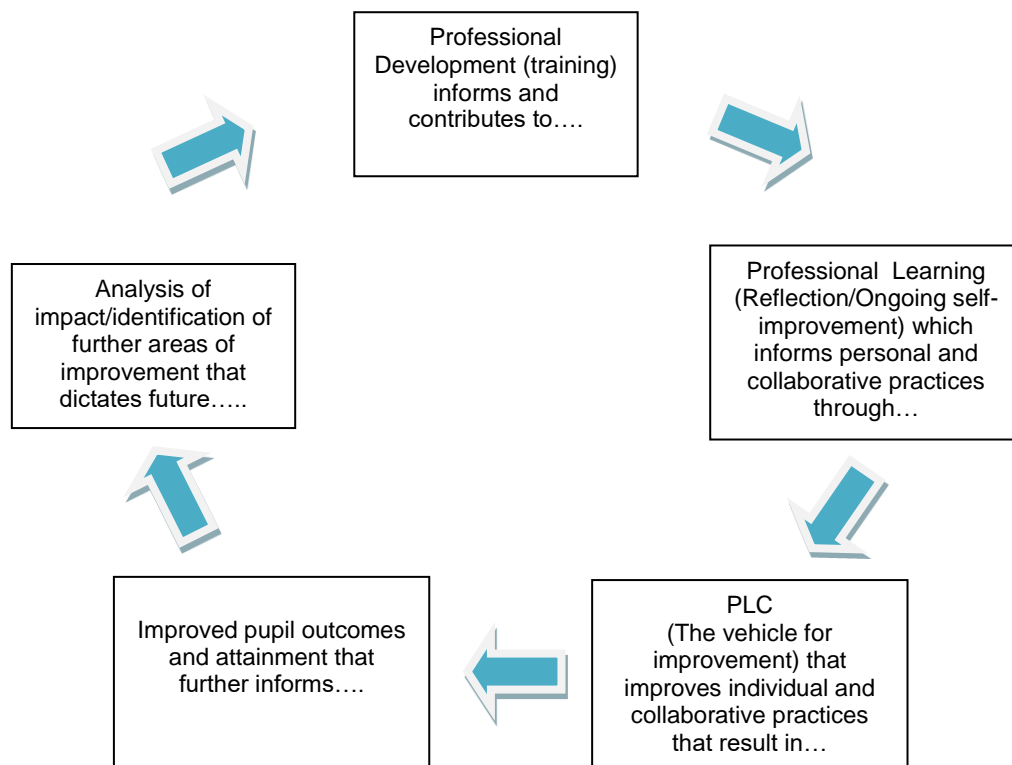


Figure 1
Teacher professional learning cycle within a PLC

This model promotes a link between professional development, professional learning and PLCs that is aimed at improving teacher quality and impacting on pupil attainment. In some countries the link has been made and a system-wide approach has been introduced using the PLC as the framework for underpinning school improvement.

2.4 How have Professional Learning Communities evolved?

Learning organisations and PLCs originated in the USA in the 1980s when major corporations such as General Motors decided that knowledge management, creation and retention, was crucial to their success. By empowering employees to generate and share knowledge, then ideas would continually be developed and knowledge would be retained if someone left the company.

Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington was considered a pioneering college when it applied these ideas to an educational setting and established an inter-collegiate learning community in 1984. The outcome was a constant creation of new knowledge and the sharing of practice that positively affected practice through collaborative enquiry and reflection (Hord, 1999, 2004; Stoll and Seashore-Louis, 2007). This practice would transform how colleges and schools operate and move away from people working in isolation in their own classroom.

- How will we know if pupils have learned it?

have involved adaptations, additions or new PLC characteristics or dimensions to those suggested by Hord (1997). Irrespective of the specific wording of the content, the model creates a framework which schools can use to audit their provision and strive to achieve.

One such PLC model was developed by DuFour et al. (2006) who discuss three 'big ideas' (Dufour et al., 2006) as the core principles of PLCs:

- A focus on learning - ensuring that pupils learn
- A culture of collaboration
- A focus on results

This model has proven to be popular with schools in the USA in particular and has a focus on four key questions:

- What is it that we want pupils to learn?
- How will we know if pupils have learned it?

- What will we do if pupils have not learned?
- How will we deepen the learning for those pupils who have mastered essential knowledge and skill?

Educational change initiatives, such as PLCs, need to be understood (Fullan, 1993, Heifetz and Linsky, 2002 and Branson, 2008) by, and have an 'internalised commitment of, teachers' (Fullan, 2005:2). That is best achieved if change is directed from within the school and involves all staff members. However, the engagement of all staff members from the outset of a PLC is never easy to achieve (Stoll, 1999; Hipp and Huffman, 2010; DuFour and DuFour, 2012). Hopkins et al. (1994) notes that long term change, such as introducing a PLC, takes time and de-stabilises the staff creating more insecurity, suspicion and tension. Actual and sustainable change comes from the individual, not from external forces. If change is perceived as mandated and/or externally introduced, for example by the Academy sponsor or Local Authority, then it is unlikely to happen (Fullan, 2005). So the introduction of change, and the perceptions of staff members towards change, needs to be carefully managed by the school's leaders.

Carpenter (2012) discovered that a PLC can positively impact on change of, practice and pedagogy, interactions, relationships and collaboration if the PLC is effectively led and not driven by leaders alone. But PLCs evolve differently based on context and since the 1990s there have been numerous studies, large and small, into the effectiveness of PLCs (Vescio, 2008).

2.5 Empirical Studies of PLCs

The majority of research on PLCs has been conducted in the USA, but significant research has appeared over more recent years from China, the Far East and Canada. One significant longitudinal study was conducted in the UK (Bolam et al, 2005). The majority of studies that researched PLCs involved principals, teachers, and other staff members (Hord, 1997; Bolam et al. 2005),

but studies that focused solely on PLC introduction (Grossman et al., 2001) generally targeted teachers only.

One of the earliest studies into PLC effectiveness was conducted by Louis et al. (1995) who began research over a three-year period into examining poorly performing urban schools. The research focused on the potential of these schools to become formal learning organisations and communities and was based on an emerging PLC framework introduced by Louis et al. (1995). The result of this research was five dimensions (characteristics) that effective learning communities need to embed and demonstrate (Louis et al., 1995:29). These were:

- 'Shared norms and values focused on institutional purposes, practices and desired behaviours;
- Reflective dialogue;
- Deprivatisation of practice encouraging teachers to become more analytical and to use observations by others to improve their practice;
- Collective focus on student learning involving monitoring of data, close support and responsive interventions;
- Professional collaboration and collective responsibility'.

The framework concluded that effective PLCs require a mix of 'structural conditions and human resources' (Louis et al., 1995:33) and these findings began to synthesise the early conceptualisation of PLCs and what they need to demonstrate. If conditions and resources are in place, then this can lead to increased participation in sourcing resources and in developing pupil interventions.

Research investigating the impact of PLCs on teacher practice was also conducted in the USA over a number of years by Newmann and Wehlage (1995) who studied data from over one thousand five hundred Elementary, Middle and High schools over a five-year period. The results of this research showed that PLCs had made a significant impact on student achievement

through an improved teacher workforce. The study identified that 'a vision of high quality, authentic, intellectual and rigorous learning' resulted in improved student attainment (Newmann and Wehlage, 1995:32). The study also highlighted the outcomes of a 'School Restructuring Survey (SRS)' which reported the positive impact of a learning community on student achievement when testing authentic performance. This survey, conducted in twenty-four elementary, middle and high schools, demonstrated the difference in performance of average students in a 'low teacher professional community' school as compared to a school with a 'high teacher professional community'. Student performance in favour of the high teacher learning community would differ by 27% on the SRS measure. This gain relates to a significant difference of thirty-one percentile points.

A further study undertaken in the USA by Lee et al. (1995) examined student engagement and academic achievement in math and science in organic (schools that encourage teacher teams) or communal (schools that encourage teacher collaboration, teamwork and involvement in decision-making) schools in their last two years of high school. The study involved over eleven thousand secondary aged students in eight hundred and twenty schools. Hierarchical linear modelling was used to approximate the impact on students' learning of specific factors whilst managing influences such as socioeconomic status, previous academic success and other issues that can impact upon student achievement (Lee et al., 1995). The analysis indicated that schools who moved away from conventional school organization and practice towards an organic school saw benefits for their students. There were greater academic gains in math and science over the second two-year period. In addition, the achievement gap between students from different backgrounds was smaller. These gains in students' achievement increased more in the last two years of high school than in the first two years. The schools that demonstrated they were a PLC, as staff collaboration was well embedded, produced greater gains than other schools.

Eleven studies in PLCs conducted by Vescio et al. (2008) who concluded that PLCs facilitate significant positive change in the approaches and attitudes of

teachers towards their work. They also concluded that PLCs have a considerable impact on the professional culture of a school improving teachers' morale, promoting teacher authority and ensuring that professional development drives teacher self-improvement and resulting in higher pupil attainment. In effective PLC schools, teacher teams predominantly focused on their practice and the impact on pupil learning. However, there is limited literature to date that conclusively proves a direct correlation between PLCs, teacher improvements and pupil attainment (Gallozzi, 2011). Roberts (2010) did attempt to use standardized exams such as criterion referenced-based test scores of students as a link to teacher practice, however, there were difficulties related to the nature of the longitudinal study and the empirical determination of quality instruction (Lomos et al., 2011).

What is lacking in PLC literature are longitudinal data studies on pupil attainment, effective teacher collaborative practices and the impact of PLCs on both. It is therefore difficult to find research that conclusively demonstrates that it is the PLC that solely has impacted on pupil outcomes. Isolating the impact of one intervention is difficult in schools as they are often delivering numerous interventions at any one time.

Another significant longitudinal study was conducted by Hord (2004), again in the USA, that focused on creating communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. It was a five-year study to investigate conditions required for an effective PLC and involved twenty-two exemplary schools of PLCs including elementary, middle, and secondary schools. The researchers then conducted case studies in six of the twenty-two schools, including two each of elementary, middle, and secondary schools. Apart from informing the researchers of the conditions required, the results also confirmed that establishing a PLC is a complex business. Successful schools are those that take their time, plan carefully, engage the staff members and create the structures, culture and ethos required for sustained progress.

One of the aims of the research conducted in the UK by Bolam et al. (2005) was to also investigate conditions to create and sustain effective PLCs in

schools. This was a thirty-four-month exploratory study to ascertain the characteristics of effective PLCs. The study aimed to identify restricting and enabling factors and to research effective practices for managing time and opportunities for professional learning. The focus was to identify good practice models of effective PLCs as well as assess generalizability and transferability to other schools.

Bolam et al. (2005) came to the conclusion that primary schools were more likely than secondary schools to exhibit characteristics that are evident in PLCs and this supported the findings of Louis et al. (1995). Bolam et al. (2005) also concluded that PLCs went through three stages: starter, then developer, and finally mature, although these stages may not be planned or obvious. They found that PLCs look and operate very differently in different places and phases.

What can be concluded from the empirical studies is that there is a consensus regarding two main considerations when introducing and establishing a PLC. The first is that each situation is unique and a PLC will be established based upon different starting points (Bolam et al., 2005; Ailwood and Follers, 2010; Hipp and Huffman, 2010). Secondly, the key to introducing a PLC is the engagement of the staff members instilling the concept of collaboration (Stoll and Seashore Louis, 2007; Mullen, 2009; Hipp and Huffman, 2010; Elbousty and Bratt, 2011). However, it is also recognised that this is also potentially the most difficult area to overcome.

In summary, empirical studies support the holistic model of PLCs and provide a general consensus of characteristics or dimensions required for an effective PLC. PLCs are not a school reform movement but the studies demonstrate how they can contribute to school improvement.

When introducing a PLC, a cultural shift (DuFour et al., 2008) in the way the school leaders think and operate to focus on the continuous improvement of teaching to bring about improvements in pupil outcomes is required. Fullan (2006) professes that teachers working together, collaboratively, towards high academic standards through innovative and common practice within a PLC is

what 'shifts' the culture. Establishing the culture in the early stage of the PLC introduction is crucial to the success of the PLC (Hord, 1997).

2.6 Stages of PLC Development

Planning is crucial to the successful introduction of a PLC (Hord, 1997, Stoll, 1999, Hipp and Huffman, 2010). Even when PLCs emerge from within a school, through for example groups of committed individuals who operate as a PLC, to cascade that practice across the school requires planning. Planning through the stages of development, as suggested by Bolam et al. (2005) is key to the success of a sustainable PLC. Bolam et al. (2005) outline stages to a PLC's development, but emphasise that the starting point is dictated by the context. Most schools will exhibit PLC characteristics at varying levels and auditing provision against the PLC characteristics is recommended (Hipp and Huffman, 2010) to inform forward planning. Others offer similar advice as Hord et al. (1999), Couture (2003) and Lambert (2003) also suggest schools assess their readiness by undertaking an audit of current practice as early as possible, but advise that this should be externally facilitated (Stoll et al., 2006; Roberts and Pruitt, 2009 and Mullen, 2009) in order to provide 'opportunities' for all staff members and leaders to be equally involved. Following an audit and planning, Hipp and Huffman (2010) and DuFour and DuFour (2012) suggest that leaders begin by sharing the vision, informing and engaging the staff members as early as possible.

Like Bolam et al (2005), Stoll et al. (2006) discuss the fact that many schools have begun the journey to becoming a PLC, whether or not they are conscious of this. Stoll et al. (2006) label schools as 'starter', 'developer' or 'mature' highlighting the introduction of a PLC as a developmental process. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) identify the 'stages' of learning community development as being novice, intermediate and advanced, and then go on to outline the challenges towards transition to the next stage. Therefore, across the literature there are different interpretations of the stages of PLC development:

Author(s)/ Stages	Huffman and Hipp (2003)	Bolam et al. (2005)	DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2010)
Pre-Initiation Stage			Pre-Initiation Stage: The school has not yet begun to address the principle or practice
Initiation Stage (Situating)	Initiation	Early Starters – Very early stage of developing the characteristics of a PLC	Initiation: The school has begun to address the principle or practice, but the effort has yet to impact on the critical mass of staff members
Implementation Stage (Collaborative)	Implementation	Developers – in process of establishing a PLC	Implementation: A critical mass of staff members is participating and implementing the principle and practice but many approach with a sense of compliance rather than commitment.
Evaluation (Systematic)			Developing: Structures are being altered to support the changes and resources are being allocated. Members are becoming more receptive to the principle and practice.
Institutionalisation (Transformational)	Institutionalisation	Mature – well established but continually evaluating impact	Sustaining: The principle or practice is deeply embedded in the culture of the school. It is driving forward the daily work of staff. It is deeply internalised and staff would resist attempts to abandon the principle or practice.

Figure 2
Phases of a school-based PLC

Throughout the different stages, where the focus is on embedding the PLC characteristics, the underpinning concepts of a PLC as transformational, situated, systematic and collaborative are confirmed.

Although terms may differ, there is a consensus that PLCs go through stages of development and that awareness of these stages will support leaders in their endeavours when introducing and establishing a PLC, particularly as the most important stage is the first, the initiation stage. It is during this stage that leaders encourage staff members to understand the vision and to become engaged. This takes time and systems may need to be changed.

Effective PLCs are reliant on staff members to share in the aspirations and vision, to be open to collaborative working and ongoing professional learning and to be open to personal and institutional transformational change. Leaders need to ensure that processes enable new staff to be integrated as quickly as possible into teams and into the PLC culture (Johnson and Kardos, 2007). For many novice teachers in particular, the school context sets the tone for early career experiences (Pugach et al., 2009) and early knowledge and engagement with PLCs and professional learning will provide skills for their future career.

To monitor the transition of a school through the stages, Fullan (1985) offers a 'three phases of change' process to monitor a PLC from initiation to maturity.

PHASE 1 Initiation	Staff adopt an innovation by making a decision to proceed with change
PHASE 2 Implementation	Staff begin to operationalize the innovation into practice
PHASE 3 Institutionalization	The innovation is recognized as an ongoing part of the system or the 'way things are done around here'

Figure 3
Fullan's (1985) Three Phases of Change

Hipp and Huffman (2010) suggests that leaders clarify their vision and the relationship between the PLC and (a) professional development and learning (b) school improvement strategies (c) long-term aspirations (d) structures and processes and all other related agendas. If these relationships are not clear then the potential effectiveness of the PLC may be diminished (Hipp and Huffman, 2010).

Couture (2003) warns that the journey is likely to involve a series of labour intensive processes and not all schools may be willing and able to undertake such a venture. There is also a consensus (Hord, 1997; Stoll, 1999; Hipp and Huffman, 2010) that leaders should initially work with motivated and interested members of staff and start 'small', providing everyone with status and an opportunity to engage; building upon the willingness of colleagues to give and share; providing clear structures built on existing good practice and by providing the necessary resource (DuFour and Eaker, 1997; Stoll and Earl, 2003; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Hord and Sommers (2008) take this further and believe in laying foundations for the introduction of a PLC by articulating why a school needs 'to do things differently' and to address the 'knowing-doing gap' in order to get staff members on board. Fullan (1993:33) suggests that 'individualism and collectivism must have equal power', difficult to achieve, but should be at the fore in leaders thinking when introducing a PLC.

DuFour and DuFour (2012) suggest that there are four assumptions made when schools embark on a PLC journey that could support a sharp focus for leaders:

- '1. The school's primary purpose is to ensure high levels of learning for all pupils;
2. The most promising strategy for fulfilling that purpose is to develop the staff's capacity to function as a PLC;
3. The Head teacher's role is to lead a collective effort to create a PLC that ensures high levels of learning for pupils through recursive processes that promote adult learning;

4. Head teachers play a vital role in creating the conditions that lead to improved learning for both pupils and adults in their schools’.

(DuFour and DuFour, 2012:2)

School leaders are advised not to assume that all individuals will agree and some will actively oppose. The need to manage conflict and tension and how this is dealt with, particularly in the early stages of PLC development, can determine how the PLC proceeds or does not (Westheimer, 1999; Grossman et al., 2001; Achinstein, 2002, Wood, 2007 and Dooner et al., 2008). Achinstein (2002) discusses how conflict over issues such as the need for teachers to take responsibility for all learners is managed in different settings and Grossman et al. (2001) and Achinstein (2002) describe management of such issues as ‘navigating fault lines’ and ‘navigating essential tension’.

How the PLC is introduced in the initiation phase is therefore critical to the PLCs success. Introducing a PLC and engaging staff members can therefore cause challenges and, as the literature indicates, this is the singular most important issue to introducing a successful PLC. But does the school’s location also have a similar significance?

2.7 Inner-City Location

The issue of whether or not location affects a PLC is particularly relevant to my research as outlined in chapter 1. Schools located in inner-city, suburban, rural or coastal areas all face different challenges. The factors that contribute to these differences often include high levels of mobility, multi-ethnic populations, poor housing, gang and drug issues, low-income families, low aspirations within households, parental disengagement with education, high crime rates, single-parent families, high rates of endemic unemployment and teacher recruitment issues. Many of these factors contribute towards under-achievement in schools. Fullan (2007) believes that the ‘inadequacy of teachers’ affects schools within economically and socially deprived inner-city areas more significantly than other schools. He also believes that the ‘within school variation’ factors that involves

teacher quality, are also exacerbated in schools in deprived areas and therefore the PLC concept has the potential to make more of a significant difference in these schools.

Literature related to location context and impact on PLCs is limited. However, research conducted in the USA in the 1970s investigated the relationship between urban education and poor attainment. Much of the research focused on strategies that 'made a difference' (Rosenshine 1983) and what constituted 'effective schools' (Edmonds 1979). This research has been used to inform further studies and government and policy ever since (Murphy, Hallinger and Mesa, 1985), and concluded that context did make a difference but only in the sense that each school's context is different. The research further discovered that there were effective schools in inner-city areas and location alone did not present a barrier to establishing a PLC. However, these 'effective' schools were not the norm and were termed 'mavericks' or 'outliers' with the implication that the majority of inner-city schools do not provide the environment that delivers success. The research showed that inner-city schools who did not have high expectations resulted in low levels of pupil attainment. A school's lack of leadership and teacher capacity also negatively affected the school's ability to function as a learning organisation and to change teacher expectations.

Research (Grossman et al., 2001; Phillips, 2003; Strathan, 2003; Supovitz and Christman, 2003; Hollins et al., 2004; Lezotte, 2005; Curry, 2008) into PLCs has confirmed that location alone is not a significant factor to PLC development and any school in any location can operate as a PLC with effective leadership, processes and staff engagement (Lezotte, 2005; Curry, 2008). So what does an effective PLC require?

2.8 Theoretical Framework for this study

Following a review of PLC literature, this study is based on the understanding that PLCs are effective learning organisations predicated on the belief that such organisations encourage employees to continually learn. The learning

organisation theory (Senge, 1990) provides the rationale for an organization, such as a school, to continually generate and share knowledge that improves the quality of teaching and learning and positively impacts on pupil attainment.

This study is also based on the fact that PLCs are situated and that adult learning and development is ongoing, collaborative and empowering. The Communities of Practice (CoP) theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991), provides the framework for professional learning in this way, complementing the principles of the learning organisation. Both theories are centred on the creation and sharing of knowledge to solve problems and to build environments for professional dialogue with the intent to improve personal and collective practice that has a positive impact on pupils' learning.

When selecting these two theories, I considered but dismissed, other theories that are associated with PLCs, for example, Mezirow's (1997) Transformation Theory that was based on adult learning and how adults changed the way that they interpreted the world around them. I also considered adult learning theory (Hansman, 2001) and collaborative learning theory (Vygotsky, 1986), both highly relevant theories to this study, but not pursued as I believe that aspects of all three theories are encompassed in the learning organisation theory.

2.8.1 Learning Organisation Theory

Learning organisation theory was introduced by Senge (1990) who researched how organisations develop people for the benefit of the individual and for the organisation. This concept is focused on the belief that an organisation (its people) are willing and able to learn. Senge (1990: 1) describes a learning organisation as 'continually expanding its capacity to create its future' and Garvin (1993: 80) considers such organisations as 'skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and modifying behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights'.

Senge (1990) identified 'five disciplines' for the learning organisation. The first focuses on building a shared vision that he believes emerges from personal

visions. The second, 'personal mastery', involves ongoing personal development and learning, continually refocusing on the mission and vision. The third discipline, 'team learning' enthuses colleagues with a common interest, focusing input and direction, and helps the team to achieve its desired results. The fourth discipline, 'mental models', primarily involves leaders and is used to steer crucial decisions that may impact on the organization and facilitate change. The fifth discipline, 'systems thinking', has credibility, is inclusive of all staff, provides a framework for interactions, forms the foundation of any change and is at the core of any organisation's development. Learning organisations therefore enable leaders to explore new ways of operating and improving the professionalism of the workforce and leaders.

Learning organisations often work through knowledge sharing cycles and processes described by Huysman and de Wit (2002) as internalizing knowledge by offering apprenticeship through legitimate peripheral participation, externalizing knowledge by enabling learning from and with each other and objectification knowledge that supports the transformation of shared knowledge into collectively accepted knowledge.

Senge's (1990) work was encouraged by organisational theory advocate Barnard (1938/1968) who examined 'human organisations' and it was he who laid the foundations for future research into exploring interactions, organisational participants, organisational culture and organisational leadership (Simon, 1966, 1991; Argyris and Schon, 1978; Weick, 1979, 1995 and March, 1988). The complementary organisational learning theory (Cohen and Sproull, 1996; Cousins, 1998; Leithwood, 1998; Robinson, 2002 and Senge et al., 2000) involves 'individual learning grounded in cognitive and social psychology' (Argyris and Schon, 1996; Schein, 1996; Fauske and Raybould, 2005) defining learning as organisational change.

Viewing learning in organisations, whereby the generation, sharing and development of knowledge is managed, enables leaders to design and construct environments and opportunities for effective learning activities. Empowered participants can take responsibility for determining, shaping and

enabling their own learning. The real promise of such context-based learning is that 'knowing' of 'just plain folks' (Lave, 1988) is valued, thus enhancing the knowledge and development of adults. For many individuals they need to learn how to learn and deal with changes and uncertainties (Edmondson and Moingeon, 1998). Learning and problem solving collaboratively through a social learning approach and *in situ* enables this to happen (Lave, 1988; Easterby – Smith, 1997).

Livingston and Schiach (2010:85-86) emphasise:

‘ ... social interaction transforms individuals through involvement in collective activities that are culturally and historically situated... this collaborative approach will result in better outcomes... by bringing together a range of different perspectives and explicitly sharing knowledge. Those involved have the opportunity to develop mutual understanding ... to create new knowledge and meaning’.

Other supporters of situated learning (Wertsch, 1991; Laurillard, 1993) believe that learning does not happen in isolation or just in the brain or as Merriam and Caffarella (1999) argue, ‘in a vacuum’. Wertsch (1991) and Laurillard (1993) understand learning to take place in a context moulded by knowledge-exchange within a learning culture whereby effective collaboration results in teachers understanding how to learn themselves (Hollins et al., 2004; Andrews and Lewis, 2007; Wood, 2007). This is achieved through sharing outstanding practice with others, collaborative exploration, problem solving, research, experimentation and reflection all resulting in increased motivation and enthusiasm for teaching and learning. Cordingley et al. (2003) and Moor et al. (2005) consider that the most effective professional development occurs when teachers have ownership, often enabled through a learning community.

Louis and Kruse (1995) discovered that when schools structured themselves as learning organisations, teachers formed ‘networks for collaboration’ resulting in more shared planning and team teaching. Teachers became more reflective and participated in problem-solving and decision-making teams and in critical inquiry. Individuals developed through knowledge growth, professional dialogue and reflection all focused on the goal of improved pupil achievement. This

learning took place *in situ*, in meaningful learning environments within a context of systematic and consensus learning. This organisational systems thinking approach provides knowledge and tools that support organisations to assess themselves and to initiate change (Thompson et al., 2004).

In the 1990s the PLC movement was driven by the aspiration to convert more schools into learning organisations (Senge, 1990) and learning communities (Hord, 1997) which could ‘access, circulate and distribute knowledge to achieve continuous improvement’ (Stoll and Louis, 2007: xix). These communities would support learners by providing evidence that could inform decisions regarding potential improvements and their impact (Stoll and Louis, 2007). Integrated school communities serving the academic and social well-being of pupils and are more likely to achieve greater academic success (Goldring et al., 2007).

There are differences between learning organisations and learning communities which should be noted. Arbogast (2004) argues that learning organisations bring issues to light for discussion, seek and achieve a consensus of opinion, whilst the learning community concept involves relationships that are social and where the organisation’s mission is shared and more pervasive. In essence, she believes the difference is the increased level of commitment and collegiality required in a community.

2.8.2 Communities of Practice Theory

The CoP theory is predicated on situated social learning, in the main delivered through teams (or learning teams) (Hyacinthe, 2011), that promote innovation, develop social capital and facilitate the creation and dissemination of new knowledge. Using this approach, learning can be an incidental outcome. A CoP enables each team or group member to contribute something unique and by doing so increases the collective knowledge. The CoP structure can be applied in any organisation and it was in the private sector, as with learning organisations, that CoPs first evolved.

The term 'communities of practice' was first used in 1991 by Lave and Wenger who discussed the notion of 'legitimate peripheral participation' and developed the CoP theory in the 1960s following their study of apprentice tailors in Africa. They observed apprentices working together and these people learned more from other apprentices than they did from their teacher (Wenger, 2011). The term 'communities of practice' was devised to apply to a 'community that acts as a living curriculum for the apprentice' (Wenger, 1998). The essential component of the CoP is that learning is not restricted to the novice. The learning process is dynamic and involves all who participate in the CoP irrespective of role or status.

Wenger (2007:1) provides a simple definition:

'Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.'

He goes on to describe three components considered essential for a CoP:

1. **'A domain':** A CoP has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. It is not just a network of people or club of friends. Membership implies a commitment to the domain.
2. **A community:** In pursuing their interest in their domain members interact and engage in shared activities, help each other and share information with each other. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. In this way, merely sharing the same job does not necessitate a CoP. A website in itself is not a CoP. There needs to be people who interact and learn together in order for a CoP to be formed. Note that members do not necessarily work together daily, however.
3. **A practice:** The third requirement for a CoP is that the members are *practitioners*. They develop a shared repertoire of resources which can include stories, helpful tools, experiences, ways of handling typical problems, etc. This kind of interaction needs to be developed over time. A good conversation with a stranger who happens to be an expert on a subject matter that interests you

does not in itself make a CoP. Informal conversations held by people of the same profession (e.g. office assistants or graduates) help people share and develop a set of cases and stories that can become a shared repertoire for their practice, whether they realize it or not.'

(Wenger, 2007:2)

The concept of learning using the CoP model shifts from acquisition to participation (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003). However, Engestrom (1999) suggests an alternative view that learning happens within activity systems that expose learners to internal and external influences and tensions. But there was a consensus that learning is social, communal, situated and takes place subconsciously occurring through normal working practices.

CoPs operate and develop differently and can be focussed on problem solving, requests for information, seeking experience, reusing assets, co-ordination and synergy, discussing developments, visiting other members, mapping knowledge and identifying gaps (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Kubiak (2003) suggests that CoPs operate effectively *within* a PLC structure which provides the overarching 'umbrella'.

'Successful school learning communities consist of many CoPs all focused on raising pupil attainment'.

(Kubiak, 2003:2)

Kubiak (2003:3) notes that it is unlikely that a school can be a single CoP and he refers to schools as a 'constellation of CoPs'. The focus of each CoP contributes towards improving staff knowledge that leads to gains in pupil attainment within the PLC. Colleagues who are members of more than one CoP can transfer knowledge between them. Also, participation in networked CoPs across schools enables individuals to gain a greater knowledge of different approaches through interactions with experts and specialists from outside of their own school.

However, CoPs have their critics. Storberg-Walker (1998) highlights concerns about CoPs and PLCs with regard to how successful they can really be when faced with politics, access, power, hierarchy, relationships and varying levels of participation. But Stoll and Fink (1996), Hord (1997) and Bolam et al. (2005) agree that these issues can be counter-acted with a clear vision, ethos and culture focused on collaborative staff learning and on pupil attainment. They also acknowledge that this is not an easy process for school leaders.

CoPs are the 'social unit' most effective to support the learning processes and managing knowledge within learning organisations (Huysman and de Wit, 2002; Kubiak, 2003).

The learning organisation provides the culture, ethos and structure through which individual or local knowledge is transferred into collective knowledge (Huysman and de Wit 2002), whilst CoPs, through being social and situated, determine the focus and provide the mechanism.

Learning organisation and CoP theories have therefore informed my conceptual framework for this study, understanding effective PLCs to be (a) collaborative (b) systematic (c) situated and (d) transformational.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

2.9.1 *Rationale*

The two complementary theoretical perspectives are focused on professional learning of individuals that is managed and facilitated through the work place, essentially through a PLC. But to support my own understanding, I initially needed to determine the essential PLC concepts based on my review of the literature.

I concluded that a PLC has the potential to positively **transform** the practice of individuals, *in situ*, through effective **systems** that are created to develop a culture of ongoing questioning, reviewing and **collaborative** learning.

So why are these four concepts so important to the PLC? I will take each concept and explain how it emerged for me as being essential to a PLC and justifying the inclusion of the concept in my framework.

2.9.2 Collaboration

My review of the literature highlighted that collaboration between staff members holds the key to the success of the PLC. Without it organisations would struggle to change and improve (Senge, 1990; Wood, 2007; Dooner et al., 2008). I found no PLC author who argued against the need for a PLC to be collaborative. In fact, all PLC researchers agree on the importance of communicating, sharing and working collaboratively in order to create knowledge and solve problems. Without collaboration a community would not exist.

Collaboration is embedded in my two underpinning theories, the learning organisation and CoP and in the PLC characteristics (Hord, 1997), placing collaboration at the heart of a PLC to enable individual and collective learning to occur.

PLCs are founded on the principle that professional learning, through collaboration is more effective than learning in isolation (Senge, 1990). Learning is a social interaction and humans are social by nature (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Wilson (1993:73) describes:

‘Learning is an everyday event that is social in nature because it occurs with other people; it is ‘tool dependent’ because the setting provides mechanisms that aid, and more important, structure the cognitive process; and finally it is the interaction with the setting itself in relation to its social and tool dependent nature, that determines learning’.

Biologists and psychologists suggest that there is neural and genetic evidence of a ‘human disposition to cooperate’ (Benkler, 2011) therefore effective collaboration shifts an individual’s role from being ‘selfish’ (Benkler, 2011) and

‘isolationist’ (Lortie, 1975; Little, 1990; Lieberman, 2000 and Thompson et al., 2004; Bolam, et al., 2005) to being part of a ‘collaborative’ within a learning organisation.

At the heart of effective professional collaboration is the willingness to improve and support ourselves and others.

‘It is intensive interaction that engages educators in opening up their beliefs and practices to investigation and debate’.

(Katz and Earl, 2010:30)

Collaboration is essential to developing collective capacity when focused on the improvement in pupil outcomes and effective PLC leaders therefore set out to create the conditions that enable teachers to learn from one another as part of their routine work practices (DuFour et al., 2005). Professional learning is described by Lave and Wenger (1991) as social and personal transformation. In order to collaborate, Lave and Wenger (1991) viewed through a socio-cultural lens, believe that teachers and support staff members negotiate membership and then participate in a group whereby they assimilate themselves into the group and grow into the community. Overtime participants become immersed into a ‘culture of practice’ (Stoll et al., 2006: 233) and PLCs provide the perfect social structure that facilitates participants’ ownership (Stoll et al., 2006). The development of knowledge (general and specific) through the community occurs and is crucial to the improvement process. The community that enables this to happen is described by Wenger et al. (2002:29) as a ‘social structure that can assume responsibility for developing and sharing knowledge’. Stoll et al. (2006) discuss the deconstruction, reconstruction and co-construction of knowledge through collaboration with others.

‘.....the demands on teachers to learn, unlearn and relearn more and more require that the model of the isolated teacher be set aside’.

(Klein, 2008:95)

By collaborating, knowledge is created through dialogue that make presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings explicit and available for exploration. It is through these interactions that new ideas, tools, and practices are created, and the initial knowledge is either substantially enriched or transformed during the process (Hakkarainen et al., 2004). This is achieved by facilitating opportunities that draw on explicit knowledge and combine it with tacit knowledge in response to authentic problems (Von Krogh et al., 2000).

Enabling staff members to be part of such a community is a powerful mechanism that will result in significant, perhaps transformational changes to practice. The expectation is that following the creation of new knowledge, improvements will be evidenced as thinking and practice has been challenged.

Collaboration between professionals on a daily or regular basis is therefore at the heart of the PLC. Effective collaboration that leads to transformation of practice is reliant on leaders providing the framework, time and systems that enable this to happen. But without staff members' willingness to collaborate then the PLC will fail. Therefore, collaboration is the most crucial of all PLC concepts and one that needs considered leadership, planning and facilitation.

2.9.3 Situated

The concept of 'situated' refers to a focus on improving and transforming the people, structures and environment as an ongoing process, usually, but not exclusively, within a single organisation.

'The theory of situated learning claims that every idea and human action is a generalization adapted to the ongoing environment, because what people see and what they do arise together.....situated learning is the study of how human knowledge develops in the course of an activity, and especially how people create and interpret descriptions (representations) of what they are doing'.

(Clancy, 1995:49)

Literature informs us of the importance of effective support in developing and improving the confidence and competence of individuals that work and learn in context (Senge, 1990; Lave and Wenger, 1991) and of the importance of face-to-face, daily interactions.

‘The theory of situated cognition...claims that every human thought is adapted to the environment, that is, situated, because what people perceive, how they conceive of their activity, and what they physically develop together’.

(Clancy, 1997:1)

Both the learning organisation and CoP theories are premised on the improvement of the organisation and the ability for that organisation to retain, develop and create knowledge through the employees that work together on a day-to-day basis. The PLC characteristics describe the need for colleagues to take collective responsibility and to have shared values focused on institutional purposes (Louis et al., 1995). The PLC characteristics are also context focused, therefore situated, and involve addressing issues that are immediately relevant to the school.

Clancy (1995:49) claims that situated learning is based on the ‘nature of human knowledge’, claiming that knowledge is ‘dynamically constructed as we conceive of what is happening to us, talk and move’. This ongoing learning, and the construction and sharing of knowledge, is crucial to the improvement of teachers’ practice and it is the PLC that provides the framework.

Effective PLCs embed situated professional learning in the school’s culture and many leaders see the introduction of a PLC as a fresh start that allows for re-culturing, re-visioning and changing the working environment (Servage, 2008). Osborne and Price (1997) support the connection between long-term sustainable improvement and school culture.

Needing to re-culture is not uncommon when schools introduce significant changes (Fullan, 2007) such as a PLC. In some schools, significant changes in

systems and approaches are required. Arbogast (2004) undertook research of a PLC in an American Elementary School and concluded that that once cultures and systems are established schools can operate as an effective community and respond to external demands in a systematic and enlightened fashion, but changes in culture determine this.

Johnson and Kardos (2007: 24) agree on the imperative for schools to go through a process of 're-culturing' and defines this as investigating the:

'...climate and spirit; motivation and morale and the norms, values and attitudes and beliefs associated with the school'.

Transformation of culture is important to enable potentially different forms of interaction to take place (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006). This is defined by Weick (2003) as 'enactment' and is a process of actively transforming the environment through action. The concept of enactment and its understanding also influences how people view transformation, something leaders need to be aware of. Hollingsworth (2004) suggests that schools consider focusing culture and systems on the shared vision with a particular focus on improving learning and teaching, team development and the role they play in improvement, the importance of deep reflection of practitioners and on intimately knowing the context and issues.

Re-culturing may require minor or extensive changes or various degrees of transformation within the school and as Fullan (2001) explains, it could take a primary school up to three years and a secondary school six years, to achieve successful change. Often re-culturing is conducted during the initial or introductory stage of the PLC (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006) and is led by leaders whose own practice changes through the process (Mendez, 2015).

Empowering teachers to be part of decision-making processes and ambassadors for change brings about transformation and requires a shift in culture away from hierarchical leadership models. The aim is to bring-about long-term, sustainable transformational change within the school.

Re-culturing for a PLC requires leaders to 'systematically transform the organisational culture of their school so that learning communities become a way of life' (Hughes and Kritsonis, 2007:2). The reason is to affect how teachers and support staff members operate, think and approach their work and their own improvement. Generally, PLCs support teachers to become more motivated (Mendez, 2015) and to bring about improvements in their teaching as a result of experimentation, using data more effectively, solving problems in collaboration with others, spending more time discussing and analysing practice, changing the way they think and how they talk about issues and by developing their knowledge and understanding. Servage (2008:65) 'believes that transformation can occur only if the school is able collectively to imagine other possibilities for itself'.

Professionals working in schools construct their own identities based on their experiences, values, knowledge and histories (Thomas, 1995) as well as from the dominant discourses that they encounter (Giddens, 1991). The culture of a situated community is also affected by the members' experiences and social background (Kearney, 2011) and by the school's culture, leadership, ethos and atmosphere (Hopkins, 2001) that in turn determines patterns of behaviour (Robbins, 2003). These teacher identities are influenced from home, family, the school and the community and support the individual in building her/his cultural and social capital which is exposed in schools through everyday interactions. PLCs are built on human interactions and dialogue (Brockbank and McGill, 2006; Hulme and Cracknell, 2010) and schools use organisational structures to encourage participants to 'buy in'. Leaders play an important part in how these interactions are facilitated or not, and how the development of staff is encouraged or constrained (Busher, 2005).

Situated learning requires systems to allow and enable people to collaborate, problem solve, generate new knowledge and evaluate practice. Staff members need to know the systems in both formal and informal settings thereby enabling an individual, ideally, to take responsibility for their own professional learning.

2.9.4 Systematic

Effective systems are crucial to the success of a PLC as demonstrated through case studies in schools (Hord, 1997; DuFour and DuFour, 2012). Establishing effective systems from the starter stage of a PLC provides staff members with security and supports the effective PLC introduction.

When discussing a systematic approach to a PLC there are two areas to focus upon. The first and most important is a systematic framework that facilitates and enables timely interventions for pupils who are at risk of falling behind. This framework provides for close monitoring of individual pupils, their well-being, progress and data, all of which will inform any intervention. Secondly, effective school systems are required for a PLC to operate. For example, there needs to be time for meetings, allocation of space for teams to meet, consistent protocols applied across the teams, systematic support for the leaders of the teams, consistently applied practices to evaluating the impact of activities on learners and processes for monitoring individual pupil progress and for providing timely interventions.

For a community to be effective there have to be rules and parameters. In the context of a PLC this will involve team protocols, practices and procedures that will be common across the school. There will be processes for monitoring the practice and impact of the PLC. Teams will report on their work and impact through a school system that stipulates timings and procedures for reporting. For leaders, this means providing 'supportive conditions', a PLC characteristic, that enable staff members to operate effectively within a PLC. Supportive systems and conditions may include how leadership operates and the leadership model, how teams are constructed and led and evaluation and impact measures. Effective PLCs involve staff members in deciding what constitutes these supportive conditions. Fullan (1992), DuFour and Eaker (1998), Schmoker (2004) and Schunk and Mullen (2011) all argue that PLCs would not be effective or sustainable without systematic, structured and well-organised approaches.

The learning organisation and CoP theories discuss the importance of time creation and systematic approaches to managing meetings, information and knowledge and in how information is recorded and shared. This is crucial to school-based PLCs that involve a number of people and who need clarity on processes. Supportive conditions are therefore required to enable a PLC to function.

Stoll and Louis (2007) discuss the need for schools to review systems when introducing PLCs:

‘If successful systematic change depends on tighter coupling of administrative and instructional practice, and if professional community is key to linking leadership and teaching, then leaders need to sequence activities to help teachers toward more collaborative forms of work’.

(Stoll and Louis, 2007:104)

Without systems, processes or structures nurturing a PLC would prove difficult. A systematic approach highlights the value that the school places on the PLC and provides structures that individuals and teams can understand and adhere to and ensure evaluation, review and impact can be identified and measured. The systematic approach to a PLC, aligned with learning organisation theory, involves establishing structures that allows the organisation to manage and facilitate knowledge creation and sharing and collaborative ongoing professional learning that impacts on the staff members and ultimately on the learners.

Schools need to consider and understand what systems are required when embarking on the PLC journey. For example, distributed leadership enables more staff colleagues to lead, take responsibility and to develop their skills. PLC leadership roles create the culture and systems for effective collaborative working and an ongoing professional learning culture. This culture should permeate all that the school does (Williams et al., 1993; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). There needs to be clear structures for monitoring the effectiveness of the PLC overall and the impact on learning and teaching in particular

(Cordingley et al., 2003). Leadership that facilitates effective organisational structures for both formal and informal learning will support a PLC to bring about transformational change (Wood, 2007).

Leadership of a PLC and the systems that support it are central to its success and effectiveness. Without systems that enable the PLC to operate efficiently then the PLC is likely to fail. Without clarity of expectations, structures, vision and leadership, staff members will not be able to function as a PLC and without systems to support timely interventions pupils it is likely that they will underachieve. Therefore, it is essential that PLCs have systems that are clear, monitored and effective. It is often the leaders that decide on the system in a school, however, how they decide and engage the teachers and support staff members is critical. Fullan (2005) and Roberts and Pruitt (2009) remind us of the skills required of leaders to achieve this, especially in relation to leadership for change and transformation. They explain that leaders need to be brave, trust others, effectively communicate the vision, foster and model collaborative working, take decisions and most importantly develop skills of others. Often, to change 'hearts and minds' there need to be cultural and systematic changes to bring about transformation in practices.

Schools need to be adaptable, reactive, proactive and flexible as legislation and government directives change and dictate. In this context Schon (1973:28) discuss the need for 'learning systems' capable of bringing about 'continuing transformation' to the practice of the institution and individuals within it.

2.9.5 Transformational

My final concept is transformation, interpreted for this study as significant or total change. This is in relation to the school and systems, and/or to individuals who work at the school, how they think and operate. For schools to achieve transformation for improvement, this will be dependent upon the staff members. It is the teachers and support staff members in particular who will 'transform' their classroom practice in order to bring about improvements in pupils'

attainment. This view is not uncommon across the literature with growing evidence to support the successful impact of PLCs on teacher practice and pupil performance, particularly in schools that were previously 'stuck' and needed to radically change practices (Vescio et al., 2008). Hughes and Kritsonis (2007) also discuss the imperative to transform schools if the needs of all learners are to be met.

Transformation in individual and organisational practice is a key objective of a PLC as schools embarking on the PLC journey are usually seeking transformational changes, for the organisation and/or individuals to do things differently. Improved quality of teaching and learning, building capacity and the need to raise standards are likely to be the main drivers and achieved through transformed systems and strategies. Essentially schools are aiming for a 'fundamental' shift rather than 'tinkering' with current practices and this can lead to teachers 'imagining other possibilities' for the pupils and the school (Servage (2008). But for transformation to occur, careful planning and effective management are required (Fullan, 2007) to lead individuals to embrace change.

Organisations bring about their own transformations in response to changing situations. The CoP theory discusses transformation by enhancing everyday practices through improving individuals which in the long term will impact on the organisation. Collective learning and application of that learning, a PLC characteristic, has an implicit aspiration that learning will bring about transformation of practice of individuals and the organisation.

'...educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and complex as that'.

(Fullan, 2007:129)

Transformational change in English primary schools is not easy to achieve and in most schools the 'tinkering', referred to by Servage (2008), is more likely to occur. Fullan (2007) agrees that transformational change rarely happens in schools often because leaders dismiss introducing significant levels of change (Fullan, 2007) as they deal with a myriad of initiatives and directives on a

regular basis or because they do not have the ability at that time to lead on transformational change. It is these issues that dominate the thinking and time of school leaders thereby sometimes inhibiting innovation in schools.

Coping with such changes and introducing new initiatives, as often required through local and government interventions, requires schools to have the capacity amongst the leaders and staff members to manage. A school's capacity to improve and sustain improvement depends, in the main, on the leaders and other stakeholders' ability to 'foster and nurture' learning communities (Mullen, 2009). Leaders want to 'construct a collective identity' and exert 'collegial control over practice and professional standards' (Talbert and McLaughlin, 1994 in Stoll and Louis, 2007:2). This assumes that there is a willingness on behalf of professionals to be open and reflective with regard to their practice (Schon, 1983, 1987). The school's capacity to develop from within is dependent on staff members' competence and confidence to develop and respond to opportunities and own and drive school improvement. How open staff members are to improving themselves is also dependent, in part, on their professional views and attitudes and to their perceptions of leadership. A consideration for leaders, therefore, is how to go about introducing transformational change, particularly when managing long-serving teachers who often find change more difficult to cope with (Hargreaves, A, 2005) and have the potential to place barriers in the way of innovative leaders.

Capacity-building (and within that professional learning) that leads to improvements in pupil attainment, is often built on relationships and in schools these have to be managed.

'Relationships that exist among educators within a school range from vigorously healthy to dangerously competitive. Strengthen those relationships, and you improve professional practice.'

(Barth, 2006:8)

For individuals, transformational change manifests itself through improved teaching quality and assessment that will result in raised pupil attainment. This

is brought about by transformations in practice developed through, for example, lesson study, coaching, trialling new strategies, team teaching with colleagues or through reflection on research.

PLCs have the potential to support such changes when leaders provide the processes for critical reflection on practice (Brookfield, 2003). But to bring about significant changes, leaders are required to be 'transformative leaders' (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007), those who are able to anticipate problems and changes, provide authentic collaborative opportunities and are proactive and deal with long-range planning (Berg et al., 1999).

Enabling transformational change is therefore a key concept to be included in a conceptual framework for a PLC. This is usually directed by leaders but without transformational change to classroom practice, improvements in teacher performance will be slow or may never occur.

My conceptual framework assumes that all four concepts are required for an effective PLC and each of the concepts is dependent upon the others. For example, for collaboration to work effectively across a PLC, systems need to be in place to facilitate the time, meeting structures and outcome reporting. This collaboration is conducted by people *in situ* who have knowledge of the context and who understand what transformation of practice is aimed for or expected. Similarly, for transformation of practice to take place there needs to be a commitment by those *in situ* to understand expectations. There needs to be a systematic approach, clearly communicated, that enables the transformation to occur through collaboration and to bring about raised pupil attainment, the ultimate goal.

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed literature related to how the UK government approaches and attitudes over the decades have changed and shaped 'professional development' for educational professionals. Within this review I have highlighted the gradual shift towards understanding the importance of

‘professional learning’ and its potential to bring about significant change in practice. However, successive governments have remained focused on professional development for teachers rather than professional learning. Even during the 1990s and 2000s when there was growing evidence of the impact of professional learning through PLCs in countries around the world, and from the findings of Bolam et al. (2005) in the UK, there was still no change in government policy towards promoting professional learning as a system-wide strategy for improvement. School leaders decide for themselves, but many remain unaware of the difference between professional development and professional learning and of PLCs and their potential. Why successive governments have not pursued a system-wide focus on ‘teacher professional learning’ may be an interesting future research project.

The literature on PLCs clearly outlines the purpose and potential impact that effectively introduced and sustained PLCs can have on the performance of staff members and on pupil outcomes. The literature also provides the evidence that PLCs are a vehicle for leaders, teachers and support staff members to gain skills, knowledge and confidence to understand and participate in regular professional learning that deepens knowledge and reflective practices.

The review of the literature also informed my rationale for selecting the learning organisation and communities of practice theories, the basis for my understanding of PLCs. My review also informed my conceptual framework, that effective PLCs are collaborative, systematic, situated and transformational, which I justify in this chapter.

In the following chapter I will describe my chosen research methods for my investigation. The methods have been influenced by my review of the literature and by the need to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline the rationale for my research design and methods and how these were influenced by the type of data required for analysis, my pilot study and the ethical issues I encountered in my evolving researcher position. I also justify my data analysis methodology.

During my investigation of methodologies, I realised the importance of selecting methods that would enable appropriate data to be collected in order to answer the key and sub-questions. I aligned my research strategies to established approaches and epistemologies to this field of study and decided on an ethnographic-case study method as this approach is a proven and used by PLC researchers (Hord, 1997; Stoll, 1999 and Hipp and Huffman, 2010).

In researching people, my research falls in to the category of social and behavioural research. Social and behavioural researchers are often required to justify their personal motivation and reasoning behind the research especially when using reflexive qualitative research methodologies (Patton, 2002; Etherington, 2004). As part of this process the researcher determines whether they are an insider or outsider and I begin by discussing this as it was relevant to my position as a researcher.

3.2 Researcher Position

The context of the school (chapter 1), as an improving school with aspirations, appeared to be the ideal school for my research. However, the lack of PLC understanding was evident from the outset and it became increasingly apparent that I might need to provide support and guidance if the school was to begin the process at all. This posed an ethical dilemma for me as a conflict between my researcher position and my professional role. I was therefore going to need to

review, explain and justify my researcher position both for my own benefit, for the school staff members and for the reader of this study.

The ethical boundaries established at the start of the research process, such as issues of bias, pre-conceived views and the issue of power would all need to be re-visited and re-assessed. This re-assessment, however, was to be on-going throughout the research as staff members' continued to view me as a consultant.

In my initial discussions with the Principal, I had made my researcher role clear. In my initial presentation to all staff at the start of the research year I introduced myself as a researcher, presented the PLC concept, the associated characteristics and outlined my plan for the research. I also discussed with all staff members the aims of the research and their participation. In doing this I discussed their right as a participant, to withdraw at any time and I discussed the requirement for written consent. But despite this briefing, staff members continued to view me as a consultant rather than a researcher. There were a number of external consultants already working in the school (chapter 4), so this was a natural assumption for the staff members to make. Staff members were unfamiliar with researchers operating in the school and I therefore had to meet with the Principal on two occasions throughout the year to remind her of my role and to discuss the staff perceptions.

My professional role and my relationship with the Principal (chapter 1) did raise ethical questions regarding my researcher position and this encouraged me to investigate in more detail the two 'binary' 'insider' and 'outsider' research methods (Aoki, 1996). Dwyer and Buckle (2009:60) profess:

'Although a researcher's knowledge is always based on his or her positionality (Mullings, 1999), as qualitative researchers we have an appreciation for the fluidity and multi-layered complexity of human experience. Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference. It seems paradoxical, then, that we would endorse binary alternatives that unduly narrow the range of understanding and experience'.

Butler (2004:108) discusses dilemmas related to the inner and outer binary stance:

‘When we, as researchers, position ourselves as "insider" or "outsider," we attempt to stabilize and make coherent that which is tenuous and discursively constituted. We attempt to say, "I am *not* one of them" or "I *am* one of them." What does this construction of coherence conceal? If the binary positioning is suspect, aren't our ethnographic "findings" equally troubled?’

There is a ‘continuum’ that exists with insider and outsider positions as the binary points. The majority of researchers are situated on the continuum between these positions as few researchers will be, or view themselves to be, entirely an insider or outsider throughout the whole research process as their position shifts, influenced by factors such as socially constructed research groups (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

There are different epistemological issues associated with insider and outsider research. Fundamentally the difference is summarised in two questions: how does the insider make the familiar strange or engage critically with their own framing assumptions? How does the outsider ever really begin to understand the world as it is known and experienced by the insider? (Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP)).

Merton (1972:11) defines the insider/outsider position where:

‘...the claim is put forward as an epistemological principle that particular groups in each moment of history have monopolistic access to particular kinds of knowledge. In the weaker, more empirical form, the claim holds that some groups have privileged access, with other groups being able to acquire that knowledge for themselves but at greater risk and cost’.

Insider researchers benefit from familiarity with the environment, culture and context. I was not familiar with the environment, context or the culture although

through my professional role I had some limited understanding of the school from an external perspective. Apart from a small number of individuals as outlined in chapter 1, I was unfamiliar with the participants. My situation therefore enabled me to be more objective than a complete insider and to make fewer assumptions. For example, I was unfamiliar with the details of the school's history, the micro-politics, friendship groups, personalities, processes, protocols and culture which enabled me to be more objective. I therefore did not have the issue encountered by most insider researchers of separating myself as a researcher from those I was researching. I approached the data collection as an outsider researcher not knowing the participants and would argue that my research was being conducted more in-line with accepted outsider researcher practices and therefore 'on' rather than 'with' participants who were active informants to the research process.

In terms of research, 'insider' is a phrase applied to a researcher who 'belongs' to the research group. The insider researcher shares an identity, language, and experiential base with the study participants (Asselin, 2003). The extreme insider position is described as a 'native' (Glesne, 1999; Kanuha, 2000; Chavez, 2008). Brannick and Coughlan (2007:59) describe insider research:

'...by complete members of organizational systems and communities in and on their own organizations'.

Insiders therefore have an intimate knowledge of the organisation, the people, structures and the environment. Adler and Adler (1987:33) describe the possibility that insider research is:

'...conducted by researchers who temporarily join the organization for the purposes and duration of the research'.

They are not full time employees nor do not belong to the community or organisation.

None of the afore-mentioned descriptions of insider research was applicable to my position.

An outsider researcher is unknown to the study group and is often described as 'parachuting in to people's lives and then vanishing' (Gerrard, 1995:59).

Outsider researchers are perceived to be more objective, detached and unbiased (Labaree, 2002) are unrestricted by preconceived ideas and knowledge and therefore can raise questions unlikely to be raised by insider researchers. The outsider researcher needs to persuade participants to take part and to build their knowledge and understanding of the environment, the culture and the people.

Eppley (2006) argues that a researcher, by nature, has to have some level of 'outside-ness' existing simultaneously with 'inside-ness'.

'There is 'othering' in the very act of studying, a necessary stepping back or distancing in varying degrees. There can be no interpreting without some degree of othering. Researchers, then, can be neither Insider nor Outsider; they are instead temporarily and precariously positioned within a continuum'.

(Eppley, 2006:11)

On commencing my research journey, I considered that I would take the position of an 'outsider' researcher. In hindsight this was a little naïve of me. As my research progressed it became clear, due to my professional role, that I needed to re-assess my position and modus operandi as a researcher. I concluded that my position was best described as both an insider and outsider researcher and this position was not unique. I was an insider as determined by my relationship with the Principal who may want to discuss PLC issues with me, but outsider because of my lack of knowledge of the school, its personnel and its systems. Dwyer and Buckle (2009:54) explain such a position as common for researchers who operate in 'the space between' that 'allows them to occupy the position of insider and outsider rather than insider or outsider'.

Taking the position of neither insider or outsider, I benefited from the assumption that I was more independent, unbiased, and objective. I was also more likely to be able to identify the key players, power differentials and dynamics that existed within the research domain, which are likely to be 'unseen' by insider-researchers (Pitman, 2002).

The Key Stage leaders had been empowered to lead their teams in the development of the PLC, but it emerged during the data collection that they were ill-prepared to do so owing to their lack of knowledge and understanding of a PLC. Consequently, they looked to me for guidance and support which I explained as a researcher would not be possible and I restated the need for the school to own the process. I explained again that I was not a consultant. At this time, I informed the Principal of the situation and recommended that further awareness raising and training for the middle leaders was required. However, it became increasingly evident that two of the three Key Stage leaders were not prepared to take on what they perceived as an additional role and workload and this affected the school's introduction of the PLC.

As a result of my observation of two meetings involving the Key Stage leaders and the resultant lack of activity, the Principal decided that if any progress was to be made she would need to take more responsibility herself or delegate this to a senior leader. This was in the context of increasing demands on the Principal and SLT members where externally imposed priorities, such as the immediacy of raising attainment levels, became the imperative. At an early stage in the year I therefore had to decide whether or not to continue with the research in this school. If continuing as a researcher how far, if at all, could I go in offering a steer or advice? On the continuum between insider and outsider positioning, what is permissible or accepted practice in providing a steer or guidance? Would my research position be as an insider, outsider or 'both'? An outsider by definition and at the extreme binary point would not be offering any advice, guidance or assistance to the school at all.

These issues highlighted the need to regularly re-visit my position so that I was always clear as to the parameters of my research brief.

I reminded the Principal that I would not interfere or provide advice to any member of staff as my role would solely be to conduct research through observation, reviewing documentation and conducting interviews and questionnaires. By doing this I would remain on the 'periphery' as described by Dwyer and Buckle (2009) who identified three 'membership roles' of qualitative researchers engaged in observational methods.

'(a) peripheral member researchers, who do not participate in the core activities of group members; (b) active member researchers, who become involved with the central activities of the group without fully committing themselves to the members' values and goals; and (c) complete member researchers, who are already members of the group or who become fully affiliated during the course of the research'.

(Dwyer and Buckle, 2009:55)

Similarly, Gold (1958) identified four roles researchers can take when studying human interactions including complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer, and complete participant. I considered which of these best described my role and concluded that if I was to provide a steer at all to the Principal then my position would need to shift to become a participant observer.

Much of what is written regarding insider/outsider research applies to long term ethnographic studies where the researcher is fully immersed on a full-time basis. For me this was not the case. I had on-going contact with the school and made visits to observe meetings and professional development activities, conduct interviews or review documents but I was not fully immersed. It was only in my interactions with the Principal that I became the 'participant observer' through listening to her reviews of progress and to her intentions. I reviewed documentation in isolation, questionnaires were completed independently and the semi-structured interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis with selected individuals based on their responses to the initial questionnaire, all within the practices of an outsider researcher.

As with all researchers, my situation was unique. The insider/outsider researcher issue was an interesting one that took me on a journey of exploration from an assumption of being an outsider researcher to a participant observer position, but I began the year as a researcher closer to outsider than insider position, located towards the middle of the continuum.

3.2.1 The Issue of Power

There were two issues of power, the perceived power that I held through my professional role and my power as the researcher.

My professional role derived from staff perceptions of traditional hierarchical structures in schools. School systems in England are based, it is argued (Smylie, 1992), on teachers' acceptance of authority, cooperation and integration of power relationships. Hopkins and Jackson (2003) refer to 'power' being related to 'managerial relationships' and 'management structures'. As these structures are familiar to the participants in this study, it is reasonable to assume that they saw me as an educational leader. This was reinforced through my relationship with their Principal and by implication that I had 'hierarchical power' (Hopkins and Reynolds, 2001) aligned with that of their Principal.

The term 'power' is also closely associated with 'authority' and 'influence' (Conway, 1993) and by implication anyone who possesses any one of these advantages is likely to have all three. Colleagues who perceive that they do not have these advantages will feel less confident and potentially more intimidated, in the main, when in the presence of those who do.

The second perception was my power as a researcher as I had knowledge that others did not. I set the agendas, determined the boundaries and scope of the research, asked the questions, manipulated the data and conducted the analysis drawing conclusions.

When conducting interviews, the researcher is often seen as more powerful than the interviewees (Kvale, 1996). However, some researchers argue that participants also hold and exercise power which can affect the outcomes of the research (Munro et al. 2004; Thapar-Bjorkert and Henry 2004). Mercer (2007), however, argues that power relations only become an issue for the insider researcher if they hold a more senior position than the research participants.

It is important for any researcher to consider power issues when reflecting on their position, such as power relations with respect to the group or individuals, or when considering those who have power over them.

I believe my perceived power did vary from one participant to the next. This was illustrated in the manner that some interviewees responded openly to questions whilst others were more guarded. Also, some responded cautiously, providing very brief answers to questions and not fully explaining their answers even when asked to do so. Anticipating this may be the case, I designed my research to include a methodological approach through multiple methods that would support the triangulation of data so I was not solely reliant on responses to questions through the questionnaires or interviews.

3.3 Research Design

I considered a number of qualitative, quantitative, phenomenological, observational and interpretive approaches and during my investigation I began to realise the importance of clarifying the purpose and direction of my design and methods before aligning my research strategies to established epistemologies.

For this study I proceeded on the understanding that improving pupil attainment through consistently high quality teaching was the aim of the PLC. This would be achieved through the ongoing professional learning of leaders, teachers and

support staff members who work in the school on a day-to-day basis and would be active participants in a PLC.

In the research design process, I applied Yin's (2003) external validity protocols and in the data analysis I applied internal validity protocols. For example, to avoid Silverman's (2005) criticism that key informants' perspectives may be more 'valid' than that of others, I treated all participants' feedback equally. In analysing the qualitative and quantitative data I attempted to address internal validity by looking at complementary evidence and by generating explanations that are compared with alternative perspectives both internal and external through researching other case studies, for example, Arbogast (2004), Burdett (2009), Voelkel (2011), Carpenter (2012) and Owen (2014).

3.4 Research Methodology

3.4.1 Choice of Methodology

My research was an empirical study investigating a 'real life' (Yin, 2003) and dynamic work environment that did not involve experiments or manipulated social settings. I chose an ethnographic-case study approach, used widely by other PLC researchers such as Hord (1997) and Stoll (1999) in order to understand what is in effect a human phenomenon involving social interactions, views and experiences in a unique context and predicated on an interpretive paradigm.

The nature of the investigation lent itself to a qualitative research approach whereby exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research (Yin, 2009) data could be collected to inform the knowledge-base of people's views and perspectives. My approach therefore needed to be holistic, context sensitive, comprehensive and systematic (Patton, 2002) resulting in an in-depth analysis of the complex and multi-dimensional components of professional educationalists' work towards their self-improvement.

Following consideration of a number of qualitative methodologies, including multiple case studies, action research and radical research (Schostak and Schostak, 2008) I selected an ethnographic-case study methodology. Ethnographic-case studies have the unique strength to deal with a myriad of different types of evidence (Yin, 2003) particularly when answering 'how' and 'why' research questions such as mine. At the outset of my research I believed that combining ethnography with case study would enable me to collect the most appropriate data. I was encouraged to pursue this approach based on my research of PLC literature, much of which is conducted using case study methodology (Hord et al, 1999; Stoll, 1999; Craft, 2000; DuFour et al, 2008; Lieberman and Miller, 2008; Hipp and Huffman, 2010). This interpretive methodological approach, making meaning and theoretical approaches explicit (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006), would enable me to obtain a rich and deep (Saljo, 1979; Biggs, 1987; Stake 2005) understanding of people's thoughts and reflections allowing for in-depth analysis of complex inter-related behaviours within small samples (Yin, 2003; Hammersley, 2006) in order to collect real time data within a holistic study (Feagin et al, 1991; Patton, 2002; Hammersley, 2006). The complexity of the issues, views and engagement is not easily quantifiable and the need for exploratory methods leading to 'thick' description was considered more appropriate for providing the data that could be best interrogated for this type of study.

Typical ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection: semi-structured interviews, observation, and documents. This in turn produces three kinds of data, quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents resulting in one product, narrative description.

Ethnographic methods are a means of tapping local points of view and community knowledge (Moll and Greenberg, 1990), a means of identifying significant categories of human experience up close and personal. However, by doing so there is the potential to gather a large quantity and range of data that could prove difficult and time-consuming to analyse, and more importantly would not significantly contribute to the quality of evidence. Therefore, defined

boundaries were clearly needed (Cresswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). For me these included the selection of one school only; a focus on the groups that had a direct and daily impact on pupils; restrictions on the number of interviewees and time-limited interviews.

An exclusive ethnographic or case study approach was considered for this study but dismissed. An ethnographic approach alone was not possible due to the constraints on time and on the fact that during teaching time, the majority, if not all of the participants, would be teaching, supporting teachers or generally involved in individual leadership tasks and therefore not involved in PLC-type activities. Formal PLC related activities required organisation and to be recognised by leaders and staff members as PLC activities. Also, I could only observe if I was invited, or at least informed. Informal activities were too random to be able to effectively observe unless I was full-time in the school which was impossible due to my full-time role.

The sole case-study approach was rejected as it was considered that some periods of time in the school observing, listening to conversations, looking at documents in context and investigating the purpose, origins and audience for the documents would add value to the data collected. I therefore considered that some periods of immersion would support the understanding of data in context and the triangulation of data.

My mixed methods research approach (semi-structured interviews, questionnaires document analysis and observations of meetings) provided opportunities to collect qualitative data relating to staff members' views, attitudes and understanding of the school, leadership and emerging PLC. This supported methodological triangulation and corroboration (Mason, 1996; Denzin, 1989; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) and would enable a descriptive and analytical approach to the data analysis. But Silverman (2005) warns that the mixed methods approach alone may not ensure validity. Therefore, in conducting my research I was aware of the issues and addressed them where possible through triangulation of data and through comparisons to findings in

similar studies (Dooner et.al, 2008; Pitman, 2008; Hyacinthe, 2011; Owen, 2014).

Researching in this way is consistent with much of the case study research into PLCs conducted to date (Hord, 1997; Hipp and Huffman, 2010; Owen, 2014) and was also consistent with strategies adopted by researchers for small-scale and time-limited research of this nature.

3.5 Limitations of ethnographic case studies

In analysing qualitative data, I was aware of different views of my chosen methodology. Silverman (2005:379) criticises case study methodology for treating '*social facts* as existing independently of the activities of the researcher(s) and the participants'. Verschuren (2003) argues that most criticisms of case study, and indeed other qualitative methodologies, derive from a 'reductionistic' basis. This is the theory that every complex phenomenon can be explained through analysis of the simplest and basic physical mechanisms that are used during the phenomenon.

'...there is a lot of risk or even hypocrisy in qualifying the case study as subjective or researcher dependent'.

(Verschuren, 2003: 133)

Those that support quantitative and scientific approaches often criticise qualitative approaches such as ethnography and case study because the methods can be used to 'justify just about anything' and only investigate a few or even one case. It is claimed that there is an absence of academic rigour and an assumption of what is observed is 'the norm'. Research approaches are considered to be not systematic which can lead to bias. Bias can be compounded by the reliance on subjective data that is based on the participant's description, opinion and feelings.

Compared to 'reductionistic' (Vershuren, 2003) methodologies, case study in particular is considered anti-intellectual. The uniqueness of a case or an ethnographic study can be contested as having a tendency to exaggerate findings which are not regarded as scientific. Results are often regarded as unreliable and lacking in validity and generalizability (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982; Ragin, 1989; Yin, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998) due to the nature of the research and the way in which it was conducted.

Ethnographic-case studies, such as mine, are criticised for involving 'fuzzy predictions' (Bassey, 2001) that will not achieve the scientific results of quantitative research. The integrity of the research is through the researcher applying appropriately recognised and applied practices and protocols.

Criticisms of ethnographic-case studies (including ethnography and case study) are countered by the arguments that the significant features of the case or object can be described and compared with those found elsewhere. 'Thick description' results from 'thick detail' that has been observed and recorded. Flyvberg (2004) and Gerring (2007) agree that 'thick knowledge' gained through qualitative approaches counters, to a degree, the lack of quantitative data.

3.6 Rigour, Reliability, Bias, Plausibility and Validity

Yin (2003) discusses the need for systematic procedures to be followed when carrying out case study research. A lack of such an approach may result in bias through the collection of data. Yin (1989), Stake (2005) and others who have wide experience in case study methodologies, have developed robust procedures. When these procedures are followed the researcher will be following methods as well developed and tested as any in the scientific field. In addressing the issues of rigour, validity, reliability and plausibility within case study research, Yin (2003) outlines four tests for case study research. His four tests are focused on construct validity, internal validity (Miles and Huberman, 1994), external validity and reliability and they address what Hammersley

(1990) refers to as the search for truth within the phenomena being researched. These same principles are applicable to ethnography. I attempted throughout my research to check my data with others to ensure reliability and validity, in particular with regard to the issues I was encountering with my position as a researcher.

Essentially reliability refers to the security of the data, how it was collected, how objective it is, the accuracy of findings and consistency of findings over time. Hammersley (1993) discusses reliability and consistency of data either between researchers or of one researcher over time. Objectivity could also encourage a lack of bias, personal views or other factors that may distort or manipulate the data towards a planned outcome.

In my position of participant observer, I needed to be particularly aware of bias, hence using a second rater to feedback on my research instruments, analyse my data, validate the questionnaire data and coding of semi-structured interview responses.

In my research I needed to ensure that the data collected were genuine views and opinions and not constrained. I therefore collected data in a systematic manner, recording and collating data and having the data checked by the independent rater. I maintained notes of the limited number of observations I was able to undertake and I analysed the few documents made available to me notably the School Improvement Plan, the CPD policy, two sets of management meetings, the school partnership strategy document outlining the school's working with external partners and the remit provided to a consultant for supporting leadership development.

With regard to bias, I needed to ensure that any influence I had on the Principal in offering advice was considered in the data analysis process. However, by the end of the research year the Principal had not asked me for advice with regard to the establishment or operations of a PLC, so this was irrelevant.

3.7 Ethical implications and considerations

Ethical research is defined by Resnik (1998:1) as 'norms of conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour'. It is important to adhere to these norms when conducting research so as to promote the aims of the research, leading:

'...to truth, knowledge and 'avoidance of error'; to value collaborative working including trust, respect and accountability; to be accountable to the reader with the protection of the truth; to gain public support and confidence that the outcomes are reliable and just and finally to promote moral and social values'.

(Resnik,1998:1)

Gall et al. (1996) describe four ethical areas applicable to case study research: Utilitarian ethics – the morality of the case; Deontological ethics – the values of honesty, fairness and justice; Relational ethics – caring for others and Ecological ethics – the cultural or social context.

Noting these principles and guidance, I adopted ethical approaches in accordance with British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) prior to conducting the research I sought and gained ethical approval from the University of Leicester.

I provided the Principal and participants with written information (Appendices 3 and 4) regarding the nature and purpose of the research and of their role within the research. I gained all relevant permissions from the school and from individuals through informed consent. I ensured participants were volunteers and I emphasised in briefings and through written information their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. I was careful to inform participants of their right to privacy and I provided, through the school, an environment for data collection that was confidential and non-threatening. I reassured them that there would be no detrimental impact on them as individuals or to their collective professionalism. Furthermore, through the briefing and written information, I informed participants of how the findings would be disclosed protecting their

anonymity. The briefing with respondents was held at a convenient time to them in order to minimise disruption.

The school provided a room that allowed for confidential and un-interrupted interviews. I encouraged the interviewees to be as honest and open as they could be again assuring them of anonymity and confidentiality. I was also aware of my manner, voice tone, body language and interview technique in an attempt to provide a relaxed environment. Freebody (2003) emphasises the influence that the researcher can have on the interview situation and that the researcher needs to do all that they can to minimise this influence.

Ethical issues also apply to the analysis of the data. The raw data is a person's own view or opinion using his or her own words. When observing colleagues, I was aware of the individual's actions or behaviours in context noting that it may be a unique reaction and not the norm and of the 'more sensitive' (Boyatzis, 1998:61) data that needed to be treated cautiously, particularly with regard to the person's informed consent, confidentiality and protection. I was also aware of writing and securing my field notes in order maintain confidentiality and anonymity of those I observe.

As the researcher it was important I acknowledged my own theoretical positions, bias and values in relation to qualitative research. It was not appropriate for me to have a naïve realist view of qualitative research whereby I can simply 'give voice' (Fine, 2002) to my participants. Fine (2002: 218) cautions researchers that the 'giving voice' approach 'involves carving out unacknowledged pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit, and deploy to border our arguments'.

Throughout my research I was aware of maintaining honesty and research rigour as I considered and reflected upon these issues that confronted me. I also carefully reviewed these issues and how they could impact upon my selection of methods, data collection and data analysis as my researcher position changed.

3.8 Generalizability

To apply the findings from one case study setting to other settings is problematic. Yin (2003:10) discusses how case studies are ‘generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations’ therefore I needed to develop a detailed understanding of my selected school’s context and carefully monitor its unique journey whilst identifying issues that may be more generalizable. Stake (1995) refers to this as ‘particularisation’ whereby knowledge is created from a unique situation but is relevant to, and can be applied to other settings.

3.9 Research Methods

3.9.1 School Selection

I chose to conduct my research in one primary school located in an inner-city context. The single school context would provide the deep data that could be usefully analysed and triangulated through mixed methodologies in order to draw conclusions and to answer the research question which could only be investigated in a single school setting.

The selection criteria for the school were based upon the following:

- Gaining access to teachers, support staff and senior colleagues who were willing, open and supportive of the research
- School located within an inner-city environment and ideally within the partnership area
- School should have at least one class per age group.
- School should not be in an Ofsted category
- The Principal should have been in position for at least two years

These criteria were selected in order for the study school to be in a position to support the research.

3.9.2 Participant Selection

I acknowledge the potential contribution of governors, business partners, parents and other stakeholders associated with the school, but as this study was focused on the introduction of a school-based PLC, I decided to limit the participant group to the education professionals employed and working daily in the school. I decided to focus on the individuals that collaborate on a daily basis, support the learning of each other and learn together as these work colleagues would be crucial to the effective establishment of a sustainable PLC. To answer my research question it was my aim to elicit data on how leaders determined the time to introduce the PLC, their knowledge of the PLC and of its potential and how they approached introducing the PLC.

I chose not to include the Governors, Academy sponsors, Local Authority, auxiliary staff or other stakeholders such as parents, secondary schools, business sponsors, religious groups or others. Data collected from these groups could contribute to the evidence base, but their day-to-day commitment to, and knowledge of, the PLC would be more limited.

The selection of the interviewees for the semi-structured interviews was based on the responses to the questionnaire. The aim of the semi-structured interviews was to two-fold. Firstly, to seek clarification if responses were not clear, or to ask for further information or detail in order to secure a deeper understanding and secondly to ascertain if views and attitudes and how staff members reacted to events as the journey unfolded.

Participation in the research was voluntary and participants agreed by signing a consent form (Appendices 5 and 6).

3.9.3 Data Collection

The methods selected, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis, were most relevant to gathering the type of data required to answer the research question and to gather data using the PLC characteristics and four concepts (see Chapter 2) as a framework. These methods had proven successful when used by other PLC researchers (Hord, 1997; Stoll and Fink, 1996; DuFour and Eaker, 1998 and Hipp and Huffman, 2010).

In accordance with ethnographic-case study practice, Cresswell (1998:68) suggests that 'research should take place overtime to allow extensive data to be gathered from multiple sources including observations, interviews, documents and audio-visual materials'. This provides breadth and depth of data that is difficult to collect on a large scale within an organisation. Denscombe (1998:73) warns that 'conceptual tools are not and can never be passive instruments of discovery' and should be applied to support both researcher and participant in making the outcomes live, relevant and deep. My data was therefore gathered over one academic year (September to July).

In order to test the suitability of my data collection tools and their 'fitness for purpose' (Yin 2003), I undertook a pilot with leaders, teachers and classroom support staff in a different inner-city primary school to that involved in my main research. The outcome of the pilot resulted in some changes to the questions on the questionnaire and to the information that I provided on definitions of the PLC characteristics to assist clarity and consistency of understanding. These changes are reported in more detail in the following sections as they related to the different research tools.

In order to collate the data, I collected the data on a spreadsheet under the following headings:

Identification of the participant	Identity of origin, e.g. document	Match data to code, noting pos/neg	Match coded data to sub theme	Match sub theme to key theme	Identify frequency of responses overall and frequency of groups	Rater agreement

This enabled me to methodically analyse the data and provide a consistent format for the independent rater and myself to use.

3.9.4 Access

At the start of the research year I had agreed with the SLT that I would provide questionnaires to all staff members and following analysis of the questionnaires I would conduct interviews with representatives of leaders, teachers and support staff. This would be repeated at the end of year so I could again clarify responses but also investigate changes in views since the start and end of the year. It was also agreed that senior leaders would provide me with documents that related to the PLC development including policies, minutes of meetings and plans. Leaders would inform me of relevant meetings and provide me with access to professional development or learning events or activities to observe.

At the start of the year I conducted twenty interviews (6 with leaders, 4 with teachers and 9 with support staff) (46.5% of all staff) and seventeen at the end of the year (5 with leaders, 3 with teachers and 9 with support staff members) (39.5% of the total staff). Thirty-five staff members (81.3% of the total staff) completed the questionnaire at the start of the year and twenty-eight at the end of the year (65.1% of the total staff). Disappointingly, I was only provided with a very limited number of documents (section 3.6) and I was only informed of two meetings and one training session across the year. This limited the data that I

could collect through document analysis and observation. I did remind the Principal during the year of our agreement and asked again to see the promised documents and details of activities for me to observe. After six months, the Principal informed me that due to Academisation, policies were being reviewed, SLT meetings in the main were now confidential between the school leaders and Academy sponsors and the school plans were being reviewed by leaders and Academy sponsors, and again these were to remain confidential.

This research was being undertaken at a time when the school was entering another period of instability (chapter1) due to the pressures exerted by the Academy Trust, something that was unpredictable by the Principal or me at the start of the research year. These pressures on the Principal led, in part at least, to her becoming distracted away from the PLC and the research and not being able to provide all the documentation discussed at the outset or access to meetings and training activities.

3.9.5 Questionnaires

All participants were introduced to the questionnaire at the research introduction and briefing session at the start of the year. Structured questionnaires (Youngman, 1982) (Appendix 7) were completed by leaders (6), teachers (16) and support staff (13) at the start of the research year. At the end of the year, leaders (6), teachers (10) and support staff members (12) completed the questionnaire again to provide data regarding differences in attitudes and perceptions over time and to raise any new points. Fewer staff members completed the questionnaire at the end of the year as the questionnaires were completed in staff meeting time (in order to ensure the completion and return) so I was reliant on attendance at the meeting in the main, with the option to follow-up with absentees after the meeting. Due to training events, illness and other distractions, fewer staff members attended the end of year meeting. When I followed up with absentees and requested

completion and return by a given date, only two staff members responded. The structured questionnaires attempted to minimise issues of ambiguity and bias (Bell, 2006). The completion of the questionnaires during a staff meeting demonstrated leadership support by providing the time. This enabled me to conduct my data collection in a controlled environment that required staff members to complete the questionnaire before leaving the room. I was aware that this also provided participants the opportunity to discuss the questions and their responses, so they completed the questionnaires in silence following an explanation and request from me.

The questionnaires had been piloted in a different school and following the pilot, some minor amendments were made to wording of questions in an attempt to clarify meaning as there had been some confusion regarding interpretation of language, e.g. what does collective responsibility really mean or involve? I therefore decided to provide a more detailed description of each of the PLC characteristics in order to achieve greater consistency of understanding of the different terms. I also decided that I needed to control the completion of the questionnaires for the main study due to some participants not returning the questionnaires on time, hence the completion of the questionnaires at the start and end of the year during staff meetings. Furthermore, I also decided to provide more information as to what I meant by 'informal' and 'formal' professional development again in order to elicit consistent understanding of terminology.

The twelve questions in the questionnaire (Appendix 7) were aligned to the conceptual framework and referred to the PLC characteristics and they required a mix of qualitative and quantitative responses.

The questionnaire was designed to elicit data on current school practices including attitudes and opinions regarding those practices. Nine of the twelve questions required both quantitative and qualitative responses whilst the other three required qualitative answers only. The questionnaire was constructed to

be as brief as possible asking open-ended questions (Bell, 2006; Dawson, 2007; Hannan, 2007).

Of the twelve questions asked, one focused on current PLC knowledge, eight on current professional development and learning practice and three questions focused on leadership and capacity. The focus on professional development and learning was for two reasons, firstly, as this is an area familiar to the participants and secondly because it is a significant component of a PLC. The school's leadership of professional development and learning is an indicator of the importance and potential impact placed on these significant school improvement areas. Also, how leaders approach, or are perceived to approach these areas also affects perceptions of capacity building, managing staff relationships, staff engagement and the significance of these on pupil attainment.

The questionnaire was designed to take no more than thirty minutes as literature had informed me that the optimum time for completion of questionnaires was under thirty minutes (Bell, 2006; Dawson, 2007; Hannan, 2007). If more time was allocated, I would have risked the quality of answers diminishing for questions as the questionnaire progressed.

The questionnaire method was chosen as this enables data to be gathered from a large number of people. The pilot had ensured that the final questions were appropriately worded to achieve consistency of understanding (as much as possible as a questionnaire is always open to individual interpretation) and to ensure that they were not leading, offensive or presuming questions (Bell, 2006). Responses were tested and extended through the semi-structured interviews allowing me to follow-up on the questionnaire responses.

3.9.6 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interview questions were prepared and trialled during the pilot study. The schedule had seven sections, each focusing on a specific area (Appendix 8). Questions were written to elicit data with reference to the study's research questions and in the context of the conceptual framework (chapter 2).

The sections collected data on:

- current PLC knowledge (Situating);
- current school professional development and learning practices (Situating, Collaborative, Systematic);
- views on improving current practices (Situating, Systematic, Transformational);
- the impact of current practices on learning and teaching – self and school (Situating, Collaborative, Systematic);
- leadership within the school (Situating, Systematic);
- capacity to embrace change (Situating, Systematic, Transformational);
- clarification of responses to questions on the questionnaire.

I limited the interview time to twenty minutes as I was restricted by staff members' availability and I was aware of optimising the time (Dawson, 2007; Hannan, 2007). Following the pilot study and feedback I did consider attempting to extend the time-limit, but decided against it as I did not believe that any added time would produce more useable data. Instead I reviewed my questioning technique in order to elicit more focused answers. This worked in some cases but as expected, not all. Some participants still misinterpreted the question or terms. This was due in the main to the lack of knowledge and use of the PLC terminology in the school, for example, references to the word 'community' meant that some interviewees reverted to thinking of the wider school community (parents, shopkeepers, businesses) and not the school community. Also, when professional learning was discussed, interviewees only discussed professional development activities. I also modified my questioning

technique in order to allow the participants to discuss the points they wished to make within the parameters explained to them, so I was aware of not allowing them to go off on tangents.

Interviewees for the semi-structured interviews were selected based on the initial questionnaire responses through purposive sampling (Creswell, 1998). At the start of the year six leaders, four teachers and nine support staff were interviewed. At the end of the year five leaders, three teachers and nine support staff members were interviewed. This represented forty-eight percent of the teaching and support staff members. The cohort size was selected as a manageable number sufficient to enable a deep analysis. At the start of each interview, interviewees were reminded of the right to withdraw and of the purpose and use of the interview data. Interviews were pre-arranged and held in private spaces (offices) assuring privacy and no interruptions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants receiving a copy of the transcript for approval.

The semi-structured interviews sought clarification and allowed for follow-up and in-depth questioning to investigate attitudinal change across the year. Also, they could add examples and contextual information where they had not thought this appropriate in the questionnaire. The use of the semi-structured interview method enabled me to have an 'aide memoir' of points to discuss and to have flexibility to enable me to follow up on issues raised (Denscombe, 1998).

The interviews also allowed me the opportunity to encourage the interviewees to overcome any fears or apprehensions regarding the sharing of their views or feelings on paper. I was aware of my position of power. Some of the interviewees remained reluctant, due to factors such as loyalty to the school or its leaders or the fear of being identified, to be open and share information despite the reassurances I provided.

3.9.7 Unstructured Observations

Unstructured observation was selected as an appropriate method to support my ethnographic-case study approach as observation provides an opportunity to conduct 'real-time' (Stake, 2005) and 'situated' analysis. My observational foci were to collect data on the approaches taken by leaders through their conduct and information dissemination towards engaging staff members in understanding and introducing the PLC. Furthermore, I was also focused on how staff members perceived the PLC or had ideas and views for progressing the PLC. This was in the context of current practice and progress towards change.

Given the range of the potential observable activities including meetings, training sessions and informal discussions, the instrument I chose was to keep a log to record notes and observations of topics discussed, interactions, leadership strategies, staff member reactions and any other issues other issues worthy of recording. The variables for observation were:

Personnel	Purpose	Approach	Interactions	Protocols
(Who was involved)	(Why this interaction taking place)	(Leadership strategy)	(Notable discussion direction; relationships; transformational practice; decision-making)	(Conduct of the meeting)

Figure 4
Observation variables

The selection of these variables were related to the conceptual framework with the focus on individuals working collaboratively in situ (personnel, purpose and interactions), operating in a system that was moving towards a distributed

leadership model (Approach and protocols) and moving towards transformations in practice (purpose and interactions).

In the observation of training, I was careful not to allow my presence to affect the participants. I conducted observations as an outsider observer focused on the data to be collected within the boundaries that I had established, notably the personal and professional interactions, the focus and direction of discussions, decision-making processes, power relationships and meeting protocols (Cresswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998) as they relate to the PLC characteristics and to my PLC conceptual framework.

Observing professional development and learning activities, along with leadership and any other relevant meetings, would enable me to gather different types of data and support the checking of accuracy and frequency of issue being raised. It was disappointing that these opportunities were few in number due to the lack of invitations to observe.

3.9.8 Document Analysis

Documentation made available was outlined in section 3.6. I had sight of minutes of two SLT meetings that I was not allowed to retain or to quote from due to the confidential nature of these minutes at this time. The Principal selected the documentation that she was willing and able to share, but this was very limited and not what had been agreed at the outset of the research.

I was aware as a researcher that documents do not necessarily exhibit an objective truth. These types of documents are contextualised within the circumstances of their construction. I was also aware not to take these inadvertent sources at face value and I investigated through questioning the staff on their knowledge of these documents and how the policy documents impacted on practice.

It is suggested (Tosh, 2002) that qualities of scepticism as well as empathy need to be employed when analysing documents and I took this on board in my approach to document analysis. In the main I used the limited number of available documents to triangulate data from other sources.

3.9.9 Data Analysis

Central to qualitative data analysis is the task of discovering themes, relevant to my research as I decided to apply a thematic analysis approach.

The term ‘themes’ refers to abstract constructs which researchers identify before, during and after data collection. This data needs to be collected and analysed within a structure that will be rigorous, valid, reliable and plausible. By applying a thematic analysis approach, I ensured that the outcomes of this research were robust and secure. Thematic analysis involves the application of a systematic set of procedures for gathering and analysing data out of which the theory is developed (Boyatzis, 1998) (Appendix 9). This approach offers an accessible and theoretically-flexible process to analysing qualitative data and there is an obvious relationship between data collection, data analysis, conceptualisation, theorising and continual comparison, all fundamental to this ethnographic case study research.

When considering the data, I needed to be aware of the perspective that an individual comes from when offering their personal views. Responses to questions may be affected when asked ‘explain what you do...’, ‘what do you think...?’ or ‘what are your views?’ Responses can be influenced by the respondents’ time served in a school, their experience, position, peer influences, the way they are managed, personal opinions and bias, to name a few. In analysing and reporting on the data I have attempted to use evidence that is representative of people’s opinions wherever possible.

3.9.10 Coding system and procedures

As guided through literature on thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001), I approached the data analysis by constructing a coding manual and record (see Appendix 9) which included details on the process and tools to analyse and record the data. In order to construct the manual, I had to consider my approaches to, and justification for, inductive rather than deductive coding and I decided, following research, that inductive coding was more applicable as I was gathering data rather than applying a theory.

I used a coding system in the analysis of the interview transcript and questionnaire text responses. I applied the four conceptual frames (situated, systematic, transformational and collaborative) as the starting point as these had formed the framework for the construction of the data collection tools, and within these four areas data segments were created in order to apply to the text in both the questionnaires and interview transcripts.

The coding system was developed and piloted. When analysing the data from the pilot study and through the processing of the data, the system evolved and changed to accommodate the new themes and sub-themes as they emerged.

In order to check the consistency of coding I coded each interview transcript twice using a new or clean document each time. I also recruited the support of an independent rater who analysed the data in order to support the validation of the data. The number of responses relating to each of the themes by both myself and the independent rater was recorded. We sought to identify any differentiation within the themes including positive and negative references.

The independent rater provided feedback on the coding system as well as coding responses independently. The inter-rater reliability was tested:

$$\% \text{ agreement} = \frac{\text{number of times both coders agreed}}{\text{number of times coding possible}}$$

The overall agreement between myself and the independent rater was 67.3%.

3.9.11 Identifying Emergent Themes

As the analysis was taking place themes emerged (perceptions of leadership, conflict and tension and internal/external factors) and within each of these themes, sub themes emerged identified through the frequency of coded narrative statements in responses at interview or through questionnaires (Appendix 10). The statements could be analysed as positive or negative and were identified through statements or segments by matching participants' comments and phrases to themes related to the conceptual framework. Where there was evidence from observation notes or document analysis, this was used to contribute to and triangulate the data. The themes formed the focus for the research analysis:

Themes	Sub Themes	Conceptual Framework
Perceptions of Leadership	Communication Distributed leadership	Situated Systematic Transformational
Conflict and Tension	Leadership team relationships Leaders and staff members' relationships School and Sponsors relationships Structures and processes	Situated Collaboration Systematic
Capacity building through Internal and External processes	Consultants influence Prof. Development and Learning	Situated Systematic Transformational Collaboration

3.10 Conclusion

The research design and methodology were selected to enable the effective collection of data in order to address the research question. In an ethnographic case study such as this, it is usual for the majority of data to be qualitative in nature. In order to capture and analyse such data I have used methods commensurate with many ethnographic-case studies notably questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations.

The data I collected from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews was significant in quantity and depth providing rich contextual data and were fit for purpose. What was disappointing was the lack of documentary and observational data collected due to the issues of restricted access. This evidence would have supported more in-depth triangulation and offered different types of data for analysis. I therefore had to rely more on researching similar PLC case studies than I had first anticipated. I also had to revisit the questionnaire and semi-structured interview data for further evidence.

As with most studies of this nature, there are limitations to my chosen methods with regard to validity and generalizability. These include such issues as the personalised nature of responses and the individual context of the school. I ensured reliability through valid and robust data, triangulated by using mixed methods and research of similar studies.

I have explained my researcher orientation with a view to establishing honesty and transparency as my research position changed. During my research year I moved from a complete outsider position to one of both insider and outsider. I also considered that my observer position shifted as I became a participant observer.

The move to an insider and outsider researcher was due in part to how I was perceived by the school staff members and the support that the leaders required from me. I reviewed my research methodology as my researcher position changed so I that remained as close to the outsider researcher position as possible.

The key themes that emerged through the data analysis, capacity-building through internal and external contributors, conflict and tension and perceptions of leadership, including professional learning leadership, will be discussed in the following three chapters.

CHAPTER 4

CAPACITY-BUILDING THROUGH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTORS

4.1 Introduction

The Principal at Oldtown Primary School made the decision to pursue a PLC in 2011 in the hope that it would support the school's ongoing journey towards improvement. This study focused on what happened as the journey began.

When reading this and the following chapters, it should be noted that the data is based upon responses from staff members who were working in an environment of significant change (chapter 1). For some staff members these changes led to confusion as to what to attribute to what! So not all comments should be viewed as relating to the PLC. Also to be considered is the history of the school, the reasons behind the appointment of the Principal and the impact of Academisation. The context had a significant impact on the introduction of the PLC as will be seen through the evidence.

This chapter describes the first of three themes, capacity building, through existing and newly introduced internal systems and through the contributions of external consultants, that emerged from the data.

The two other themes, conflict and tensions and perceptions of leadership, will be discussed in the next two chapters.

All three themes are inter-related. For example, the impact of capacity-building (Chapter 4) is determined by leadership (Chapter 6), and conflict and tension (Chapter 5) is strongly affected by leadership and impacts on the school's ability to build capacity. However, I have attempted to draw clear parameters

for each theme but there will be cross-referencing to the other themes throughout the chapters.

This theme emerged from the significant number of coded responses across the two semi-structured interviews (41.6%, n= 425/1021) (Appendix 10), from questionnaire responses and from my observations and document analysis. Within responses captured under the theme of capacity-building were a number of sub-themes, notably internal contributors of distributed leadership, formal professional development (particularly formal activities of lesson study, coaching and mentoring and team working) informal procedures, e.g. discussions regarding sharing practice and resources, and external contributors with the role of the consultants highlighted in particular.

Capacity-building of individuals and of the staff members as a collective is essentially the aim of a PLC. Senge (1990) discusses the need for a learning organisation to expand its capacity in order to develop. Building the capacity of an individual through personal growth, development and improvement delivered via ongoing professional learning is at the core. By sharing and creating knowledge by individuals and teams ultimately supports the school's improvement. To achieve this, systems need to be in place (DuFour and DuFour, 2012) with co-ordinated opportunities for individual and team development. PLCs can therefore build capacity, transform practice, develop collaboration and improve the quality of learning and teaching.

I start by reporting how the internal and external data emerged as a result of the school's leadership development strategy and in response to the changing school priorities.

Before I do so, a reminder that the terms 'internal' and 'external' in the context of this study (Appendix 1) are defined as:

Internal - Within school development (change) or intervention driven, led and managed by full or part time staff members.

External - Within school development (change) or intervention driven, led and managed by an external consultant/body.

4.2 Capacity-building

4.2.1 Capacity-building Context

Oldtown Primary School's need to build staff capacity was not uncommon as schools vary (Stoll, 1999) and often this is determined dependent upon whether the school is cruising, struggling or sinking (Stoll and Fink, 1996). Under this description Oldtown Primary School would be described as 'struggling' having been a 'sinking' school and therefore capacity building would be perceived as more difficult to achieve in the short term. A long term process of capacity-building is not uncommon in schools that move towards a PLC (Ho and Chen, 2013).

The school was also working with networks such as Teaching School alliances, other schools, local universities and an educational partnership for support with particular areas of improvement. This network provided professional development opportunities, accredited courses or facilitated placements for members of staff. The placements included opportunities to observe outstanding practice. However, there was a strong SLT belief that consultants working *in situ* alongside staff members supporting, leading, advising and steering their practice was the most appropriate way to build capacity and confidence towards developing independence. It was hoped that this situated learning approach would quickly transform teaching and lead to higher levels in pupils' attainment, however, no significant change happens quickly in education (Fullan, 2005), so the second strategy that the SLT introduced was to begin a long term approach to building capacity from within.

The significance of this theme is highlighted in the international findings (McKinsey Reports, 2007, 2010) that suggests educational change is dependent upon teachers' individual and collective capacity and how this links with the school-wide capacity for promoting pupils' learning (Stoll et al., 2006; Pitman, 2008; Ho and Chen, 2013). As Fullan (2007) suggests, it is people that change organisations.

The need to develop strategies to improve the quality of teaching and to build the capacity of individuals was highlighted when a number of SLT observed lessons that demonstrated teaching quality was unacceptable. Coupled with low levels of attainment across the school that consistently meant the school failed to meet 'floor targets' (or expected targets - DfE annual data, now RaiseOn-line), and with some staff members' reluctance to take responsibility for pupil outcomes, the SLT decided (SLT meeting minutes Sept-Nov, 2012-13) that there was a need to improve the quality of teaching. The school's 'A partnership approach to raising attainment' (2012:2) document recognised the urgency:

'We do not have the luxury of time to experiment with pedagogy and interventions due to the sense of urgency and the improvements the school needs to make...'

Building capacity of those who work in schools traditionally occurs through professional development activities and/or through leadership development and empowerment of individuals. DuFour (2007) supports this by emphasising the need to develop a 'collective capacity and commitment' to achieve an effective PLC.

In the context of Oldtown Primary School, capacity building was essential in order to address the challenges that the school faced, notably, to improve pupil attainment and the quality of teaching in the short-term; to sustain improvements in these same areas overtime; to improve teacher retention and improve understanding of professional learning. However, the driving force

behind building capacity was the school improvement interventions and not the PLC (School improvement Plan, 2012-13).

The process to build capacity was captured in the CPD policy and described as 'nurturing people and providing the support, training and empowerment required for them to develop'.

In response to the question as to how this was to be achieved, the Principal answered:

'That's been done through a lot of one to one and group discussions with consultants, and then the SLT with consultants'.

This indicated that the school viewed capacity-building needed to be led by external consultants inferring that this was beyond the school's SLT at the time. However, the attitude of SLT members towards capacity-building became more focused as the pressures exerted by the Academy sponsors increased throughout the year.

Capacity-building was translated in the School Improvement Plan (2012) as aiming to improve the quality of teaching; to develop skills of ongoing professional learning for individuals and teams; to develop leadership skills through coaching and mentoring; to develop higher levels of competence and confidence; to develop the ability to identify challenges and solutions, and to build coping strategies to deal with constant and inevitable change. As documented in the School Improvement Plan (2012) and CPD policy, these would be addressed through a three-pronged strategy. Interestingly and unintentionally this strategy was aligned to my conceptual framework for an effective PLC. This supports the research of Hord (1997) and Stoll (2005) that suggests schools unconsciously demonstrate PLC characteristics, they have begun the journey without planning or realising it.

Firstly, to bring about improvement through transformational change by using external consultants *in situ* as experts to work with individuals and teams, labelled as 'improvement through partnership'. Secondly through building capacity from within, situated and systematically, by developing trust and facilitating improved collaborative relationships, sharing the school's vision, distributing leadership and developing higher levels of collective responsibility for pupil outcomes. And thirdly, to review school systems in order to remove barriers that inhibit improvement. This was decided when the SLT (School Improvement Plan, 2012) discussed the need for more to be done to put processes and systems in place to enable sustainable improvement and to build capacity. The intention of the review was to inform SLT whether or not time was used effectively, how professional development and professional learning was enabled and if systems, including proximity, were issues that needed to be addressed.

The quandary for leaders was whether to wait and develop the capacity within the school or to look outside for external support. The latter option was chosen as SLT members did not believe that they had existing capacity within the school and they did not have time to address this. This decision had been made in the year prior to the research and external consultants had already begun their work prior to the PLC introduction.

The three-pronged approach involved:

Strategy 1:

The appointment of consultants (a 2-year programme with the research year as year 2) to look at high priority areas such as the quality of teaching of literacy and numeracy, particularly through the lesson study approach; the development of leadership skills; to introduce coaching and mentoring, and to work with targeted underperforming/in need of additional support individual teachers/groups. For example, one consultant supported the teaching of literacy through a mentoring process by advising and guiding teachers through

direct lesson observation using ISIS, a technology to remotely coach in real-time. The aim was not only to improve the teacher's practice but to support her/him in gaining experience of high quality reflective practice. This was an 'improvement through partnership' strategy and involved consultants working in the school on a regular basis. During the second year (the year of the research) individuals/groups would be given responsibility for driving their own development by booking time with consultants.

Strategy 2:

This strategy was focused on empowerment, ownership and increased responsibility of staff members. Empowerment was through creating opportunities for support staff members to own their work and for them to have greater levels of responsibility for the curriculum (themed curriculum), for example, as identified leaders/experts. By distributing leadership, the SLT increased the number of leaders by appointing middle phase leaders and by appointing more senior leaders to take on additional responsibilities (Appendix 2). Taking ownership of professional development and increasing understanding of the value of professional learning would also provide staff members with the skills and abilities to continually improve, for example, through activities such as lesson study and coaching and mentoring. Increased responsibility was not only focused on individuals who had enhanced roles within the school but on all staff members. A focused approach that provided easily accessible pupil data to all members of staff, managed through the Key Stage teams, was an attempt by leaders to introduce more collective responsibility for pupil outcomes.

Strategy 3:

This strategy involved a review of school structures and systems. The SLT's intention was to evaluate whether or not time was used effectively for staff development; to review how professional learning was enabled and to determine if proximity issues, such as the isolation of the Key Stage teams and

the Nurture Centre, were a barrier to improvement. Teams were required to review their practices during training or team meetings and expected to move away from purely procedural meetings to a CoP approach aimed at facilitating learning teams (Hyacinthe, 2011).

The data that emerged referred to both internal and external interventions and these will be discussed under the sub-themes that emerged through the data analysis.

4.3 Internal Contributors

4.3.1 Distributed leadership

Distributed leadership was the focus for a number of responses gathered through data collection. Distributing leadership had been introduced as a strategy to empower more staff members and to encourage them to take responsibility for pupils' attainment. Furthermore, it was hoped to improve relationships across all staff members by having more leaders who had existing strong relationships with others in the school. The Principal was also attempting to build capacity by distributing leadership and challenge negative attitudes. She considered that she was now in a position, having being in place for a five years, to change her leadership style along with changing the leadership model. She hoped to facilitate further changes with all leaders working more collaboratively with the staff members. However, the success of the model and how staff members perceived it would depend on how people understood the model, how it operated, how it was managed and the impact it would have on them personally (Marzano, 2003). If staff members understood distributed leadership, particular in the PLC context, then the model could impact on perceptions and empower people to bring about change. Bertsch (2012), who researched PLC leadership behaviours also emphasised the power of the distributed leadership model as the facilitator for effective PLCs. According to Gibb (1958), Stoll et al. (2002) and Mulford and Silins (2003) a distributed

leadership model facilitates PLC developments much more effectively than other models.

One of the reasons the Principal introduced distributed leadership, as described to me in a conversation with her, was because the model requires senior leaders to 'let go' of some responsibilities and by doing so empower other colleagues to develop their leadership skills for their own and the school's benefit. Distributing leadership can support effective situated capacity-building focused on collective responsibility for teaching practice and professional learning (Elmore, 2000).

Questionnaire responses at the start and end of the year demonstrated that staff members recognised a significant shift from autonomous leadership to distributed leadership. At the start of the year, 76.9% (n=20/26) of teachers, leaders and support staff members described the leadership of the school as 'top-down'. By the end of the year, the response to the same question was 40% (n= 10/25) signifying that distributed leadership was becoming more evident. This finding is similar to that of Wyler (2008) who conducted research into perceptions of leadership and PLCs across 100 staff members in Georgia (USA) schools, and found that moving towards distributed leadership did positively change staff attitudes towards leaders.

Responses demonstrated the acknowledgement of staff members:

'It has changed to be more distributed with the introduction of middle leaders and a wider SLT team'.

(Kerry, Teacher, KS1, End of year interview)

The appointment of the middle leaders from within the staff was seen as recognising the potential of existing staff members:

'The introduction of the phase leaders has made a difference. It was good that they were appointed from within the school'.

(Kerry, Teacher, KS1, End of year interview)

The majority of support staff members interviewed also recognised improvements and changes in attitudes as they considered that they were now empowered and expected to take more responsibility and ownership for pupil outcomes.

‘I now feel that I own my work. I work with the teacher, but I plan and make decisions myself’.

(Clarice, Support Staff Member, KS 2, End of year questionnaire)

This was also reflected in support staff being awarded additional responsibilities.

‘We have responsibility for our own area of work. We work and plan with teachers. This year myself and have produced resources to support one of the themes’.

(Bethan, Support Staff Member, KS2, End of year interview)

By the end of the research year support staff members, in general, felt more valued and that their contributions made a difference. One support staff member described how her potential had been recognised:

‘When they saw I was really good with the EAL children they said I could lead on that intervention and that I could train others. They also recognised I was good on letters, sounds and phonics, so I lead the intervention and we share that practice.’

(Irene, Support Staff Member, KS2, Start of year interview)

So measures to improve capacity were leading to transformations in practice. Along with improved levels of collaboration, PLC concepts were becoming recognised in practice.

4.3.2 Formal professional development

The second sub-theme that arose related to formal professional development activities, generally agreed by staff members as the vehicle for building capacity.

The CPD vision for the school aimed at:

‘...creating a self-improving school that improves outcomes for EVERY pupil.... and develops our school as a learning community’.

(School CPD Policy, 2011-12:1)

This was the only reference to the phrase of ‘learning community’ that I found in any school documentation throughout the year and there was no further explanation in the policy as to what or who constitutes the ‘community’.

The school’s professional development policy stated that there was need to find a:

‘...balance between the pupils’ needs, school needs, national needs, individual teacher needs and career aspirations’.

(School CPD Policy, September 2011-12:2)

At the start of the research year the majority of staff members (56.3%, n=18/32) preferred, and relied on, ‘formal’ professional development systems for their improvement. This figure increased to 60.7% (n=17/28) by the end of the year. This illustrated that the majority of staff members perceived that the school leaders dictated and provided for their professional development and learning. This perception can be explained through the autocratic leadership approaches of the current and previous leaders as well as to the nationally imposed systems relating performance management to professional development. At the beginning of the academic year the majority of participants (54.8%, n= 17/31) viewed their professional development as related to, and dictated by, their

performance management. By the end of the year this figure had not significantly changed (55.5%, n=15/27) demonstrating that staff perceptions remained unchanged.

‘My targets (professional development) are decided for me by my line manager’.

(Gertrude, Teacher, EY, Start of year questionnaire)

Support for staff members’ access to professional development had been erratic under previous leaders.

‘In the past professional development systems were irregular and almost non-existent for support staff but this has changed over recent years’.

(Bethan, Support Staff Member, KS2, Start of year questionnaire)

‘In-school professional development’ at Oldtown Primary School took the form of whole-staff training days, weekly whole-staff training sessions/meetings, Key Stage meetings/training and lesson study and coaching and mentoring (both in the early stages of introduction) for selected individuals. The views of the staff members towards these was mixed. For example, the relevance for support staff members of some of the whole-school training, such as the content of staff meetings or training sessions, was questioned.

‘I think the school does a lot of professional development, such as things we do on Tuesdays and our training days. But sometimes I don’t think it’s relevant to all people. I think some of the stuff they do is just relevant to teachers really. I think sometimes the training needs to be better for us teaching assistants. Sometimes we find it quite hard to be fair.’

(Lucy, Support Staff Member, Nurture, Start of year interview)

According to interview responses, whole school meetings or training sessions were often spent on information giving and receiving rather than engagement, questioning and participation. The one-off one hour inputs were considered too

brief and did not enable sufficient time, at the end of a long day, to absorb new information or ideas.

'If you are going to train then do it properly.....we are not going to learn just from being talked at.....you need to put things into practice....training is trying things out....training is bits of this and that, but that isn't professional development! To be professional about something you need to learn about it properly and understand it. Somebody coming in and talking to you for an hour in order for you to receive a piece of paper...no that's not professional development training as far as I'm concerned!

(Lucy, Support Staff Member, Nurture, Start of year interview)

When asked if the professional development activities were focused on pupil outcomes, 74% (n=20/27) of leaders, teachers and support staff members reported in the end of the year (questionnaire) that they were compared to 78.5% (n=22/28) at the start of the year. Noting the number of respondents is relatively small, the indication is that formal professional development activities were moving away from being pupil-focussed. Then asked if they were required to measure the impact of professional development activities on their professional practice, 88.4% (n=23/26) leaders, teachers and support staff members claimed they were in the end of year questionnaire compared to 73.2% (n=26/35) at the start of the year. Again noting the relatively small number of respondents, this demonstrated a shift to more accountability for knowing the impact of professional development on their personal practice. However, we must consider the variables in these responses such as individuals' interpretation of 'pupil focused' professional development and knowledge of how to accurately measure the impact of a single professional development activity on pupil outcomes. This was one discussion area in team meetings.

4.3.3 Team Development

Building capacity through situated, systematic and collaborative teams in order to transform practice was the aim. This would provide a platform on which to build a PLC and many case studies across the literature focus on the development of PLCs through existing team structures (DuFour and Eaker, 1997, Hord, 1997; Stoll, 1999). However, the team structure at Oldtown Primary School was unclear to me and to some staff members. The easily identifiable teams were the SLT, Early Years and Key Stage 1 team, the Key Stage 2 teams and the Nurture Centre team. Some referred to belonging to the 'staff team', but there was some confusion whether there were formal teams for NQTs, Teaching Assistants or curriculum theme teams. Some support staff members were unaware as to which teams they belonged, if any.

'I just work with the class teacher'.

(Leanne, Support Staff Member, KS1, Start of year interview)

Not only was there confusion over which teams existed, there were also inconsistencies in how the teams operated.

'I certainly feel that there is probably more 'driving' of certain teams, and more taking ownership of their own development..... in one of the teams in particular you are receiving the information, processing the information and then in another team you have ownership'.

(Cherry, Middle Leader, KS2, Start of year interview)

The approaches to team meetings and the understanding of their purpose was also inconsistent across the school. For example, the expectation from leaders was that all meetings cover procedural issues, most covered data analysis and discussions on pupils' progress, but some meetings in Early Years and Key Stage 1 took on a CoP approach and spent time on sharing practice and on professional learning. The skills of the team leaders were the determining factor in how the meetings were managed, but there were no moves by SLT or from

within the team structure, to share practice, devise protocols or agree expectations for such meetings. In successful PLC schools, teams have allocated time, agreed protocols for team operations and meetings and have access to scholarly literature and tools that support the development of skills and knowledge (DuFour and DuFour, 2012).

In interviews, staff members often referred to the time it took for their teams to build the relationships and levels of trust in order to collaborate effectively. Current school systems did not facilitate CoP-type (Lave and Wenger, 1991) approaches that would enable greater levels of ownership and participation. Changes were needed if CoPs or learning team approaches were to be introduced.

Lesson study provided an opportunity for staff members to collaborate *in situ* with colleagues of their choice and in a CoP-style manner if deemed appropriate. Staff members' responses indicated that situated professional learning in context, such as lesson study, was more useful and relevant than external courses or other more generic training highlighting that situated learning is more likely to lead to transformation in personal practice.

'When I am supported in the classroom I understand and can relate much more effectively – it is more real'.

(Angela, Teacher, Key Stage 1, End of year interview)

Staff members were voluntarily able to access the lesson study programme thereby enabling them to take ownership of an area of the professional learning by deciding when and with whom to work.

'If we had it (lesson study) more often it would be really good. If we were sitting and working with a group planning, seeing the changes, seeing the impact, it would have so much benefit. You would know where they're (pupils) coming from, what the pupils didn't understand, all would lead to properly meeting individual needs. At the moment it's broad.'

(Irene, Support Staff Member, KS2, Start of year interview)

Collaborative, situated teams that have a systematic approach provide a structure for both individual and collective improvement (Hyacinthe, 2011). Surprisingly, clear team structures were not evident in the school and these inhibited improvements across the school in general and of the PLC in particular.

4.3.4 Personalised Professional Development

Consultants in the school provided staff members with an opportunity for personal development or learning as they were able to book time with a consultant to discuss improving their practice in general or focussed on a particular issue, thereby taking some responsibility for their own learning and development.

‘For instance our Year 1 TAs now don’t come to us for their professional development, we have our open house with our consultants, we tell them (TAs) when they’re (consultants) coming in and they sign up for any sessions they want, so it automatically fits in with them and their pupils so they are getting that feedback of how they can improve further and what they’re doing really well they’ve spoken to their consultant and designed their own training day’.

(Principal, End of year interview)

Many preferred the *in situ*, personalised approach.

‘Effective CPD is where training is delivered in the classroom (in situ) and impacts on the children’.

(Kerry, Teacher, Year 1, End of year questionnaire)

The newly introduced coaching and mentoring programme was offered to a number of staff members who did not hold leadership roles but who had been identified by SLT as having the potential to become future leaders. Although

many of the coaching pairings involved only school-based colleagues, an external consultant was available to develop the skills of individuals.

‘.....its (coaching and mentoring) just in our informal meetings rather than a formal coaching session’.

(Victoria, Middle Leader, KS 1, Start of year interview)

The intention was to systematically roll out this programme and involve all staff members overtime with a view to improving reflective practice. Coaching would provide individualised support for professional learning to those that are being coached and would build the skills and capacity of the coach. The overall aim was to achieve greater consistency of high quality learning and teaching across staff members and to address variations that could be identified and addressed between teachers.

A secondary objective of introducing coaching and mentoring was to encourage more staff members to take responsibility for their own improvement and ultimately for the outcomes of pupils.

4.3.5 Collective Responsibility

In order to develop greater levels of collective responsibility, the SLT placed more accountability on staff and in an environment of distrust this raised some tensions (chapter 5).

‘.....some see it as they are given additional work to do and they don’t see that as them developing personally..... they see this as increasing accountability and it’s not. It’s about what they’ve learnt, what they’ve found useful.’

(Principal, Start of year interview)

Therefore, the SLTs intentions may not have been clear to staff members, some who believed that it was the SLT who were ‘responsible’ for teaching and learning within school as well as for leadership and management. At the start of the year the confusion between empowerment and leadership was

demonstrated when 76.9% (n= 20/26) leaders, teachers and support staff members described the leadership model as 'top-down'. Issues of collective responsibility were difficult to address.

One leader summed up the dilemma between the responsibility of the leader and that of the teacher:

'I've got to be honest, our SATs results aren't very good this year. We're quite shocked as a Leadership Team. They're not as good as we need or expect them to be. Where does that responsibility lie? You talk to the teacher and I wouldn't know what to advise to do differently. The responsibility lies with all of us, SLT as well.'

(Anthony, Leader, Whole School, Start of year interview)

Longer serving members of staff who perpetuated the culture of mistrust, felt that staff members had no ownership of decisions, their views were not sought or valued and their role was simply to teach. They resented being heavily scrutinised under different initiatives over many years and this led to more tension when the Principal tried to empower them through what they perceived as additional tasks:

'It's like she's asked me to fill out an evaluation form to inform the best way forward. They see that as me increasing accountability and it's not. It's about what they've learnt, what they've found useful?'

(Principal, Start of Year Interview)

When asked about moves towards more collective responsibility, one middle leader replied:

'Yes, we have talked about it before but it's just not happened. For example, we talked last year about having a maths team but it didn't happen. Things have been mentioned towards the start of this year about setting up teams for different areas, but it's not happened yet but it might be on the way.'

(Josie, Middle Leader, KS 1/2 Curriculum lead Start of year interview)

Without significant changes to systems and attitudes it was going to be difficult, in a short period of time, to instil a sense of collective responsibility across all members of staff. There were a number of opportunities that were already in operation within the school that could have been developed to encourage collective responsibility and support the introduction of the PLC. These included lesson study and coaching and mentoring. Distributing leadership was also clearly having an impact on the staff and provided an opportunity for greater levels of empowerment of staff within a PLC structure. However, these were insufficiently exploited as opportunities and were over-looked in favour of external interventions.

4.4 External Contributors

4.4.1 Consultants

The urgency to improve the quality of teaching and pupil attainment was the main reason why the SLT turned to external consultants for support. The Principal informed me that this decision was made in part due to the ‘newness’ of the SLT team who needed time to settle into their roles and secondly the existing school staff did not have the skills to build the capacity of others at this time. Consultants were therefore employed to:

- ‘Build the capacity of staff members across different areas that require support, i.e. the teaching of literacy and numeracy, through coaching and mentoring and lesson study. The aim is to provide those colleagues with on-going and regular support to improve practice and increase their knowledge;
- Collaborate and complement each other’s work in the hope of meeting the imperative of rapid improvement;
- Support the new leadership team members in developing their skills as leaders and as coaches and mentors, and to support them with key areas of responsibility for improvements in the teaching of literacy and numeracy.’

(Improvement plan 2012:2, ‘improvement through partnership’ strategy)

In total the SLT appointed five consultants to work in the school. For the purpose of this study, it is the work of the consultants that I categorise as 'external' influences as they are not full time employees and were invited to work in the school.

The role of each of the consultants:

Consultant	Role	Purpose
Maths Consultant	Transforming teaching and learning in mathematics	To work with targeted teachers to improve knowledge and practice
Leadership Consultant	Working with accountability	To work with senior and middle leaders to improve leadership skills with a focus on accountability
Early Years Consultant	To support improvements in Early Years provision	To support the newly appointed Phase Leader
Coaching and Mentoring Consultant	To introduce the Improving from Within programme that focuses on developing staff members' confidence and competence	To work with all staff to develop skills and practices in, for example, reflective practices and coaching and mentoring
Literacy Consultant	Transforming teaching and learning in literacy	To work with targeted teachers to improve knowledge and practice

Staff members were informed of the role of each consultant, but how each one contributed to overall school improvement and how their work supported, if at all, the journey towards becoming a PLC was not made clear. This did not help staff members, or me as a researcher, to understand how their work complemented other school improvement strategies.

The work of the consultants was focused on specific, targeted improvements to raise pupil attainment and to build capacity of individuals. The consultant's role was to up-skill and empower teachers and support staff members and not intentionally to contribute to the introduction of the PLC. It could be argued that their work distracted attention away from the PLC, but it is evident that in the short term at least, the consultants were having an impact on improving the practice of individuals.

Data collected through semi-structured interviews coded responses (26.4%, n=292/1107) referred to the influence and work of the consultants. This is a high percentage when taking into account the number of potential areas that could have arisen. The majority of responses (88.6%, n=259/292) were positive indicating that having the consultants working in the school did, in the short term, make a positive impact. For example, increasing confidence and developing skills:

‘I’ve worked really closely with the consultant and we’ve developed action plans (for the teaching of numeracy)’.

(Michelle, Middle Leader, KS2, Start of year interview)

And:

‘Having a consultant work with me in my classroom with my children has been the best CPD ever’.

(Shelly, Teacher, Year 2, End of year interview)

Leaders also recognised the contribution of consultants:

‘It is good to have the consultants in the school. They are all working on different areas of our development’.

(Cherry, Leader, Observation Note M2:8: Meeting, 28th Oct. 2012)

In interviews several staff members informed me that they felt that they had made significant progress and transformed their practice as a result of their involvement with consultants.

‘I think people with expertise coming in and helping you, talking things through, coaching or advising..... in the school, can help you develop. That is effective personal development’.

(Alexandra, Early Years/KS1 Leader, Start of year interview)

However, other comments recorded from the questionnaires and interviews did suggest that the school should focus on one or two priorities only, inferring that there were too many interventions at one time.

‘I think we are trying to do too much too quickly. We would be better focusing on fewer priorities’.

(Anthony, Leader, Whole School Responsibility, Start of year interview)

The consultants’ role was to deliver situated training to groups and individuals focusing on improving practice, enhancing the skills of reflective practice, building capacity and developing leadership skills. Their primary role was to raise standards of teaching. The Principal hoped that implicitly the consultants would help to change attitudes and to transform the culture towards more collective responsibility. They were also expected to model teaching strategies,

to introduce effective coaching and mentoring techniques and to develop in-school experts.

In an attempt to highlight collective responsibility, the consultants were asked to lead staff members to understand that it was their teaching that had greatest impact on pupil learning and not the home background of the pupil. The home background was often referred to by the teachers as the main barrier to pupils' progress, hence the drive from SLT for more collective responsibility to be instilled in all staff members. Consultants were also charged to develop the skills of individuals so that they become more confident and experts in their own right. One consultant was employed to work specifically with leaders through an 'Improving from Within' development programme. The briefing paper to the staff stated that the model:

'...has been introduced to strengthen the culture of self-sustaining improvement'.

(Staff briefing paper, 5th December 2012)

Throughout the research year I did not observe any discussion between leaders and consultants that was focused on the PLC, nor did I see any newly created documentation, including minutes of meetings, that referred to the PLC. I did observe an informal meeting between the Principal and the consultants for literacy and numeracy. The discussion focused on the progress and confidence of targeted staff members. However, the consultants appeared to operate in relative isolation and only met occasionally to share what they were doing. There was little evidence of joint planning or of an overall strategy and no documentation was made available to me to review.

I was aware that one consultant was working with and advising the new Phase Leaders and extended SLT offering guidance and support. These colleagues were also encouraged to participate in locally or nationally recognised

leadership programmes as offered, for example, by the National College for Teaching and Learning (NCTL).

‘I am doing the Aspiring Leaders (National College course) with the other new middle leaders’.

(Michelle, Middle Leader, KS 2, Start of year interview)

Through their work, the consultants modelled an approach to developing trust and building effective working relationships. For the Early Years/Key Stage 1 leader this was effective.

‘There are consultants that come in to work with us and develop different skills. So, for example, there will be someone come in and help me with Literacy for Early Years and KS1. There will be someone who will come and help me to develop my strengths to be a better leader....the consultants are very good’.

(Alexandra, Early Years/KS1 Leader, End of year interview)

So much of the consultant’s work was making an impact, however, the SLT did recognise that the use of consultants was a short term strategy as it was not sustainable financially and more importantly would not address long term capacity-building in the school. The positive impact on pupil attainment had yet to be proved. This short term strategy worked against the PLC introduction which required embedding systems that would enable ongoing and sustainable improvements.

Requiring the help of a consultant to develop a PLC is not unusual (Huffman and Hipp, 2003; Andrews and Lewis, 2004) and in this school would complement the strategy of using consultants to facilitate improvements. However, the school decided not to employ a consultant to support the PLC introduction. If I had been asked to act as a consultant rather than a researcher, then this would have had implications and changed my role with further implications for insider/outsider research stance (chapter 3). Most staff members remained confused regarding my role as many found it difficult to distinguish between a researcher and consultant, particularly when they were

not supported to understand the difference through, for example, regular reminders at staff briefings. This confusion was emphasised through a comment made at a meeting I was observing of Middle Leaders (28th Oct 2012):

‘John is helping us to review professional development processes and to become a PLC’.

(Victoria, Leader, Observation Note M2:6: Meeting, 28th Oct. 2012)

Viewed in the context of my conceptual framework, the work of the consultants did support the development of situated learning and with introducing new systematic approaches for interventions for under-achieving pupils.

4.5 Conclusion

From the data analysis process (chapter 3), the theme I entitled ‘capacity-building through internal and external contributors’ emerged from the number of both positive and negative responses in the data.

The emergence of this theme supported my investigation into the existing capacity of the school, one of my research sub-questions, and contributed towards my understanding of any influences on capacity-building due to the school’s inner-city location, another of the research sub questions.

Capacity-building also relates to the PLC characteristics (supportive conditions) and the need for ongoing experimentation and shared leadership that develop staff members, so as an emergent theme, this provided an opportunity to explore how deeply PLC characteristics were embedded in the school.

Within the context of a learning organisation or within the theoretical approach of a community of practice, this theme is significant because learning

organisations are focused on the development of staff members and the creation and retention of knowledge. As outlined in chapter 2, the organisational systems thinking approach develops capacity within individuals and in doing so enables change (Thompson et al., 2004). Communities of Practice enable individuals to move from novice to expert status overtime (Lave, 1988) thereby building capacity involving learning *in situ*.

In analysing the data, the main issues that arose were categorised as either internal or external capacity issues and analysed within a context of having a positive or negative influence on the introduction of the PLC.

The main 'internal' issues resulted from three factors, the inexperience and/or 'newness' of the school's leadership team, the lack of planning, knowledge and understanding of the PLC and from the leadership team decision to develop capacity using consultants. The SLT had recognised that the school did not have the capacity from within the existing staff to affect the levels and pace of change required to rapidly improve pupil attainment through significant improvements in the quality of teaching in the classroom as required by the Academy sponsors. The need for improved pupil attainment and for the school to demonstrate progress at the next Ofsted inspection was the over-riding driver for improvement and the priority of the SLT. Significantly the school's leaders had also planned school targets to address levels of staff collective responsibility for pupil attainment and for staff member's professional development and learning, but these became less of a priority as the Academy sponsors exerted their influence.

The strategies chosen by the SLT to build capacity shaped the school's PLC journey and arguably diverted attention away from the PLC. To illustrate this point, the focus on how to build capacity was led by the imperative to do so quickly and not by a strategic decision to develop effective sustainable process through for example, the PLC. Capacity building became an isolated issue and was evidently not seen by the SLT as something that could have been facilitated through the PLC in the short or long term. Instead, introducing a

number of consultants, all at the same time, was deemed necessary by SLT to affect the changes required in the shortest possible time. Waiting for staff members to develop the confidence and competence to lead on whole-school improvements was not considered as an option. The 'quick fix' approach was the preferred approach of the SLT.

The strategy for improvement through the use of consultants may have been clear to the Principal and some members of the SLT, however, for others there was a lack of clarity as to how each consultant's work contributed to the overall co-ordinated approach to improvement. The Principal's intent was that the consultants would work strategically together and there was evidence of some of the consultants meeting from time-to-time. However, in reality the consultants operated in relative isolation from one another. This was mainly due to the growing pressures exerted by the Academy sponsor that distracted the Principal and SLT from their co-ordination of the consultants and from the PLC.

Analysis of the data suggests that the use of external consultants to support capacity building, had both a positive and negative impact on the school's journey towards becoming a PLC. The positive areas were focused on the improvements of individuals through situated training and demonstrating that the staff members' professional learning is best undertaken in the work place. The negative area of the strategy is that the consultants did not work collaboratively or with the school leaders to support the school's PLC journey. This was not a deliberate or conscious decision on their behalf, more due to the lack of direction provided by school leaders. The different interventions also distracted the leaders from the PLC goal.

School improvement strategies could have been supported through PLC structures and characteristics. The decisions to use consultants as a short term strategy relied in the main on isolated interventions to address specific issues rather than a co-ordinated approach to sustainable and long term improvement that the PLC had the potential to enable.

Little has been written about the impact that external consultants make on a developing PLC, however, literature does refer to external consultants, advisers or others as able to contribute towards PLC development in schools. It is the consensus across the literature and PLC case studies that it is the school members and in particular the leaders that need to drive the PLC (Hord, 1997; DuFour and Eaker, 1998). Capacity-building of staff is often referred to in the literature in a generic manner as part of a wider study. Yet in my study the use of consultants to facilitate capacity building had probably the most significant impact on the school during the research year.

What my findings do highlight is the need for effective and clear planning for capacity building of both leaders and staff members (Hipp and Huffman, 2010; DuFour and DuFour, 2012) and not to overload staff with initiatives.

Effective planning for the PLC may well have supported the school leaders to methodically review structures and systems and make progress in these areas in a co-ordinated manner. As the PLC was not the driving force for improvement, structures and systems were at best only superficially changed and being driven in the main by the consultants, so potentially were unsustainable.

The data showed that both internal and external contributions towards building capacity were effective in the main. Individual teachers and support staff members responded well to the interventions of the external consultants. But the emphasis shifted from external (through consultants) capacity building at start of year to being more internally focused by the end of the year.

Both of these examples illustrate the importance of focusing on individuals' professional learning being situated and systematic in approach. Some of the teachers and support staff members also discussed their work being transformed. It is therefore not difficult to see why professional learning best takes place within the concepts of the framework I outlined in chapter 2.

In conclusion, there is a need and a place in schools and in an emerging PLC for building capacity through both internal and external contributors. What appeared to be evident through the data was the lack of an overall strategy that was shared with staff members. A co-ordinated and shared vision would have supported a more coherent approach that staff members would have understood. Again, this illustrates the importance of clear communications and having a systematic approach.

In the next chapter I discuss the second theme that emerged from the data, conflict and tension, some of which emanated from the issues raised in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONFLICT AND TENSION

5.1 Introduction

Schools are dynamic organisations totally dependent upon people. Human-based organisations are dependent upon relationships, interactions, engagement, commitment and motivation. It is therefore not uncommon for conflict and tensions to arise between individuals and groups, particularly when a school is under significant pressures to deliver improvements.

This theme emerged from the number of responses to questions in the questionnaire, to responses made to interview questions and through observation.

Conflict and tension were already evident in the school due, in the main, to the distrust of some of the longer-serving teachers. These members of staff had a significant influence on new staff members and this created challenges for the inexperienced SLT. New tensions both within the school and between the school leaders and Academy sponsors were being created as the sponsors became increasingly involved in the day-to-day decision-making processes. Conflicts and tensions also arose due to the endemic failure of a school with some staff members blaming home backgrounds for academic failure resulting in poor attainment, thereby attempting to avoid any responsibility themselves for pupils' learning. This led to tensions between staff members and leaders.

The data identified a number of in-school issues that led to conflict and tension. These included perceived autocratic leadership, efforts to force collegial responsibility, poor communication systems generally, initiative over-load, the timing of the PLC introduction, relationships between the Key Stage teams, proximity issues and the use of time. Furthermore, there was an inconsistent understanding of the differences between professional development and

learning and responsibilities and processes for driving these. This led to confusion regarding what was required. All of these impacted on relationships between leaders, leadership team and staff members, inter-staff relationships and between the school leaders and Academy sponsors.

In this chapter I will focus on each of these issues and how conflict or tension emerged.

5.2 The vision

The school's vision statement states:

‘...an outstanding school at the heart of the community where children and staff love learning’.

The ‘staff love learning’ reference was not referred to by staff members and was not evident at the start or the end of the research year through responses to questionnaires. This demonstrated a lack of knowledge, understanding or buy-in from staff members, a catalyst for tension.

At the start of the research year the leaders instigated a review of the school's vision statement that was not related to the introduction of the PLC. Whether or not this was a conscious decision by leaders is unknown and occurred before my research began. A consultant led the staff members through this process as leaders felt that an independent facilitator would support them to see that there were no hidden agendas. However, the revised vision statement did not refer to the PLC and was therefore a missed opportunity to share the vision and promote the PLC and begin to change the culture. This illustrated the lack of PLC leadership, joined up thinking and preparation at a time that the school was hoping to make significant improvements and introduce the PLC. Hartnell-Young (2003), Hollingsworth (2004) and Bertsch (2012) all identified the importance of a clear vision and planning to ensure staff engagement at the outset of the PLC. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) discuss the need for teachers

to collaboratively construct a shared mission and vision with clearly stated goals and a focus on learning. Others (Hord et al, 1999; Couture, 2003; Lambert, 2003 and Berlinger-Gustafson, 2004) recommend that PLC leaders effectively communicate with staff members, starting with them asking questions of themselves and the staff, auditing provision and then progress through a process that builds knowledge, understanding and commitment that establishes a series of indicators against which to measure progress. Successful school PLCs have also developed communication across staff members with a focus on inquiry and pupil learning (Feger and Arruda, 2008). If this communication does not occur, then the success of the PLC will be limited.

When questioned about the school's vision, either generally or for the PLC, no staff member was able to quote either statement in full but the majority of staff members could describe elements of both and they understood the focus was on pupil achievement. Only 10.3% (n=3/29) of staff members mentioned they (staff) were referred to in the vision or mission statements. Two of the six leaders discussed references to staff development in the statements. Consequently, the lack of a shared vision made the leader's task of supporting the PLC introduction, and in achieving the buy-in from staff members, much more difficult.

Leaders viewed school issues as compartmentalised. The priorities of the Academy sponsors, the leader's school improvement foci and the work of the consultants were becoming viewed in isolation of each other. This was illustrated in the process behind, and wording of, the new vision statement. The process was led by a consultant who was unclear as to what the school was attempting to achieve by introducing the PLC and consequently the PLC was not mentioned in discussions nor in the wording of the final statement.

5.3 Communication

The data showed that much of the tension and resulting conflict emanated from poor and ineffective PLC communication and was seen by staff members as

systematic of poor communication that had existed in the school for some time. Effective collaboration relies on communication and when this is not evident conflict arises, susceptible of micro-political processes (Achinstein, 2002).

A large number of coded interview responses alone, 76.4% (n=781/1021), related to communication.

‘I would say for the last few years the communication has not been very strong; teachers were not informed of the things that were happening very quickly. Things happened all of a sudden....’

(Victoria, Middle Leader, KS1, Start of year interview)

This view was held across the staff:

‘I think better communication between the senior leadership team and the staff is required.’

(Lucy, Support Staff Member, Nurture, Start of year interview)

There are a number of possible explanations as to why poor communications existed in the school, notably through the historic lack of trust between leaders and staff, or through autocratic leaders not wishing to share, or the SLT not having effective communication skills. Whatever the reason, poor communication at all levels led to confusion and misunderstanding of the PLC, which not only hindered its introduction, but effectively was a barrier as staff members failed to understand the PLC and the leader’s vision. This emanated from the decision for the school to become a PLC being made by the Principal as a response of my request for a school to participate in this research. Her reasons:

‘I want to see the school opened up and working with other professionals for the benefit of the childrenwe’ve got to change their (Teacher and support staff members) mindset about professional development’.

(Principal, Start of year interview)

She explained:

‘A lot of people have a negative attitude towards CPD because of all the systems and structures that have been enforced on the school, e.g. Hard to Shift, etc.’

(Principal, Start of year questionnaire)

As a consequence, the SLT were not directly involved in the decision illustrating the lack of senior leadership collaborative planning and decision-making. This resulted in a ‘disconnect’ between what the Principal wanted to achieve and the understanding of other leaders and staff members. One leader commented:

‘I am not sure we are supposed to know the big picture’.

(Josie, Middle Leader, KS 1/2 Curriculum lead Start of year interview)

This view was not widely supported by other leaders, but it does illustrate the challenge faced by the Principal and the other leadership team members, particularly relating to the issue of building trusting relationships within the leadership team and to the potential effect that dysfunctional negative relationships can have on a school (Robinson et al., 2007). It also evidenced the attitude of at least one longer-serving staff member.

The failure of the SLT to effectively communicate the vision and explain the PLC was evident as support staff members remained confused. One support member described a PLC as:

‘Bringing the community together through various activities, such as parent partnerships’

(Bethan, Support Staff Member, KS2, Start of year questionnaire)

This comment illustrated a misconception that was common amongst support staff members in particular, that all things ‘community’ must relate to external

partners, the school's immediate location and the people who live near the school. Misconceptions such as this led to confusion that lasted throughout the year: Another support staff member when asked to define a PLC commented:

'Different groups of people who work in the community'

(Lakhvinder, Support Staff Member, Nurture, End of year questionnaire)

These responses and misconceptions from support staff members are easily understood in this school. The Principal had been working to improve the local community's perception of the school since her arrival. She had employed local people and, more importantly, she had adopted the FAST initiative (chapter 1). The focus on, and drive for, working with the 'the community' focussed on the families, partner organisations (other schools, colleges, universities), local businesses, people who lived around the school and community organisations. The perception of who made up the 'school community' or the 'professional learning community' was less clearly understood by school staff members and community partners alike.

Poor communications and the decision of the Principal to introduce the PLC in relative isolation and at this time created tensions. Poor relationships, often resulting from poor communication, further contributed to the failures to embed the ethos and culture required for the PLC. Arguably these should have been addressed before any attempt to introduce the PLC. In particular, some support staff members felt under-valued and believing that they had no role or opportunity to develop their skills, including leadership skills:

'....we do not have leadership roles or responsibilities'

(Clarice, Support Staff Member, KS 2, Start of year questionnaire)

Senior leaders' lack of knowledge was evident when one SLT member asked me what PLC information to share with middle leaders and staff members and when should they do this? I understood that the question was asked in the

context of the number of new staff in the school and to staff new to roles of middle and senior leaders. This may have also illustrated some awareness by leaders of not over-loading new colleagues with too much information. What this did lead to was a lack of sharing of information at the start of the research year which in turn led to misunderstandings and tensions as staff members simply did not know what was expected of them. Too little information was shared with leaders and teachers and the misconceptions were not addressed.

The issue of poor communication also led to tensions between the school leaders and the Academy sponsors. It appeared to me as an outsider that there had been a lack of information sharing, visioning and planning from the outset of the Academy formation and as a result tensions regarding operations and responsibilities developed. As the year progressed, relationships worsened between the sponsors and school leaders.

Research into PLCs by Timperley et al. (2007), Webb et al. (2009) and Bertsch (2012) all confirm the importance of positive relationships for an effective PLC to exist. At the start of the year, eight new members of staff had arrived (26.6% of the teaching staff) and were unaware of relationship issues. However, 45.0% (n=9/20) coded interview answers from existing staff members, did describe relationships as negative. Some of these issues had resulted from numerous failed initiatives (chapter 1), and leaders were seen by some staff members as exacerbating issues by introducing more interventions.

Improving communications systems was important to improving leader-staff member relationships as doing this had the potential to bring about significant improvements and important for an effective PLC. This was supported by the research of Pitman (2008) who investigated how schools in a District of Alberta, Canada approached capacity-building when establishing a PLC. She discovered that the building of trusting relationships and the celebration of achievements moulds the culture of the school to reflect the PLC characteristics. But, changing staff perceptions and building relationships takes time and in every school there are likely to be a number of staff members who

need convincing particularly when there is a history of distrust (Bryk and Schneider, 2002).

However, some progress with improving communications was made:

‘....we are speaking to management more because before it was them and us’.

(Angela, Teacher, Year 1, End of year interview)

Also, historically the support staff members viewed their role as solely supporting learning as directed by the teacher and do little else. They were often not included in meetings or decision-making processes.

‘Before this Principal started the Teaching Assistants were not included in anything...now we are’.

The number of coded responses to interview questions also demonstrated a positive shift in staff members’ attitudes towards more trust in the school. At the start of year 45.8% (n=11/13) responses were positive regarding the existence of trusting relationships in the school and by the end of the year the interview responses had increased to 64.7% (n= 11/17).

In an attempt to improve communications and build effective relationships the SLT created opportunities for staff members to work more collaboratively (themed curriculum, lesson study). However, in doing so they also ‘contrived collegiality’ (Hargreaves and Dawe, 1990) requiring staff members to work more collaboratively (training events) and to take responsibility (pupil data analysis). This ‘forcing’ of staff members to work with others with whom they would not normally collaborate did cause issues for individuals, but the SLT by introducing this, had set-out its intent.

Fullan (2007) describes contrived collegiality when PLCs are ‘mandated’ and there is ‘cosy collaboration’, a definition that could be applied to Oldtown Primary School at this time.

Despite the attempts by SLT, staff members still tended to work with existing team members and not with others from the wider school team. However, one initiative that did force staff members to work across the staff team was the planning and delivery of the themed curriculum.

‘I worked with another TA. We planned the work and created the resources together’.

(Clarice, Support Staff Member, Key Stage 1, End of Year Interview)

What was required was more initiatives that would encourage collaboration and positive communication, but this would require a change to systems at a time when staff members were also expected to take on board a number of new initiatives.

5.4 Initiative over-load

When I introduced my research at the start of the year to all staff members through a briefing session held at a staff meeting, I noticed reactions that clearly demonstrated the belief that the PLC was another initiative. I observed staff members give each other ‘knowing looks’ and sensed an attitude of ‘here we go again’ (Observation note: 1.3). There was clearly a perception of ‘initiative overload’ existing within the school at this time.

It was apparent that little had been shared regarding the intent to move towards a PLC with staff members prior to my briefing. As previously mentioned, staff members were already coping with the recent introduction of lesson study, coaching and mentoring, several consultants working in the school, the Academy agenda, the focus on improving attainment and the drive for staff members to take more collective responsibility. The timing of the decision to introduce the PLC was directly related to my research, but the options to the Principal and leaders were to proceed or delay.

Leaders were also concerned about initiative overload, but considered all initiatives were necessary:

‘It’s the case that we have lots of things going on here and that’s good, but.....It maybe we need a couple of years just embedding good teaching and, getting the SATs results back up. We could be a fantastic school with all these initiatives going on, but not all at the same time.’

(Anthony, Leader, Whole School, Start of year interview)

What they did not do was to strategically look at how the initiatives could be coordinated and complement each other.

‘There is just too much going on at the same time. We should focus on one issue or intervention at a time’.

(Anthony, Leader, Whole School, Start of year interview)

The PLC was perceived by staff members and most leaders as another isolated initiative rather than the framework for delivering school improvements (Hord, 1997; Stoll, 1999; Hipp and Huffman, 2010) as its potential had not been discussed or understood. In reality, without my plea for a school to participate in this research, it is unlikely that the leaders would have pursued the PLC at all.

The lack of a strategic planning to see how initiatives could work together also contributed to the failure of the PLC. The ‘compartmentalising’ of the initiatives, including the PLC, was possibly due to the inexperience of the team and to the distractions of agendas set for the school by Academy sponsors.

5.5 Proximity issues

There were also a number of questionnaire responses 62.5% (n= 10/16) in the data related to the proximity issues that inhibited effective communication and collaboration.

The physical isolation of the Nurture Centre and of the Key Stage teams hindered collaboration in general and informal collaboration in particular. The Key Stage teams were located on different floors in the building. The reason for this was organisational and is a typical arrangement in most English primary schools. The challenge to school leaders was to ensure that individuals working in each area did not become isolated and that the teams did not become too parochial. PLC research (Hord, 1997; DuFour et al, 2004; Hipp and Huffman, 2010) highlights the need for leaders to address issues of physical isolation to enable sharing, collaborative learning to take place to avoid these issues. The Key Stage teams were also isolated as lunchtime arrangements meant that the teachers could not meet even informally as the pupils and staff in each Key Stage had their lunches at different times. Through re-organisation of lunch-times the leaders could arguably have enabled more Key Stage collaboration. They chose not to do this on the basis that the split arrangements supposedly improved the management of pupil behaviour and this was perceived as being more important.

The Key Stage teams and the Nurture Centre staff considered that they worked in isolation from each other but worked closely within their team.

'We are a close team and can discuss anything with anyone in the Unit....We meet other staff in meetings or training sessions'.

(Lucy, Support Staff Member, Nurture, End of year questionnaire)

The Nurture Centre was located in a separate building on the school site primarily to safeguard main school pupils from those experiencing behavioural issues. The team only formally met with other staff members at weekly staff meetings.

In most English primary schools, Key Stage teams typically work collaboratively within structured systems that enable staff members to meet formally and informally, share practice and discuss individual pupils' progress. The lack of

opportunities, particularly informal ones, for interaction and sharing, manifested itself into two isolated Key Stage teams restricted by the physical location of the teams and split lunchtime arrangements. Therefore, the teams had become increasingly isolated from one another over the years.

‘So a teacher who has been in Year 1 for ten years, they would not have a clue about what goes on upstairs (Key stage 2) and if you mention the Nurture Centre, they’ll just say they’re not going in there!’

(Lucy, Support Staff Member, Nurture, Start of year interview)

This led to an increased Key Stage divide.

5.6 Key Stage Divide

At Oldtown Primary School the division between the Key Stage teams appeared more noticeable than in other schools based on my informal observations and experience working with other primary schools.

‘I think the issue (communication) that happens quite often in schools is that you’ve got a Key Stage 1 and a Key Stage 2 team and sometimes it feels like they are not together, that they’re apart...’

(Arthur, Teacher, KS1, Start of year interview)

And in Oldtown Primary School this was more evident than in other schools:

‘We have KS1 and KS2 staff and I don’t think they really communicate well with each other, it’s very segregated.’

(Irene, Support staff member, KS2, Start of year interview)

This was reinforced by a leader commenting:

‘I think that you still get a Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2 divide because we don’t have enough time to mingle.’

(Josie, Middle Leader, KS 1/2 Curriculum lead, End of year interview)

Tensions were further heightened as pupil attainment was improving at a significant rate in Key Stage 1, in contrast to pupil attainment in Key Stage 2. The Principal commented to me that staff members in Key Stage 1 were more engaged, willing to learn and to embrace the PLC.

The improvements in the Early Years and Key Stage 1 attainment and in how staff were working, were publicly shared and celebrated. This led to feelings of insecurity for Key Stage 2 staff members who came under increasing pressure. This further contributed to the poor relationships between the Key Stage teams.

The Key Stage teams existed within school structures, however there was extensive evidence to suggest that the teams operated very differently.

‘I think there is a division between Key Stage 1 and 2. There is a more positive ethos probably in KS1.’

(Josie, Middle Leader, Key Stage 1/2 Curriculum lead, Start of year interview)

The Early Years and Key Stage 1 teams worked closely under a revised structure and a newly appointed senior leader who managed both teams. The Key Stage 2 team was led by newly internally appointed middle leaders who had responsibility for upper and lower Key Stage 2.

Effective leadership and empowerment of staff members supported the teams to embrace the PLC and work to embed the characteristics into their team and individual practices. As team members grew in confidence, so this exacerbated the divide with Key Stage 2 as I discovered when I was interviewing the Upper Key Stage 2 leader who inferred that the Early Years and Key Stage 1 teams could do ‘nothing wrong’!

The Early Years and Key Stage 1 teams, under effective leadership, had embraced the PLC ideals of situated learning with the focus on bringing about transformation. Allocating time, reviewing systems and empowering individuals were part of the process for introducing the PLC within the teams.

The staff members had a shared understanding of expectations for the pupils and for their teaching. They collaborated by sharing ideas, knowledge and strategies with each other. Colleagues learned collectively by identifying and discussing issues and solving problems common to the team. These teachers and support staff members sought knowledge from one another as they focused on improving teaching and learning both within formal and informal situations. They also planned together and analysed data relating to pupil performance. This was all evidenced through responses to questionnaires, semi-structured interview questions and through my limited number of observations.

‘....in KS1 they are a lot more transparent, they will talk about things that have gone wrong, they will help each other, they will share resources and they will trust sharing things with their colleagues. I can’t say the same thing about KS2 and that’s because the TA’s haven’t shifted like they have in KS1 and Early Years.’

(Principal, End of year interview)

One suggestion as to why the Early Years and Key Stage 1 teams operated more effectively was because historically they were used to working closely together.

‘We’re all a team, all of us together. We share, we know what we want the children to achieve and we do it together. Not sure if it’s the same in KS2 because I’ve only ever worked in KS1 but for all the year groups downstairs we know what the aims are, we know what we want the children to achieve before they move onto the next school year. We know what we want them to be, what they can do, upstairs I’m not sure!’

Strong professional and often personal relationships between individual staff members were well established and the introduction of a senior leader with knowledge and enthusiasm arguably contributed to this team having stronger foundations on which to build. The senior leader also held an SLT post. She attempted to initiate change, for team members to value 'learning together' and to take collective responsibility. She described her vision:

'...it's all about creating a team so that even if I'm not here they can still implement good practice... It's about a shared vision and how we want Early Years to move forward and how we can do that together..... It's not just me driving everything. I've got my ideas but I want us to feel that we've all worked together in achieving something at the end.... We discuss ways forward to develop the children and the learning environment etc. ... the ideas come from everyone.....we get the staff to take ownership of certain areas within Early Years and they have a chance to develop without judgement.'

The Early Years and Key Stage 1 teams had embraced the PLC and were seriously working to embed the characteristics into their team and individual practices. As team members grew in confidence so this exacerbated the divide with Key Stage 2 as I discovered when I was interviewing the Upper Key Stage 2 leader who inferred that the Early Years and Key Stage 1 teams could do 'nothing wrong'!

The middle leaders in Key Stage 2 had not embraced the PLC concept or characteristics in the same way. They did plan together, discussed pupil data, shared ideas and techniques, but differed from their Key Stage 1 counterparts in that staff members' collective learning was less evident and a 'by-product' rather than an intent. There was a more traditional approach to meetings involving dealing with information, document sharing and discussions on pupil progress. Less time and importance was placed on sharing practice, generating new ideas and collective reflection.

One of the newly appointed Key Stage 2 leaders commented:

‘We only have time to update colleagues, to discuss interventions, individual pupils and to plan. If we have time we will share practice. Meetings are driven by what is necessary: pupil progress, interventions and planning’.

(Michelle, Middle Leader, KS2, End of year interview)

Close partnerships between the class teacher and the classroom support member of staff or between teachers working in the same age group were common in Key Stage 2 teams. The teams were smaller in number and colleagues were able to work closely on a day-to-day basis focused on planning and on individual pupil interventions mainly with their year group colleagues:

‘I work with the class teacher on all planning’.

(Irene, Support Staff Member, KS2, End of year questionnaire)

But the pressures exerted by SLT to adopt the PLC approach and to be more creative caused tensions for the less confident Key Stage 2 leaders.

‘We work as a phase team... we discuss, we plan, we share. If that is what we need to do, then fine, otherwise I am not sure what is expected and whether or not we could deliver....’

(Victoria, Senior Leader, Key Stage Team, Start of Year interview)

The move towards distributing leadership also progressed at different rates within each of the Key Stage teams. There may be a number of underlying reasons for this, but essentially it was the knowledge and motivation of the team leader that was the difference. Within the Key Stage 2 team there was a sense that staff were ‘experienced’ and not ‘novices’ (Ball and Cohen, 1999) and therefore they were less open to change. Overtly learning from each other or alongside others rather than just advising or exchanging ideas was a new

concept to many of them. Responses to questions did, however, demonstrate sharing practice amongst Key Stage 2 staff members did occur on a regular basis. Professional relationships, between individual teachers and the support staff members working in their classrooms, in the main appeared to be strong and effective in both Key Stages.

‘We plan together and with the TAs’.

(Shelly, Teacher, KS2, Start of year interview)

However, trust issues between leaders and staff members continued to exist and was illustrated by one of the newly appointed Key Stage 2 leaders:

‘Especially as my role changed this year, I can already see the difference in terms of how staff treat me. Staff who used to talk to me don’t talk as much to me now as they feel I’m going to tell whatever they’ve said...’.

(Michelle, Middle Leader, KS2, End of year interview)

And one support staff member referred to the lack of collective responsibility:

‘I think there are some people with the attitude that it’s not my responsibility it is the teachers and that’s wrong because we’re there working with them to support the children as well. It’s hard to make that judgement, when you listen to hearsay ‘it’s her fault’.

(Clarice, Support Staff Member, KS2, Start of year interview)

Furthermore, staff members continued to be suspicious of leaders:

‘With regards to trust, we have progressed but at the same time I think we have our own personal fear that others may be judging.’

(Angela, Teacher, KS1, End of year interview)

However, there was an optimism that this may change:

‘.....now that the school has been opened up and people are more approachable, you do feel that you can approach anyone with a problem.....and you’ll ask them what do you think of this and they’ll advise you....’

(Arthur, Teacher, KS1, End of year interview)

Although Key Stage divides are evident in primary schools across the country, it appeared that the divide was greater at Oldtown Primary School than in most other schools, and this divide played a significant part in the failure of the school to introduce a PLC at this time. However, the Early Years and Key Stage 1 teams have provided the school with foundations on which to build a PLC.

5.7 Systematic use of time

There were a number (75.6%; n=62/82) of coded responses from interviews that referred to insufficient time for current working let alone the introduction of new initiatives. The imposition of new initiatives created tensions between leaders and staff members. The staff members perceived that each new initiative needed more allocated time rather than a change in the way that time was used. Therefore, there was a perception that the PLC, as a new initiative, would require additional time and this would be to their detriment. A number of responses could not see where this additional time could be found. This view once more illustrated the lack of knowledge as to how the PLC could support and facilitate the use and creation of time.

Staff members considered themselves to be working at the limits of their capabilities:

‘We barely have time for the basics let alone anything new’.

(Michelle, Middle Leader, KS2, Start of year interview)

The use of time for whole school training and for meetings was the focus of an SLT-led review held at the start of the research year. Staff members are more willing to be supportive if they feel that their time is well-spent and if the experience is of value. The review found that cross Key Stage team meetings were only possible after school or on training days due to the split lunch-time arrangements, therefore these colleagues mainly met in formal meetings. The review outcomes suggested that more time was needed for collaborative working across the school and existing meeting structures should be changed to facilitate more sharing of practice across the Key Stages. The focus was on how effectively time was allocated and used, e.g. for disseminating information, professional development training or for professional learning activities. For schools such as Oldtown Primary, finding time and using it effectively are crucial to engaging staff members and persuading them of the importance of professional learning (Hord, 1997; Stoll, 1999).

Within the data, responses to poor time management included issues regarding the introduction of coaching and mentoring. Some leaders and teachers had received training but time was not allocated for sessions to take place with others. The intention was to eventually roll out the programme to involve all staff members but this did not happen as time could not be found and subsequently tensions arose as there were fears of another initiative failing:

‘...there’s no time. They’ve introduced it (coaching and mentoring) and left us to go ahead’.

(Victoria, Middle Leader, KS1, End of year interview)

A note aside, this response from a leader is interesting as it refers to ‘they (them)’, referring to the Principal and Deputy. Again this illustrates the tensions that existed at the start of the year within the leadership team when the internally appointed leaders were still coming to terms with their roles and new status.

The issue and legislation of the use of time in schools had been considered by successive UK governments. Over recent years the introduction of academies has freed up Governing Bodies to make their own decisions with regard to pay and conditions and hours of work. However, tensions can still arise regarding how non-contact time is used (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003). In English primary schools, teachers are allocated planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time which is seen by teachers as protected time for them to use as they see fit within the remit of PPA, but in practice this time is not always seen as sacrosanct in all schools. But what this legislation has achieved is to enable schools to take responsibility for how time is allocated and allow schools to be creative in doing so. Schools that wish to allot time for creative PLC activities have the flexibility to do this.

But academisation at Oldtown Primary School was seen by leaders to bring tension rather than opportunity.

5.8 Academisation

As described earlier in the chapter, the school was dealing with pressures from the Academy sponsors to rapidly raise pupil attainment. In order to effectively respond, the school leaders believed that the school required support, guidance and additional funding to initiate changes. Leaders themselves needed encouragement to experiment and staff members required reinvigorating.

The PLC had the potential to do this, but the Academy sponsors were ignorant of the PLC as communication between the school leaders and Academy sponsors regarding the intent to introduce the PLC has not taken place. The sponsors were new to their role and were not specialists in primary education. Tensions arose through the reluctance of the primary specialists, the school leaders, to take advice from non-primary specialists.

‘Leading and managing a primary school is very different to running a secondary school!’

(Principal, End of year interview)

Not understanding the implications of academisation for them or the school, many staff members became fearful of losing their jobs, another catalyst for creating tension:

‘.....I would like to know how the school is fully supported now that it’s an Academy! Where does that money come from now that we’re a company...how do they support the school? Questions like how is the Academy doing? Are we doing well? What’s our future as an Academy and how is it supported?’

(Lucy, Support Staff Member, Nurture, Start of year interview)

It was the Academy sponsors agenda that determined the school’s priorities and took over from what the school was aiming to achieve during my research year. It was the main distraction for the school leaders taking their attention away from the PLC introduction.

The combined internally and externally driven conflicts and tensions outlined in this chapter to date resulted in the school’s inability to effectively establish a PLC. There were too many distractions for the new leadership team, already under pressure to initiate change, and who found it impossible to remain focused on the goal of establishing a PLC.

5.9 Conclusions

The second theme arising from the data analysis was ‘conflict and tension’ and is related to issues of leadership and perceptions of leadership that will be covered in the next chapter. This theme emerged from the number of responses (e.g. 23%, n= 63/275 interview responses) that were categorised as ‘conflict and tension’ and is related to the conceptual framework arising from analysis of PLCs as situated and collaborative. The emergence of this theme

also supported my investigation into research sub-questions around the existing PLC knowledge of leaders and staff members, the capacity within the school to become a PLC and challenges or barriers of introducing a PLC in an inner-city location.

Tensions already existed between long-serving members of staff and the leaders. Many of these staff members had experienced numerous changes to leadership over the years and a number of interventions (local and national), mainly unsuccessful, over a four-year period. None of this was conducive to the timing of the introduction of a PLC.

Conflicts and tensions arose between leaders as not all of the team were involved in the decision to become a PLC, or agreed with the timing of its introduction. Leaders remained ill-informed and ignorant of the vision throughout the year as the other priorities took over. Tensions also arose between leaders as newly appointed Key Stage leaders were expected to drive the PLC with little knowledge or support from senior leaders. In fact, a number of the tensions dated back to years of change, in-stability, mistrust, under-achievement and a lack of staff responsibility. Over these years the changes in leadership and the resultant interventions had created an environment of distrust and suspicion between the leadership team members and between the leaders and staff members.

The school was still embedding a number of school improvement initiatives when the Principal decided to establish the PLC in response to my letter requesting a school to participate in this research (Appendix 4). This was an autonomous decision by the Principal that in itself created tensions between her and the other leaders.

The sharing of the vision and the understanding of the PLC with the leaders did not take place and leaders learnt about the PLC as time progressed. This lack of communication and understanding made it difficult for leaders to share the PLC vision with other members of staff, again causing frustration and tension.

The leadership team were ill-prepared and this did not help them in their endeavours to introduce the PLC across the staff. The poor PLC leadership from the outset caused, and built upon, existing tensions of 'us and them' that needed to be addressed.

Introducing a PLC requires a whole-school 'buy-in', so communication and clarity of the vision, mission, culture and ethos of a school becomes particularly important and relevant. Expectations need to be shared. They were not, and many of the tensions that resulted were created through the lack of clarity of vision, ineffective communications and through differing expectations such as responsibility for outcomes. The exception was the new Early Years and Key Stage 1 leader who made a point of researching and understanding the PLC characteristics and did her utmost to create a PLC within her teams.

So tensions arose due to the existing poor relationships and a lack of effective communication in the school. In addition, there was a lack of knowledge and ownership by staff members regarding responsibilities for pupils' outcomes and personal professional learning. The culture of the school at the start of the research year did not readily facilitate a PLC. The failed Local Authority and government interventions over a number of years (chapter 1) had affected staff member's attitudes towards responsibility and accountability and this impacted negatively on the culture. It also meant that the more established staff members were less open to embracing further change. The data discussed in this chapter demonstrates the importance of relationships and effective management of those relationships, particularly when introducing something new such as a PLC.

The importance of staff engagement in a PLC has been discussed at length, for example by Hord (1997), Stoll (1999) and Hipp and Huffman (2010) and is commensurate with findings in this study. If relationships are not managed, then the job of introducing the PLC becomes much more difficult.

It was evident that the poor relationships, in part at least, arose from endemic poor communication in the school. Poor communication systems resulted in the vision for the PLC not being shared, leaders not fully informed and a general lack of knowledge of PLCs. The issue of a number of school improvement initiatives also being delivered simultaneously as the PLC introduction, also heightened tensions amongst staff members who were conscious, as were some leaders, of initiative overload. However, the data demonstrated through responses that conflict and tension issues reduced between start and end of year. What was new and could not be foreseen was the conflict and tension that arose from academisation.

In the following chapter I will be reporting on the third theme that emerged from the data, that of leadership.

CHAPTER 6

PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

6.1 Introduction

How leaders are perceived by teachers and support staff members often impacts on relationships, trust and on the respect agenda. The themes reported in chapters 4 and 5, capacity- building through internal and external contributors and conflict and tension, both referenced staff members' perception of leadership. In this chapter I will focus on staff members' perceptions of leadership in general and on the leadership of professional learning and the PLC in particular.

Again, data was influenced by the school's history and context (chapter 1) and consequently the school leadership model, the Principal's leadership style, school culture, the leadership of change and of staff engagement.

With specific reference to professional learning, it was evident that there remained some way to go to engage all members of staff and to improve their levels of understanding and commitment. However, some progress had been made within the Early Years and Key Stage 1 teams (chapter 5).

The perceptions of leadership theme emerged from the number of coded responses, both positive and negative, relating to leadership from the questionnaires and interviews (36.2%, n=401/1107) and through observations. Documentation that I was able to access was also analysed for references to the leadership of the PLC or to professional learning.

The leadership of the PLC was a challenge for the school at a time when there were a number of other priorities, initiatives and distractions (chapter 1).

As leadership permeates what schools do, how people behave, and so on, it is important to again note the context of the school, the journey the school had

been on since the arrival of the Principal and the priorities imposed by the Academy sponsors when considering the evidence.

Every school and context is unique and PLCs will evolve differently (Hord, 1997; Stoll, 2007; DuFour and DuFour, 2012). The uniqueness of Oldtown Primary School's context was mainly due to the timing of the PLC with the Academy agenda, the number of external consultants working in the school and to the school's history.

I have organised the data findings under headings that relate to perceptions of school leadership, professional learning leadership and the PLC leadership.

Effective school leadership is recognised as the second most significant area that impacts on a school's performance, second only to the quality of teaching (McKinsey, 2010). There is a plethora of education literature that describes effective leadership and leaders. But putting the theory into practice is not always easy in reality.

6.2 Perceptions of Leadership

6.2.1 Leadership Style

Perceptions of leadership are often influenced by an individual's experiences, length of service, comparisons with leaders/ship in previous schools and relationships with leaders both past and present. For example, the views of 33.3% (n=10/30) members of teaching and support staff who had been in the school for longer than five years would be different to those 40% (n=12/30) who had been at the school for less than five years, or to the 26.6% (n=8/30) who were new to the school. As over a quarter of staff were new to the school, this needed to be considered when analysing the data.

Due to the issues encountered by the school over a number of years (chapter 1), successive leaders had adopted an autonomous leadership style in order to attempt to address issues and to impose changes. The staff members who had been at the school for some-time had therefore experienced autonomous and

hierarchical leaders for some time who had 'directed' them to participate in new interventions. This had created an ingrained culture of mistrust and an understanding that leaders led and other staff members followed. There was no understanding of collective responsibility.

'....we do not have to understand, we just have to do!'

(Josie, Middle Leader, KS 1/2 Curriculum lead Start of year interview)

Historically, due to the school's under-achievement over the years, staff members had not been encouraged to take responsibility, show initiative or to lead and this resulted in a lack of collective responsibility for the outcomes of the pupils.

As the Principal had been appointed to focus on the task of leading the school out of the Special Measures category, initially she also adopted an autonomous approach as she explained 'to get things done'. Consequently, her behaviour and role were determined by the task at hand. Using this approach, she was successful in achieving significant improvements, as recognised through Ofsted inspection and the school coming 'out of' the Special Measures category (chapter 1). Therefore, the leadership model of the Principal during her early years of tenure (2009-12) was perceived by staff members as top-down and autocratic (start of the research year questionnaire responses, 59%, n=13/22).

'.....management has always been top led (whoever the Principal)'.

(Josie, Middle Leader, KS 1/2 Curriculum lead Start of year interview)

In changing her leadership style and moving towards distributing leadership, the Principal was aiming to change the culture, to re-culture, in order to facilitate more ownership, improved relationships and greater levels of engagement.

'I want the staff to be more proactive about what happens....staff to be more reflective about their practices.... I want to stop the school from being so

insular... I want to see the school opened up and working with other professionals'.

(Principal, Start of year interview)

Principals are the main influencers of a positive school culture as it is they who will lead and facilitate that change (Fullan, 2007; DuFour and DuFour, 2012).

6.3 Perceptions of School Culture

The 'us and them' culture had become the norm in the school.

'I'm not sure how much we've all been singing the same tune up to now...'

(Josie, Middle Leader, KS 1/2 Curriculum lead Start of year interview)

The long period of instability had resulted in staff members taking little or no responsibility for pupils' outcomes or for their own development. Under previous leadership there had been no attempts to create a culture of self-improvement outside of the professional development processes. If the PLC was to be established there was a need to develop a strong culture, ethos and understanding of how professional adult learning occurs in schools (Mullen, 2009; Hipp and Huffman, 2010), thereby creating a true learning organisation. Cavanagh and Dellar (1998:11) suggest that:

'...school improvement occurs through the growth of the learning community's culture and perpetuation of the common values which bond the community'.

Creating a culture that establishes and sustains a successful PLC is complex. Principals need to understand what a PLC is and what it can achieve in order to provide the appropriate support to other leaders and staff members (DuFour and DuFour, 2012). Unfortunately, the Principal at Oldtown Primary School

was not able to support SLT colleagues in their understanding and this did not help the introduction of the PLC.

If it were not for the new Early Years and Key Stage 1 senior leader introducing PLC characteristics and developing a PLC culture within her team, the school would have learnt little from its endeavours to become a PLC. But across the school, changing the culture within a short period of time was deemed to be beyond the SLT team and consequently there was little change in the culture.

Through my start of year briefing, questionnaire and semi-structured interviews I attempted to raise leaders' and staff members' awareness of the PLC characteristics and the culture required to embed them into everyday practice and operation. However, whether or not each of the characteristics was fully understood by every individual was questionable. Due to the lack of clarity, different understandings emerged, for example, when discussing the term 'reflective personal enquiry', responses such as:

'What does that mean?'

(Josie, Middle Leader, Key Stage 1/2 Curriculum lead, Start of year interview)

were not uncommon. For the end of year questionnaire, I provided a more detailed explanation of each of the characteristics to attempt to improve consistency of understanding of the terminology.

When questioned about which PLC characteristics the school was currently demonstrating, the teachers and leaders, as an example, responded:

What PLC characteristics does the school already demonstrate?	LEADERS' RESPONSES No of respondents (Max no. of respondents - 6)	TEACHERS' RESPONSES No of respondents (Max no. of respondents - 16)
Shared values and vision	83% (5)	69% (11)
Collective responsibility	100% (6)	87% (14)
Collaborative learning	83% (5)	44% (7)
Individual learning	83% (5)	62% (10)
Reflective personal enquiry	67% (4)	19% (3)
Openness	83% (5)	75% (12)
Inclusive membership	67% (4)	62% (1)
Mutual trust	67% (4)	37% (6)

Figure 5

What PLC characteristics does the school already demonstrate?

When investigated further through interview questioning, the low response to 'inclusive membership' confirmed that teachers based their response on poor communication in the school as some people were kept informed and others not and levels of trust varied considerably. Inclusive membership and mutual trust in particular are characteristics significantly based on relationships and the low responses supported perceptions that relationships needed to be improved.

The responses also indicated that the majority of leaders (of which 2 new to the school and 2 new to a leadership post) perceived the school was already demonstrating a number of the PLC characteristics. Notably, reflective personal enquiry, inclusive membership and mutual trust were acknowledged as weaker. Again, when investigated further, reflective personal enquiry was seen as an expectation, but not supported.

Improving and changing attitudes, systems and culture that embed the PLC characteristics required leaders to have the ability to facilitate change.

6.4 Change and Transformation

Change was happening in the school, much of it positive and recognised through Ofsted inspection and improvements in the community's perceptions of the school as evidenced through the FAST project (chapter 1). But significant change takes time to embed, requires effective leadership and efficient processes. As Fullan (2001) discusses, Principals who have the ability to bring about change possess a moral purpose and sense of social responsibility, understand change and how to bring it about and can improve relationships, change cultures, foster knowledge creation and facilitate effective sharing of practice.

The Principal had a good understanding of managing change. From the time she was appointed, she was conscious of the importance for the staff members to understand the concept of change. In her first staff briefing the new Principal outlined her beliefs - A New Beginning and A New Hope – and in her presentation she explained her rationale for change informing the staff members that they needed to begin the journey to success with 'the end in mind'.

Some staff members did realise that change was necessary and crucial to the school's survival whilst others viewed more change as unnecessary and wanted a period of stability. If the reasoning behind change was not explained by leaders or understood by staff members, then it is likely that staff members would default to conventional processes (Giles and Hargreaves, 2006), as experienced at Oldtown Primary School.

'Things have got to change if the school is to move forward and try and achieve an 'Outstanding school' inspection... but some people don't like change... I've seen a lot of staff leave'.

(Lucy, Support staff member, Integration, Start of year interview)

The school staff members had experienced constant change but were not well-supported to develop their skills and approaches to managing such change. The expectation, as in many schools, is that the staff members just had to 'get on with it' and 'cope'. Effective preparation of staff for change was an issue that arose in the data, particularly in relation to the timing of the PLC introduction and the readiness of leaders and staff members. Organizational readiness for change is described by Weiner (2009:67) as:

‘...an organization’s members’ collective attitude, willingness, commitment, and confidence to engage in school change.’

Significant change comes from the individual, supported through the organisation and not from external forces (Fullan, 2007). If change is perceived as mandated and/or externally introduced, for example by the Academy and Local Authority, then significant change is unlikely. The introduction of change, and the perceptions of staff members towards change, needed to be carefully managed by the school’s leaders, some of whom were new to the school or inexperienced, new to leadership and change management and working within a newly constructed leadership structure.

6.5 Principal Behaviour

Having successfully brought the school out of the Special Measures Ofsted category, the Principal had re-branded the school and managed the change process to enable the school to become an Academy (chapter 1). But she was now under pressure to deliver the improvements expected by the Academy sponsors. How she responded was to shape staff members’ perceptions of her as a leader.

The actual or perceived behaviour of a Principal affects how a school is led and managed and ultimately influences how effective the school, its staff members

and pupils perform (DuFour and DuFour, 2012). Their positional authority as ‘all seeing and knowing’ affects how others see them or their role. In her attempt to be more open and approachable the Principal’s efforts were recognised.

‘The Principal is listening more’.

(Anthony, Senior Leader, Whole School, Start of year interview)

And she was perceived by a newly appointed middle leader as being inclusive:

‘We know our Principal is quite driven and she takes us along with her. She wants us to get involved in how we change the school, she wants us to change the school...’

(Michelle, Middle Leader, KS2, Start of year interview)

This was confirmed by a support member of staff:

‘She’s focused and she knows where she wants us to go..... She puts it in black and white and says that’s what we’re going to do and we all do it, what more could we ask?’

(Paul, Support staff member, KS2, Start of year interview)

However, not all staff members were convinced and on a more negative note:

‘I think sometimes things are dumped on us very quickly from above..... I think maybe at the very top there is a need to be a little less reactionary.’

(Josie, Middle Leader, KS1/2 Curriculum lead, Start of year interview)

The Principal was also trying to improve attitudes towards, and understanding of, professional learning. She tried to lead by example and become a ‘learning leader’ which involved her sharing her own professional development and learning journey so that staff members could see what support and training she

was receiving. This demonstrated her empathy with others along with developing her own capacity and skills. The Principal engaged as a team member in several activities that required staff members to interact as equals in staff training sessions.

What she was unable to do was to address the misconceptions that existed in the school regarding the PLC in particular. The first was that the school was already a learning community because it was an organisation where pupils and staff members supposedly learnt. And secondly, that support members of staff continued to interpret 'community' as involving the wider community outside the school and not the community within the school.

Systems are led by leaders and McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) stress the influence that Head teachers and senior leaders have on 'making or breaking' a PLC. Head teachers who use their authority to build a teacher community, convey new expectations for teachers' work and ensure that teachers have the time, space and knowledge resources needed for collaborative work (McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) are more likely to embed an effective PLC in their school.

Unfortunately, the lack of PLC preparation at Oldtown Primary School resulted in leaders' expectations of teachers and support staff members not being clarified.

Wells and Feun (2007) examined Principal leadership of PLCs and concluded that Principals' should not only have a good knowledge of the PLC model and a clear vision for their school, they should also understand change theory and their role in bringing about effective and sustainable change. They should be aware of the skills, strengths and areas for development of the staff members and have knowledge as to how best to support them. As referred to in various sections of this chapter, the Principal was addressing some, but not all, of these issues.

6.6 Perceptions of Leadership of Professional Learning

Limited knowledge of professional learning and how to manage this emerged through the data. As explored through the literature review, the importance of professional learning in improving the quality of teaching is becoming more apparent in schools (chapters 1 and 2).

Findings proved that staff members perceived that formal professional learning occurred through professional development activities and these were decided for them through their performance management.

‘This (professional learning) is decided in my performance management interview’.

(Clarice, Support Staff Member, KS2, Start of year interview)

Professional learning, when perceived in this way and not as an individual’s responsibility and as a day-to-day function, led to a limited view across staff members of both professional development and professional learning, a view that in the main remained unchallenged by leaders. The Principal informed me that she hoped teachers would eventually take responsibility for their own and others’ professional learning and understand what was involved. She also hoped that in doing so they would collaboratively and socially construct a learning community (Lambert, 1998; Fullan, 2001). However, there was a lack of understanding of staff members with regard to professional learning and confusion around responsibilities for leading this. The majority of the staff members were unfamiliar with the term ‘professional learning’ and when discussed in the interviews had different interpretations or thought I was discussing professional development. Therefore, there was no consistent understanding of what professional learning looked like in the school or whose responsibility it was.

‘I am not sure what you mean. My learning takes place at meetings’.

(Paul, Support staff member, KS2, Start of year interview)

There was little mention by teachers in interviews or questionnaire responses of collaborative learning, reflection on practice, research or experimentation or of other activities associated with professional learning. There was no systematic focus on professional learning in the school and therefore no emphasis on developing professional learning skills of staff members. There was just an expectation that they would do it!

The lack of understanding of professional learning hindered both professional development and professional learning practices and slowed improvements in the quality of teaching. This lack of understanding was not unique to Oldtown Primary School as evidenced in other schools (Williams, 2010). If the PLC had been effectively introduced and established then, as Hartnell-Young (2003) discovered, teachers may have become more involved in their professional learning as they became familiar with the PLC framework.

At the start of the year there was also little acknowledgement across staff members of what constitutes 'informal professional learning' or how this could support them. The term refers to professional conversations, reading, deep reflection, analysis of impact of personal practice, research, observations or sharing practice outside of meetings. There was recognition across staff members that they were involved in some or all of these activities on a regular basis and they valued these activities, but they were not viewed in the context of professional learning.

'We discuss things daily, sometimes we discuss individual pupils, sometimes we share something that worked well. These are often brief discussions in corridors or in the staff room'.

(Gertrude, Teacher, Early Years, End of year interview)

The staff members in Key Stage 2 described an informal collaborative community primarily built on personal relationships. Collaboration was largely sporadic, and congenial with professional conversations conducted daily often

between close colleagues and/or friends. There were a number of staff who believed that they learned more through informal learning (43.7%, n=11/28). When questioned, both teachers and support staff members labelled this dialogue as 'sharing' or 'informing' rather than 'learning' although they did acknowledge that the receiver of information may be taking on board new knowledge and therefore learning. Applying a slightly different mind-set to these conversations may have supported understanding of knowledge-growth through exploration, application of joint working, research or collaborative deep learning.

Adults, like pupils, learn from activities when they see a purpose for themselves (Adult Learning theory, Merriam and Caffarella, 1999) and Timperley (2011) discusses the need for leaders to provide systematic support to facilitate professional learning. She argues:

'Professional learning that is disconnected from these everyday situations rarely makes much difference to pupils'.

(Timperley (2011:91)

Therefore, schools introducing a PLC are advised (Timperley, 2011) to consider developing the skills of staff members in how to learn themselves within a professional learning and/or learning organisation and/or community of practice context. Leaders are responsible for enabling this to happen, again something that leaders of Oldtown Primary School struggled to achieve.

6.7 Perceptions of Leadership of the PLC

It is the quality and style of leadership that shapes a PLC (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007). 'Heroic leadership' (Kruse and Louis (2009); Robinson et al., 2007) is required to build strong school cultures that will create better opportunities for pupils through a professional community, organisational learning and trust. But this is not always easy to achieve and, as evidenced at

Oldtown Primary School, can be influenced by historical and current issues at the same time.

The fact that the Principal or SLT members had only limited knowledge of the PLC at this time did not appear to be a major consideration for the staff members. The lack of SLT knowledge was not mentioned at all in responses to questionnaire or interview questions and as the SLT were not driving the PLC, the perception of the staff members appeared to be that the PLC was not a priority, just something happening around them. The SLT viewed the PLC as naturally evolving as the other improvement activities and interventions were introduced into the school (Observation note 3). This view was naïve and again demonstrated a lack of leadership or PLC knowledge and again re-emphasised that the PLC was not perceived as a change initiative.

The overall lack of staff preparation for the PLC was evident through responses to questions in the start of year questionnaire and particularly illustrated when answering the question on the understanding of what is a PLC.

‘I have never heard of the phrase’.

(Sukhvinder, Support Staff Member, Key Stage 1, Start of year questionnaire)

Both teachers and support staff members mentioned terms relating to professional development and collaboration, but no one other than leaders claimed that they were familiar with or understood the phrase ‘professional learning communities’. It was apparent that this terminology was not used within the school and was unfamiliar to most colleagues. This was re-emphasised through my observations and the lack of the use of these terms in the school’s documentation.

From the data evidence it can be concluded that leaders were unable to lead the school towards a PLC at this time, although there was notable successful leadership within Early Years and Key Stage 1. The failure across the rest of the school was due to a number of factors: the lack of a shared vision, SLT not being involved from the outset, a lack of leaders’ knowledge of PLCs, no

leadership of the PLC, the lack of focus on the PLC goal, distractions from Academy sponsors, barriers from entrenched staff members that were not successfully managed, to name a few.

6.8 Conclusion

Perceptions of leadership emerged from the number of responses in the data and supports my investigation into 'what is the current understanding of PLCs' and 'what existing practices could be developed', two of my research sub-questions. The data referred in the main to leadership issues per se, with very few specific references to the leadership of a PLC thereby demonstrating that the PLC was not a priority in the school. Furthermore, the data showed that staff members relied on leaders to determine their professional development and within that their professional learning, a typical English primary school model. It also demonstrated a lack of understanding of staff members as to what professional learning is, whose responsibility it is and what impact it could or should have on personal practice.

There were a number of opportunities that the school leaders could have developed to build the PLC, such as lesson study, coaching and mentoring, distributing leadership and/or the themed curriculum. It was the absence of PLC planning and knowledge, not having a clear PLC vision and the distractions of academisation that meant that these opportunities were not successfully exploited.

The data that emerged demonstrated that staff members' perception of their leaders was mixed, often dependent upon the individual respondent's experience, time in school or relationship with leaders. What was widely acknowledged was that there were changes occurring in the school, generally accepted as changes for the better, but this was happening slowly. It was at a time when the school was going through a period of building working relations

with the new Academy sponsors and this was not a straightforward or smooth process.

The data highlighted the importance of supportive and shared leadership, and a clear a shared vision, both PLC characteristics, to drive the school and PLC forward. But most importantly, the findings illustrate the importance of strong strategic leadership, leadership of change, effective communication, clarity of a shared PLC vision and maintaining the focus on the goal as none of these were consistently evidenced at Oldtown Primary School. These findings are commensurate with those of other case studies (Arbogast, 2004, Burdett, 2009, Voelkel, 2011, Carpenter, 2012 and Owen, 2014) illustrating that substantive change in improvement requires ownership of pupil outcomes through collective responsibility, again something Oldtown Primary School leaders were striving to reinforce.

Analysis and reflection of the data has offered some interesting insights. The data emphasises the need for leaders to work as a team. This will not be news to school leaders, but the experiences of the leadership team members at Oldtown Primary School will remind leaders who are in any doubt. Even if autonomous decisions are made by the Head teacher or Principal, all leaders are responsible for ensuring that required actions are carried out. This is only possible if leaders are aware and understand the vision and what is required of them.

The perceptions of staff members towards the Principal in particular and to leaders in general were changing throughout the year. The change in leadership style from being autocratic to more distributed was recognised. The broadening of the leadership team with a number of internal appointments made was well-received by staff members. But there was still significant evidence that staff members positioned barriers to change. There was reluctance to change evidenced through responses from more experienced staff members in particular. Too many interventions and too much change was perceived as detrimental with some calling for a period of stability.

However, leadership within the Early Years and Key Stage 1 teams was effective. Staff members knew what they were aiming to achieve, participated in learning activities, took ownership and responsibility and worked towards embedding the PLC characteristics into their practice. They were well-led as a team and responded to the enthusiasm of their newly appointed leader.

Staff members were unaware of their responsibility for professional learning, what this entailed and whose responsibility it was, their own or their leaders. Again this led to a negative perception of leaders due to the absence of clarity resulting from poor communications.

Within the context of a learning organisation the emergence of this theme is significant. Without effective leadership a learning organisation cannot be developed. Leaders who view their employees as knowledge creators and learners can design and construct environments in which this can happen. At Oldtown Primary School there was no effective PLC leadership and the leaders did not perceive staff as professional learners or knowledge creators.

In the final chapter I will discuss my findings in more detail related to my research questions, draw some conclusions from the study and provide some thoughts on future research.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This study explored what happened when the leaders of one English inner-city primary school attempted to introduce a PLC. PLCs have been established in schools across the world with the intention to improve the quality of teaching to positively impact on pupil attainment.

The research approach was through a mixed methods ethnographic-case study and conducted with the intent to add to existing literature as there is little empirical data on what happens to schools when they attempt to introduce a PLC, particularly relating to English primary schools.

Traditionally in England, improving teaching quality has been delivered through 'professional development' which has become increasingly susceptible to UK government policy changes over the years (chapter 2). Professional development, rather than professional learning, remains the government's, and therefore most schools', driver for teacher improvement in England and is linked to staff performance management processes (chapter 1). Professional learning is perceived by most teachers as being part of professional development and consequently there is little promotion of professional learning nationally. Nor is there overt government support for PLCs. Promotion in schools of professional learning and PLCs as an expectation, process or activity is left to the discretion of the school's leaders. Government policy shifts have provided more autonomy for Head teachers and therefore more freedom to decide for themselves, but at the same time this is reliant on Head teachers being aware of professional learning and PLCs and of their potential.

For many years, Timperley (2008/2011) and Cordingley et al. (2003, 2005, 2007, 2012) have debated the impact of professional development on teacher improvement. Over more recent years this discussion has been focused more on professional learning, viewed as being more individualised and requiring

active participation (chapter 2) than professional development. So with the lack of knowledge of professional learning and of PLCs, progress in England has been slower than in other countries.

In this chapter I will review my main findings with reference to the research questions, drawing on the data collected. Then I aim to consider the findings in relation to the theoretical and conceptual models presented in chapter two. I will then evaluate the research methods in terms of their relevance and validity to the research questions. Finally, I will discuss implications of this study for policy and practice and also for future research.

7.2 Summary of key findings

Data was collected across one academic year (2012-2013) through research methods and tools outlined in chapter 3.

Oldtown Primary School was selected as it was a school that was on the road to improvement following a long history of under-achievement and was open to introducing a PLC in an attempt to support improvements in teaching quality, low pupil attainment and staff retention rates.

I present the key findings as they relate to the research questions (chapter 1) and to my conceptual framework (chapter 2). In the summary of the key findings I have highlighted in brackets how each finding relates to the research questions and in bold and italics to the concepts of the conceptual framework.

The research questions were constructed to elicit data that provides an understanding of the position of the school in terms of knowledge of a PLC, current practices and understanding of professional development, the capacity of the school to change and to determine if there were any specific issues or barriers for an English inner-city primary school to introducing a PLC.

The first significant finding was that there was little knowledge of PLCs in Oldtown Primary School. No strategy or systematic approach to introducing the PLC had been agreed by leaders. The language of the PLC was not widely

used in the school, in conversations or in documents. There was little drive for the PLC by any of the SLT members.

As a consequence, staff members were unaware of the school's PLC ambitions throughout the research year. The absence of any SLT drive meant that any success was to be achieved through the teams and therefore dependent upon the team leader. The Early Years and Key Stage 1 leader (chapter 4) was the exception as she demonstrated an understanding of the PLC characteristics and operation. But little impact was made in Key Stage 2. The different approaches led to frustration and tension between the Key Stage teams and between SLT and the Key Stage 2 team as the Early Years and Key Stage 1 teams received praise for their endeavours.

So, at the end of the research year there were some pockets of planned PLC activity in Early Years and Key Stage 1, but in essence, the school had only just begun moving forward on the journey to introducing an effective and sustainable PLC. The reasons for this are well documented throughout this study, but were focused on the school's history and the context of the school at the time of the research.

In summary, the key findings linked to the research questions and to the conceptual framework were:

- a) The absence of leadership led to the failure of the PLC. Introducing a PLC into a school requires a leader, someone to drive the PLC. This person needs to be knowledgeable about and committed towards the PLC (knowledge and capacity) (***situated, systematic***);
- b) Informing and engaging SLT is crucial in order to establish a clear vision for, and to increase SLT knowledge of, the PLC (knowledge and capacity) (***situated, systematic, collaborative***);
- c) The vision for the PLC should be shared with all staff members and a strategy agreed to deal with those who may oppose any changes (capacity) (***situated, systematic***);

- d) There was no systematic approach to the PLC introduction. There was a senior leader overseeing the introduction in Early Years and Key Stage 1. The introduction of the PLC was left to the Middle Leaders in Key Stage 2. (capacity) (***situated, systematic***);
- e) Leaders (and the school staff members) need to remain focussed and committed to achieving the goal. They should not allow themselves to become distracted, by external or internal interventions (knowledge and barriers) (***situated, systematic***);
- f) What the school hopes to achieve by introducing the PLC needs to be decided as part of the vision. The potential of the PLC to provide the framework for school improvement and related initiatives should be investigated when introducing the PLC (knowledge and capacity) (***situated, systematic, transformational***);
- g) The timing of the PLC introduction was wrong. The leaders and staff members were ill-prepared for the PLC and the academy process had not fully been completed. Timing the introduction of a PLC should be considered and the journey started only when the school staff are clear on the vision, prepared and when time can be allocated. And, when a strategy is in place for dealing with the distractions that inevitably will arise (knowledge and capacity) (***situated, systematic***);
- h) There were too many initiatives and consultants working in the school at the same time. The strategy to build capacity was short-term. The balance of internal and external capacity activities needs to be considered. The implications of over-reliance on external contributors when building staff capacity should also be considered (knowledge and capacity) (***situated, systematic***);
- i) Leaders did not consider building the PLC on existing opportunities, e.g. lesson study and/or coaching and mentoring may be useful to gradually engage staff members into the PLC (knowledge and current practices) (***situated, systematic, transformational***);
- j) The inner-city location did not impact on the introduction of the PLC. The location presented challenges to the teachers and to the school leaders,

but no more than experienced by similar schools in inner-city locations (location) (**situated**);

- k) There was no understanding or recognition of the role that professional learning could play in supporting improvements. The greater the understanding of what constitutes 'professional learning', whose responsibility it is and how this is supported in a school will contribute to both personal and collaborative improvement (knowledge, current practices and capacity) (**situated, systematic, collaboration, transformational**).

7.2.1 What are the current levels of understanding across the staff members of a PLC and its potential for sustained improvement?

In considering this question, the data consistently demonstrated that there was a general lack of knowledge of PLCs and of their potential amongst all staff members.

No member of staff could articulate the PLC characteristics and the term was never used in the meetings that I observed or the documentation I reviewed. Consequently, there was a lack of understanding amongst the leaders and staff generally of the potential of the PLC to support sustained improvement in the school. Inherent in many of the responses (90% across all responses) was the misconception that the school was already a PLC as pupils and staff members were learners. These views were generalised at all levels of staff, including leaders. This presented a challenge for the Principal and informed leaders as to how to address the misconceptions and change attitudes at a complex and difficult time.

The fact that leaders and other staff members were ill-prepared and lacked knowledge was highlighted in chapters 4, 5 and 6. This resulted from, and led to, poor communication and misunderstanding causing the emergence of the

themes of conflict and tension reported in chapter 5 and to the perceptions of leadership reported in chapter 6.

The deficiency of PLC understanding was a major factor in the failure of a PLC being established in this school, and this is consistent with findings of Hord (1997), DuFour and Eaker (1998) and Senge (1990) all of whom highlight the need to engage staff members through clear communication of the vision. Fullan (2005) cautions of the danger and imminent failure if leaders are unsuccessful in achieving this, as at Oldtown Primary School.

A staff review process of the school's mission and vision statements conducted in the summer term prior to the start of the research year did not refer at any point to the forthcoming PLC. The literature advises leaders to have a clear mission and vision (DuFour and DuFour, 2012), and the importance is clearly emphasised as this is one of the PLC characteristics (Hord, 1997). The fact that the PLC vision had not been effectively shared may have also contributed to leaders becoming distracted from the PLC.

Inherent in a number of failures at Oldtown Primary School was poor communication which resulted in no PLC preparation. Effective communication and preparation are two essential areas that the literature consistently explains are required for establishing a successful PLC (Hord, 1997; DuFour and Eaker, 1998; Hipp and Huffman, 2010).

The absence of planning was also evident through the documentation with very few references to the PLC in, for example, the school improvement plan. The inclusion of the term 'PLC' in the plan was more of a 'label' to cover references to professional development rather than to a 'formal' PLC. Also, observations of meetings and training activities showed little evidence of a consistent approach to the PLC across the school, with the exception of the work and approach in Early Years and Key Stage 1 who were embedding the PLC characteristics.

7.2.2 Does the school have the capacity to establish a PLC?

In this study both the capacity of individuals and the capacity of the organisation to change was investigated.

At the time of my research, five leaders (n=5/11 leaders: three middle leaders new to position and one new externally appointed Senior leader and one internal appointment to SLT) were new to the school and others were new to position (chapter 1, Appendix 2). Seven (n=7/30 staff members) other teachers or support staff were new or relatively new to the school. So there was a lack of knowledge amongst leaders regarding the PLC and its potential. No one person was appointed to lead or coordinate the PLC and support the Phase Leaders. I observed a meeting (October 2012; Observation note 4.3) between the Middle Leaders (Key Stage 1 and 2) who had been 'empowered' to lead the PLC in their phase, but it was evident that they were unclear with regard to the PLC and how to achieve progress towards it. Furthermore, it was also evident that they perceived the PLC as another initiative and almost resented having to introduce it. The Middle Leader for Key Stage 1 was working under the guidance of the senior leader for Early Years and Key Stage 1. The Key Stage 2 leaders did not have senior leadership guidance in the same way.

Also at this time, the leaders were encountering considerable external pressures from Academy sponsors to rapidly improve pupil attainment (chapter 1). The pressure to improve pupil attainment as quickly as possible was the over-riding priority for the school. If leaders had been informed or were aware of the PLC potential to support pupil attainment through school improvement, then perhaps different decisions may have been made. As it was, the PLC was not perceived as the framework for supporting the school improvement interventions. Instead it was seen as another and separate initiative (chapter 6). The number of interventions at the time of academisation was questioned by leaders and other staff members alike (chapter 4).

Rather than build capacity from within the school, the school leaders turned to external consultants to support leadership development and to improve literacy and numeracy teaching (chapters 1 and 5). The decision to look outside of the school for support was due, in the main, to the urgency to improve teacher quality and pupil attainment. This resulted in confusion for staff members, as evidenced through the data, regarding the school's vision for improvement and how this would be achieved (chapter 5). It also highlighted the dilemma that leaders had as to how best to achieve a balance between internally and externally driven capacity-building of staff members. Furthermore, it demonstrated the void of a formally shared plan, vision and an understanding of how the work of individual consultants would come together to support long term and sustainable school improvement, how the impact of each intervention would be assessed and how, if at all, their work contributed to the introduction of the PLC (chapter 5).

One internally introduced initiative by school leaders was distributed leadership (chapter 2). The driver for this, as explained to me by the Principal, was the need to improve relationships, develop trust between leaders and staff members and to support capacity-building processes. However, she did not discuss the distributed leadership model in the context of the PLC. The move was seen by many staff members as positive as evidenced through questionnaire and interview responses (chapter 6). The appointment of Middle Leaders and empowerment of a number of individuals from within the school was particularly welcomed. Staff members' responses to the questions in interviews demonstrated that many perceived positive changes in the approach to leadership from the start to the end of the research year (chapter 6). However, the attitudes of some of the more entrenched staff members remained unaltered (chapter 6).

The newly appointed Early Years and Key Stage 1 leader had a positive impact on the PLC development in the school (chapter 6). She led her Early Years and Key Stage 1 team to model the PLC characteristics throughout the research year and embedded PLC practices into everyday operations. Observations and

responses to interview questions illustrated the differences between Early Years and Key Stage 1 staff members and those based in Key Stage 2 (chapter 5).

Data collected also highlighted issues regarding systems (chapter 4). In particular, the two main areas were the issues of split lunchtimes for the two Key Stages which inhibited staff members' opportunities to meet, and secondly, the issues of proximity that prevented staff members from both the two Key Stage teams and from the Nurture Unit engaging with each other on a regular basis, particularly informally.

Despite issues and barriers, it was evidenced through the data that the majority of staff members had faith in the Principal to bring about change. She had already proven herself capable of leading change through bringing the school out of the Ofsted category, through leading the school to Academy status and through the FAST initiative (chapters 1 and 6). However, at the end of the year there were a few entrenched staff members who still perceived the Principal as an autonomous leader, but there was growing evidence of positive change and a move away from this belief as distributed leadership began to impact (chapter 6).

7.2.3 How can current professional development practices be developed in order to support an emergent PLC?

Prior to the research year, and irrespective of the PLC introduction, the leaders had introduced the lesson study model (chapter 1) as a focus for professional individual improvement and three senior staff members had received coaching and mentoring training with the intention of rolling this out across the school.

Lesson study, albeit in its infancy, was beginning to make a significant impact on the teachers and their practice. Although initially driven internally, the consultants were asked to support individuals and small groups through using

the lesson study approach. The support staff members received from consultants was valued (chapter 4). By the end of the research year data suggested that the majority of staff members preferred the situated, collaborative approach facilitated through lesson study that enabled on-going, rather than one-off, development opportunities (chapter 4).

‘The training that has most impact is when ideas are shared within the team’.
(Martha, Support Staff Member, Key Stage 2, Start of year questionnaire)

Coaching and mentoring was a further opportunity for introducing the PLC through the development of coaching skills, individualised professional learning, reflective practice, generating knowledge, solving problems and providing feedback.

At the end of the research year, the operation of the Early Years and Key Stage 1 team could also have been shared with Key Stage 2 colleagues. An opportunity to share the practice *in situ*.

7.2.4 What are the significant challenges or barriers to establishing a PLC in this school located in an inner-city context?

The distractions that inhibited the successful introduction of the PLC were related to the context of the school. The fact that more inner-city schools are likely to under-achieve than schools in suburban or rural areas (DfE attainment data, 2012) means that inner-city schools are under extensive scrutiny by the Local Authority, Ofsted or, if relevant, Academy sponsors.

Schools in inner-city areas are often challenged by high pupil mobility rates, high staff turn-over, high levels of competition from local schools due to the concentration of schools in cities, language issues, low parent expectations and low levels of parental engagement or interest, to note a few.

There were references in the data responses from both leaders and teachers to the high rate of staff turn-over and the need to 'start again' the following year. Staff turn-over rates at this level are not uncommon in schools located in challenging inner-city areas and in particular in schools that have experienced a history of under-achievement. Some staff members who work in challenging inner-city schools apportion responsibility for low attainment to the reasons listed above in order to deflect responsibility away from the school or themselves. This indeed was the case at Oldtown Primary School where the entrenched staff members blamed aspects of the school's failure on location and families and on the wider school context.

The FAST programme (described in chapter 1) was seen as a way to engage with parents, to involve them in supporting their child to learn, to educate the parent and to change parental and community attitudes towards the school. Fourteen of the nineteen individuals interviewed at the start of the year mentioned FAST and the significant impact that it was having on the school with more parents coming into the school, parents employed in the school and with raised levels of interest in their child's education. However, the focus on FAST was yet another distraction away from the PLC and once again leaders could not see how the PLC may have supported the school with the FAST initiative.

Overall, and as evidenced through other case studies (Arbogast, 2004; Owen, 2014) it can be concluded that all schools have challenges and issues of a differing nature. The PLC is a culture, a methodological approach to working and therefore can be applied in any context. The inner-city location of a school does not prevent PLC characteristics being demonstrated, as evidenced by the Early Years and Key Stage 1 team at Oldtown Primary School.

7.3 Evaluation of Findings as Related to Theoretical Frameworks

One of the more significant findings from my research was that the PLC needed clear leadership and a shared vision. Senge's (1990) learning organisation disciplines (personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking) includes the need for a shared vision that is developed by all staff members:

'The practice of a shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared 'pictures of the future' that foster genuine commitment and enrolment rather than compliance'.

(Senge, 1990:9)

But this did not become a reality for the PLC, although the staff members were involved in deciding the vision which did not refer to the PLC for the school. The issue was that staff members and leaders were not sufficiently informed and neither was the external consultant (leadership consultant) who led the staff through the re-visioning process, so did not include the PLC in the deliberations. Shared ideals could have been included in the drafting of the new vision statement as could references to professional learning or a learning community.

My findings also suggested that Senge's (1990) discipline of personal mastery (of pedagogical approaches and subject knowledge) was a priority for all staff members as they worked towards rapidly improving pupil outcomes. However, there was no evidence that the school was supporting development of mental models and no process to enable systems thinking. However, there were efforts being made to develop team learning, especially in the Early Years and Key Stage 1 team.

In DuFour et al.'s (2005) view, PLCs are required to break from the industrial model of education and to move towards a learning organization that emphasizes relationships, shared ideals and strong culture. Relationships at

Oldtown Primary School had been affected by historical factors that led to high staff turn-over and an 'us and them' culture, so developing strong trusting relationships was going to take time and be a challenge to achieve.

The CoP Theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991) is predicated on situated learning and developing professional learning. The Early Years and Key Stage 1 team (chapter 4) operated as a CoP developing a team learning approach, in particular. However, the absence of formalised team structures within the school led to confusion regarding group membership, participation or protocols for team operations. The most referred to example in the data was the confusion around the existence of a Teaching Assistant 'team' within the school.

If 'CoP-like' teams did meet on an informal basis it was clear that the school did not construct or facilitate these and the way they operated would have differed from one to another with no conventions, guidelines, time-limits or clarity of purpose. Yet Kubiak (2003) does highlight how effective CoPs can be in supporting the delivery of the PLC vision in schools when they are successfully introduced and managed. The CoP processes can be introduced based around existing team structures to support the PLC introduction. It is the CoP focus on situated learning through empowering people to identify and solve problems and to contribute to the learning of the organisation that underpins the PLC.

So in the context of my findings, the working of the Early Years and Key Stage 1 team did demonstrate an adoption of the CoP approach within a PLC (Kubiak, 2003) and provided an environment with a focus on professional learning intended to impact on pupils' learning outcomes. The challenge to the school leaders was to extend the practice across the school.

There was also evidence through responses to interview questions (82.3% n=28/34 of all staff members) that demonstrated a preference for training and professional development to take place in the classroom (situated) and to be personalised to the needs of the individual. The conclusion reached by

numerous staff members that personalised professional development *in situ* as offered to them through the support from consultants, through lesson study or via the newly introduced coaching and mentoring scheme was far more relevant and effective.

Prior to the research year there was some existing PLC practice (ongoing, connected to practice, situated and in the main social learning) existing in the school through lesson study, coaching and mentoring and through the existing teams. This is commensurate with Stoll et al.'s (2006) findings that every school will be demonstrating some of the PLC characteristics albeit at a low level. However, there was little evidence outside of the Early Years and Key Stage 1 example to demonstrate transformative practice that was facilitated by the PLC journey.

PLCs have the potential to transform schools into effective learning organisations as the learning organisation theory (Senge, 1990) provides the focus and a framework in which schools can operate. The CoP theory underpins the importance of situated social learning and the development of people. So both these theories support the PLC approach to enabling situated professional learning if successfully embedded in the culture and workings of a school. But leaders need to understand this and create the culture that embraces these practices. Evidently this was not possible at Oldtown Primary School at this time.

7.4 Evaluation of Research Methods

I was aware from the outset that it was unlikely that Oldtown Primary School would be able to evidence that it was already operating as an effective and sustainable PLC or had the potential to become a PLC by the end of the research year. It takes time for schools to audit practice and to set in place effective structures and systems that enable a PLC to operate. This research

was therefore focused on the very early stages of the school's approach to the PLC introduction.

I set out with the intention to collect data using a mixed methods approach involving questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis. Due to the restricted number of visits to the school to observe meetings and training activities, my access to data collection opportunities was drastically reduced from what was planned and only resulted in three visits to the school rather than twelve. The length of each visit was also shortened due to other priorities thereby not allowing the time necessary for an in-depth discussion. Promised access to documents was also restricted (section 3.6). I was allowed access to the staff at the start and end of the year to hand out questionnaires and to conduct interviews.

I do not believe that I was intentionally restricted as the year progressed, but this was a result of staff members and leaders becoming distracted by the Academy sponsor's priorities and by the emphasis on the work of the consultants, both which took priority over the PLC introduction.

The semi-structured interviews proved extremely valuable as a source of contextualised and deep data. The personal views from a range of staff members provided me with valuable data from which I could identify the themes and subthemes, use to triangulate data, distinguish patterns or sub-sets of data and to elicit key issues that warranted further investigation.

The dearth of PLC knowledge by those who participated in the interviews did mean that many of the responses related to the school generally and not to the PLC journey specifically. This same lack of knowledge also impacted on the questionnaire responses. As I was led to believe that the staff members would be introduced to the PLC idea and the vision shared prior to my visit, I wrongly assumed that participants would have some knowledge. A lesson learned! The quality and depth of the data as it related to the PLC was therefore poorer than originally hoped for or expected.

In an attempt to ensure more in-depth answers to questions on the end of year questionnaire, I provided further guidance prior to the completion to the participants with regard to the language of the questions. Although there was some recognisable improvement, this may have resulted from increased exposure to the language across the year, albeit limited, rather than to my support.

What both the semi-structured interviews and the questionnaires allowed me to do was to gain an in-depth insight into respondents' perceptions and views at that given point in time and attitudinal differences overtime (start and end of the year).

For observations I used a log approach to record my observations. Similarly, for the document analysis I made notations on documents that I was provided with and I recorded in a log any relevant statements or discussion points from the minutes of meetings that I was allowed to see but not retain for more in-depth analysis.

Overall, my selected research methods did provide the type and depth of data required for the analysis of this ethnographic-case study. However, due to the restrictions, less ethnography took place than planned. Also, I was more reliant on the interview and questionnaire responses than I had expected due to the absence of observational or document analysis data.

The thematic analysis approach did allow for a systematic and rigorous analysis of the data, checked and validated by an external rater.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the data and understanding the context of this study.

As a single ethnographic-case study there were limitations in ensuring the transferability of outcomes to other settings. Secondly, as a single school study the maximum number of participants in the different research groups of leaders, teachers and support staff members was relatively small and varied from the start and end of the year (maximum number: leaders n=10; teachers n=13 and support staff member n=19).

Thirdly, this ethnographic-case study was conducted in a small inner-city primary school and so the results of this study are at best only generalizable to similar schools.

Fourthly, the position of the researcher should be noted as a limitation as (a) I was known to the Principal prior to the research year (b) the school was a member organisation of the partnership I manage (c) the perceived power I hold. I had not previously worked with individuals in the school although two newly qualified teachers had previously been on an initial teacher training programme with the partnership and were aware of me as I managed the programme.

Fifthly, the study was conducted in a year of transition for the school which had recently changed its status to become an Academy as part of arrangement with a local secondary school and HE/FE College. The school had changed its name and had an influx of new staff. These issues meant that new colleagues were limited in their knowledge of the school and also resulted in the school leaders been distracted by Academy issues throughout the course of the year. For example, much of the promised documentation for the research did not materialise and the number of sessions open to observation were very limited. Also, a lack of knowledge of PLCs meant that respondents were only able to use their limited knowledge of PLCs or relate my questions to the general workings of the school.

Finally, the literature emphasises the contribution that the wider community can make to a school-based PLC, however, for this study I focused on the 'professionals' who work in the school on a day-to-day basis only. This may be seen as a further limitation.

Despite these limitations, this study highlighted a number of considerations for schools contemplating introducing a PLC in general and contributes to the literature on introducing a PLC in an English primary school setting in particular.

7.6 Significance of this Study to the Field

Much of the existing literature has investigated schools that have established PLCs and are focused on what schools were already doing. There is little in comparison written regarding how to introduce a PLC. The literature that does exist (Lieberman, 1995; Westheimer, 1998, 1999; Morrissey, 2000; Grossman et al., 2001; Phillips, 2003; Giles and Hargreaves, 2006; Wood, 2007; Dooner et al 2008 and Hipp et al 2008) centres on case studies in different contexts and they tend to focus on schools that have an existingC and they only briefly mention how the PLC was introduced.

There is a consensus amongst writers that there is no one definitive method or process for introducing and establishing a PLC in a school, therefore school leaders must decide upon a strategy that best suits them and their school. Studies such as this will better inform and support leaders to make such decisions and consider how they plan their PLC journey.

7.7 Implications for introducing a PLC

7.7.1 For Teachers

This study has highlighted the ignorance that surrounds the difference between professional learning and professional in schools. It has also emphasised the scarcity of understanding of PLCs as a vehicle for the ongoing learning and development of leaders, teachers and support staff members. The study has confirmed that teachers view the concepts of professional development and professional learning as being the same. They view professional development as something that they do not own, is 'done to them' and not necessarily related

to their ongoing learning as an educational professional but more related to the priorities of the school.

The concept of ‘professional learning’ what it is, why it is necessary, how it occurs, and so on, are critical questions to be answered and understood by individual teachers and leaders alike, especially in the context of introducing a ‘professional learning community’. Therefore, there is a need for teachers and support staff members to spend time researching and understanding how professional learning will impact on their practice.

As educational professionals, teachers need to be open to change, willing to learn in collaboration with others, to experiment when all the time continuing to be focused on improving pupil outcomes and attainment. Therefore, they also need to take collective responsibility for pupil attainment.

7.7.2 For School Leaders

PLCs, as aligned to the learning organisation theory, provide the framework for schools to establish an understanding of ongoing professional learning through collaborative practices and collective responsibilities. Work in the area of defining a school as a learning organization emphasised:

‘....the collegial need of educators to learn how to work together and consider the (pedagogical) system in a collaborative setting to focus on what they as teachers do and why they do it’.

(Carpenter, 2012:25)

This has implications for leaders and for Head teachers. Establishing a learning organisation often requires a cultural shift, as needed by Oldtown Primary School, to achieve the levels of engagement and ownership to transform practice and impact on pupil attainment in the manner described above. PLCs motivate and empower teachers and support staff members if they are well-led

and managed by informed leadership teams who have a clear understanding of the PLC concept and potential.

Much has been written about PLCs and is available for school leaders to consider prior to embarking on the PLC journey. Preparation should include literature research into similar phase schools in similar contexts. It is often suggested in the literature (Hord, 1997; Mullen, 2009; Hipp and Huffman, 2010) that preparation is a key factor to the success of the establishment of a PLC and to its sustainability. This same literature focuses on school leaders having clarity as to what they want to achieve and how they will go about it.

The data gathered in my research school reiterates the need for leaders to understand the PLC idea and the potential that PLCs have in making a difference in and across schools. Leaders may therefore need to consider reviewing their support for staff members and how their ongoing professional learning is enabled. Currently much of the literature focuses on school context, staff engagement, leadership, school systems/structures all effecting the successful introduction of the PLC. Hipp and Huffman (2010) and DuFour and DuFour, (2012) suggest ideas and processes that school leaders may wish to consider to support the introduction process, for example, auditing practice or starting small with a group of staff members who are keen and engaged and can focus on a specific idea or intervention.

International interest in professional learning has heightened awareness as to how it can impact on pupil attainment. Enabling professional learning through a 'community' requires systems where time is provided and used effectively, teams are well-managed and empowered, understandable data informs discussion, targets are set, timescales are in place, practice is shared, new knowledge is generated and transformation in practice occurs

Leaders should carefully consider their approach to introducing and establishing a PLC. For example, they may consider how to inform themselves and others as to what a PLC is and to be clear on their own vision. They may

also contemplate the inclusion of all learners, the school community, in their vision statement. Secondly the timing of the PLC introduction and whether or not the school staff members have the capacity to develop the PLC requires further consideration. Thirdly, leaders may also wish to deliberate effective working relationships and whether or not the school has the systems in place to empower the staff members with the aim of transforming their practice in order to improve pupil outcomes, such as through a distributed leadership model. The PLC characteristics focus provide a framework in which to audit practice and understand and monitor the PLC.

Misconceptions and assumptions that the school is ‘naturally’ a PLC may need to be addressed. Staff members’ perceptions of professional learning and their responsibilities within this expectation may also need to be considered.

Schools will also have to overcome barriers. At Oldtown Primary School one such barrier was the Key Stage divide and another was the strong negative voice of dissenters. Consideration of such issues and how to address them may provide challenges to leaders if a successful PLC is to be established. Other barriers may be organisational, through systems that do not allow sufficient time or through physical proximity that prevents or inhibits meetings.

What leaders may consider is how the PLC can support and deliver school improvement in general including interventions and strategies. The PLC could support the school to manage school improvement. In essence, this is all integral to leaders being able to manage change, to bring about transformation and see the long term potential of the PLC for sustainable school improvement.

7.7.3 For Policy makers

PLCs are cost-effective for schools and the government. To encourage the introduction of formal PLCs in schools would, based on mounting evidence, improve the quality of teaching, raise attainment and support teacher motivation and retention agendas.

Further understanding of staff members regarding the difference between professional development and professional learning could be crucial to enabling significant improvements in teacher quality. System-wide support to raise awareness of the differences of professional learning and professional development and how a PLC can support a school to manage this would help to provide schools with the information and support they need to make decisions.

7.8 Future research recommendations

Whilst PLCs around the world appear to be making a significant difference to teacher quality, teacher motivation and pupil outcomes, there continues to be a dearth of evidence regarding how schools go about introducing a PLC. Further research into how effective PLCs are introduced would help schools in their planning.

Further research in linking WHY schools should turn to the PLC as a vehicle for transformation change and HOW this is achieved in schools may also provide an interesting focus for further study.

A longer-term ethnographic case study approach would also provide evidence over a longer period of time and this would be helpful in guiding schools following more in-depth and longer term data collection and analysis. More comparative case studies across a range of different contexts over a longer period would also provide data to inform practices in introducing, establishing an effective and sustainable PLC model.

This research, as has much of the literature, highlighted the issues of staff engagement, relationships and leadership. Further research into how these issues are addressed, particularly pertaining to engaging reluctant staff in PLCs, would support leaders when considering their strategy for introducing a PLC.

Ultimately the impact on pupil attainment and outcomes will be proof of an effective PLC. Further research on the relationship between how PLCs were introduced and their impact would also support school leaders in making decisions.

7.9 Final thoughts

Research into literature by Vescio et al. (2008) suggested that PLCs were a factor in contributing towards significant and sustainable improvement in teacher quality and pupil outcomes. It is curious, therefore, why more schools and education systems, such as in England, do not adopt or actively promote PLCs, particularly as research conducted in England (Bolam et al, 2005) concluded that PLCs should be widely promoted.

The findings of my research illustrates some of the ignorance regarding PLCs that exists in English schools with school leaders not knowing or wanting to know the potential of the PLC. The misconception of many leaders that a PLC is another initiative remains. The future challenge is to educate leaders and staff members NOT to perceive a PLC as an initiative but perhaps to consider it as process that supports individual and school improvement through collaborative working.

It is also a challenge for leaders to see the potential of a PLC if they are not enabled to do so or if they are unaware. The potential of PLCs to build capacity, improve the quality of teaching and to impact positively on pupil attainment will not be understood or realised if PLCs are not advertised. If more English inner-city primary schools were encouraged to adopt the PLC approach, it would be interesting to see the impact nationally on pupil outcomes and attainment. Indeed, without the distractions encountered by Oldtown Primary School, it would have been fascinating to see what would have happened to teacher quality and pupil attainment.

Postscript

The year did not turn out as expected for either myself as a researcher or for the school leaders, particularly the Principal.

Although the school had begun working with their chosen Academy partners before this research was conducted, what was not known at the start of the research year was that the level of control, interference and direction that the Academy sponsors would exert during the research year. What was also unpredictable was the breakdown of relationships between the Principal and Academy sponsors.

Despite the past achievements of the Principal in leading the school out of the Ofsted Special Measures category, in re-branding the school, with improving relationships with families and community partners and in improving pupil outcomes and progress, at the end of the research year the Principal and Deputy Principal were both removed from their posts by the Academy sponsors.

I was not allowed to report my findings to the staff either in person or through a circulated document, as I had promised to do so.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Glossary of terms

Appendix 2 - Staff Profile

Appendix 3 – School Location Data

Appendix 4 - Written information to Principal and Governors

Appendix 5 – Participants (staff members) letter

Appendix 6 – Consent Form

Appendix 7 – Structured questionnaires

Appendix 8 – Semi-structured interview schedule

Appendix 9 – Coding Manual

APPENDIX 1

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Terminology in education changes regularly and is therefore often outdated or incorrect. A number of terms can be used interchangeably but often with different interpretations.

For clarity, the following definitions are used in this study.

Pupil – the term pupil is used throughout this study rather than the term student or learner as the English education system in the main refers to **children** in Early Years settings, **pupils** in primary schools, **students** in secondary schools and **learner** across all these settings and in adult learning contexts.

Collaboration - is when two or more people interact, effectively communicate and are engaged in shared working or discussion as they move toward a common goal. It is when professionals work together independently and care about the same issues although their perspectives and priorities may differ (Skrtec et al, 2005)

Systematic – structures, processes, systems or whole-school approaches

Situated - as defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) involves people, who work within the organisation, as full participants in the world and in generating meaning

Transformational – significant positive change

Learning Teams – group of teachers and/or school staff who collaborate regularly in reflection, inquiry, dialogue, and problem solving in an effort to improve pupil academic achievement and school performance (Gallimore and Ermeling, 2010)

Collective Responsibility – is when one person joins others in taking responsibility for pupil outcomes and by doing so cannot take sole responsibility. The individual therefore takes both credit and blame for pupil outcomes

Capacity: The power to engage in and sustain continuous learning of teachers for the purpose of enhancing pupil learning; influenced by individual teachers within a school, the relationships between individuals within the school, and the school's social and structural context (Stoll, 2009)

Capacity-Building—opportunities to learn and expand professional learning, knowledge, skills, and competence individually and collectively; becoming a learning organization (Fullan, 2011)

Children's Centres – nationally funded centres to support babies/children birth to 3 years and their parents

External - Within school development (change) or intervention driven, led and managed by an external consultant/body.

Free School Meals (FSM) – These are provided to pupils who come from low income families and therefore fsm is an indicator of a school's area deprivation

Further Education – Education providers for 16-19 year olds, often Colleges

Higher Education - Universities

Initial Teacher Training (ITT) – Course leading to a recognised teacher qualification

In-Service Training (INSET) – Training for practising teachers who are qualified.

Internal - Within school development (change) or intervention driven, led and managed by full or part time staff members

Nursery Education – Usually provides for 2-5 year olds

Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) – Time-tabled time for teachers to carry out these tasks

Primary Schools – Schools providing education between 5-11 years

Professional Development—opportunity to learn that enhances professional knowledge, skills, and practice to increase student learning (Killion and Roy, 2009)

Special Schools – Provide education with those with Special Education Needs that cannot be accommodated in mainstream schools

Staff members – includes leaders, teachers and support staff

United Kingdom Government Department's Responsible for Education

Department for Education (DfE)

Department for Education and Science (DfES)

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)

Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) – Government funded body responsible for school inspection

International Organisations/Projects

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

OECD – PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

OECD – TALIS – Teaching and Learning International Survey

APPENDIX 2

Staff Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Key Stage	Length of time in school	Length of service
Leader 1 Anthony	Male	Senior Leader	1/2	4 years at the school	17 years
Leader 2 Michelle	Female	Middle Leader	2	3 years at the school	4 years
Leader 3 Alexandra	Female	Senior Leader	EY/1	New to school	14 years
Leader 4 Principal	Female	Senior Leader		5 years at the school	19 years
Leader 5 Cynthia	Female	Senior Leader	1/2	New to school	15 years
Leader 6 Victoria	Female	Middle Leader	1	4 years at the school	11 years
Leader 7 Cherry	Female	Middle Leader	2	3 years at the school	Unknown

Leader 8 Josie	Female	Middle Leader	2	25 years at the school	27 years
Leader 9 Richard	Male	Middle Leader (Part time)	EY/1/2	Unknown	Unknown
Leader 10 Gillian	Female	Middle Leader	EY/1/2	Unknown	Unknown
Teacher 1 Sharon	Female	Class Teacher	2	Trainee Teacher	0 years
Leaders 11 Kimberley	Female	Middle Leader	2	2 years in the school	7 years
Teacher 2 Angela	Female	Class Teacher	1	2 years in the school	2 years
Teacher 3 Gertrude	Female	Class Teacher	EY	New to school	Unknown
Teacher 4 Kerry	Female	Class Teacher	1	3 years at the school	3 years
Teacher 5 Arthur	Male	Class Teacher	1	2 years at the school	3 years
Teacher 6 Shelly	Female	Class Teacher	2	2 years at the school	2 years
Teacher 7 Ann	Female	Class Teacher	2	New to school	NQT
Teacher 8 Petra	Female	Class Teacher	1/2	New to school	23 years

Teacher 9 Violet	Female	Class Teachers	2	New to school	NQT
Teacher 10 Cheryl	Female	Class Teacher	1	New to school	12 years
Teacher 11 Susan	Female	Class Teacher	1	New to school	Unknown
Teacher 12 Julia	Female	Class Teacher	1	Unknown	Unknown
Teacher 13 Shazia	Female	Class Teacher	1/2	Unknown	Unknown
Support Staff 1 Irene	Female	Teaching Assistant	2	6 years at the school	6 years
Support Staff 2 Sukhvinder	Female	Teaching Assistant	1	6 years at the school	6 years
Support Staff 3 Bethan	Female	Teaching Assistant	2	4 years at the school	4 years
Support Staff 4 Clarice	Female	Teaching Assistant	2	5 years at the school	5 years
Support Staff 5 Cindy	Female	Teaching Assistant	EY	4 years at the school	4 years

Support Staff 6 Lakhvinder	Female	Teaching Assistant/ Integration	Nurture Unit	12 years at the school	21 years
Support Staff 7 Marysee	Female	Teaching Assistant/ Integration	Nurture Unit	1 year at the school	5 years
Support Staff 8 Martha	Female	Teaching Assistant	2	6 years at the school	6 years
Support Staff 9 Lucy	Female	Teaching Assistant/ Integration	Nurture Unit	3 years at the school	3 years
Support Staff 10 Satvinder	Female	Teaching Assistant	1	11 years at the school	12 years
Support Staff 11 Paul	Male	Teaching Assistant	2	13 years at the school	13 years
Support Staff 12 Jennifer	Female	Teaching Assistant	2	Unknown	Unknown
Support Staff 13 Leanne	Female	Teaching Assistant	1	Unknown	Unknown
Support Staff 14 Michelle	Female	Teaching Assistant	1/2	Unknown	Unknown

Support Staff 15 Clement	Male	Teaching Assistant Integration	Learning Mentor	11 years at the school	Unknown
Support Staff 16 Wendy	Female	Teaching Assistant/ Integration	Nurture Unit	Unknown	Unknown
Support Staff 18 Lyla	Female	Teaching Assistant	EY	Unknown	Unknown
Support Staff 19 Abigail	Female	Teaching Assistant/ Integration	Nurture Unit	Unknown	Unknown

APPENDIX 3
School Location Data
2011 Census Data

	Area	Birmingham	England
Persons aged 0-15	28.6%	22.8%	18.9%
Persons living in are who were born overseas	43.0%	22.2%	13.8%
Asian or Asian British Heritage	54.8%	26.6%	7.8%
Black or Black British Heritage	25.6%	9.0%	3.5%
Arab or other Heritage	2.2%	2.0%	1.0%
No people in household has English as a main language	19.7%	7.5%	4.4%
Lone parents with dependent children	13.8%	10.1%	7.1%
Over-crowded housing	25.1%	12.4%	8.7%
Unemployed	18.9%	11.1%	6.3%
Persons aged 16 or over with no qualifications	33.2%	28.2%	22.5%
Since 2011 the number of migrants to Birmingham from EU countries has increased whilst the number of migrants from non-EU countries has decreased			
Since 2001, the number of births to foreign born mothers living in Birmingham has increased by 54.6%			

Sources:

Office of National Statistics (ONS):

Birmingham City Council: www.Birmingham.gov.uk

APPENDIX 4

Principal/Governor Information

Letter to Principal

John Bridgman
School of Education
University of Leicester
21 University Road
Leicester
LE1 7RF
Email: jpb23@le.ac.uk

Dear Principal,

I would like to invite your school to participate in a research project which aims to investigate the school as a Professional Learning Community (PLC).

The PLC concept has been proven in the United States of America (USA), Finland, Singapore and Japan to make a significant and sustained contribution to school improvement and raising standards of attainment.

I am an experienced educational professional with over thirty years involvement in teaching, leadership and management, initial teacher education and schools' partnership working. I have a particular interest in supporting school improvement and in teacher/education professionals' development. To this end I would like to work with teachers and classroom support staff in your school in order to audit your current practices and benchmark these against the characteristics of an effective PLC. The work with school-based colleagues involves short questionnaires, short interviews, observation of meetings/professional development activities and analysing school documentation.

The consent of all participants will be requested and participation in the research is optional. Participants will also be able to withdraw at any time.

All data and information will be held in a secure place away from any school or establishment. All information remains confidential and will only be used for analysis in order to aid my understanding of how the school is progressing towards, or already is, a PLC. It is hoped that the information collected will be used to form the basis of academic writing and possible publication in order to share good practice with others in the field of education.

If you require further information or would like to discuss any aspect of this research in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I strongly feel that participation in research such as this will support the school to improve and move forward.

I look forward to hearing from you by 16th December 2011 if you wish to be involved or would like to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

John Bridgman

Attached Brief

Re: Professional Learning Community – Research

As you may be aware there is considerable interest in the education sector regarding Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the potential contribution they can make towards significant and sustained improvements to student attainment, the quality of teaching and to schools in general. Please see attached briefing paper for more information on PLC and their characteristics.

As a focus for my Doctorate (EdD) through the University of Leicester, I am researching PLCs in the context of inner-city primary schools. In order to do this, I am planning to undertake research in three Birmingham primary schools throughout 2012-13.

It is hoped that participating schools will benefit from:

- A greater awareness and understanding of the PLC potential
- A review of current 'all staff' professional development practices
- A review of the school leadership model
- An audit of the school's practices against the PLC characteristics
- Involvement of all staff in reviewing their current professional development and teaching practice

- Wider sharing of 'outstanding' classroom practice both within and across the participating schools
- A renewed focus on 'the individual learner'
- An informed staff using data effectively to inform planning and teaching
- Ultimately, improved teaching quality and improved student attainment
- A confidential report on the research findings

Individual school-based colleagues will benefit from:

- An opportunity to contribute to an evidence base of collective views on the school's professional development practices and approaches
- Increased awareness and understanding of the PLC concept and how it could benefit their personal practice, the school and most importantly the students
- The sharing of outstanding practice, teaching strategies and 'new' knowledge
- Collaborative reflection on practices, issues and risk-taking
- Individual learning within a collaborative environment
- Supported coaching
- Development of their own coaching skills
- More opportunities to develop leadership skills
- A deeper understanding of what works effectively in the classroom and why

The aim of the research is to:

- Ascertain levels of understanding regarding the PLC concept and characteristics amongst leaders and members of staff
- To support schools to build capacity to implement a PLC
- Investigate whether the current leadership model will enable a PLC to be established
- To investigate whether added awareness, knowledge and PLC practice can support school improvement

- Over the period of a year to gather evidence that the journey towards, or the implementation of, a PLC can make a difference in an inner-city primary school
- To determine whether deprivation factors of inner-city schools affect, in any way, a PLC.

Participation and Research Methods

I hope to involve ALL members of staff, teachers (including Head teacher and senior leaders) and support staff in the research through the completion of a questionnaire at the start of next academic year (2012-13) and a further questionnaire at the end of the academic year. Following the completion of the first questionnaire I would like to interview a selection of teachers and support staff in order to seek further data and clarification.

The questionnaires and follow-up interviews will focus on teacher's/support staff views on;

- The school's leadership model and staff involvement in leadership
- Experience of professional development
- Attitudes towards professional development – as an individual and school
- The school's capacity to become a PLC by demonstrating the PLC characteristics and willingness amongst staff to embrace change
- Collaborative learning/professional development both within the school
- Current systems and processes for sharing practice (formal and informal); measuring the impact of professional development; staff-leadership team communications

Please note, Governors, parents, students and other stakeholders will NOT be involved in this research. The focus for this research is on the 'professional' school-based staff members who are directly involved in day-to-day learning and teaching. It is possible that other stakeholders could be involved in further or extended research following the completion of this research.

Methods

The main research is focused on 'difference' and therefore is an investigation that involves change 'over-time', it is necessary to gather benchmark data at the start of the year for comparison to data gathered at the end of the year. This will be through the methods outlined below.

I would appreciate the opportunity to 'observe', as a passive observer, an agreed number/type of professional development activities. For example, I would be looking to observe levels and types of collaborative staff learning; individualised professional development; professional development activities in practice; teachers acting as leaders and so on. Observation of meetings that involve the planning of training days or training events may also be valuable. This will help me to gather data related to:

- How the school organises professional development for ALL staff members
- The levels of collaborative teacher/support staff professional development
- Opportunities created for sharing knowledge and practice (formal) and how effectively this is achieved
- How the sharing of practice/knowledge informs change in, progress of and quality of teaching – and what colleagues then do with this knowledge of improved practice
- Leadership attitudes towards professional development and ownership

I would also request that throughout the research year that I could review any relevant school documentation that relates to professional development and PLC activity. This would include:

- Training days – agendas, delivery models, activity leaders
- Related school policies
- Minutes of CPD planning meetings
- Roles and responsibilities of post holders
- Team meetings/training activities

Ethical Considerations

I would like to assure the Governors and School Leadership Team that this research will be carried out in accordance with the BERA Ethical Guidelines (2011) and in accordance with the Ethical Regulations of the University of Leicester.

Permission to carry out this research will be sought from the Governors and the Head teacher. All participants will be provided with a letter of consent proforma to complete and return to me stating their willingness to be involved. This letter will include a statement on their right to withdraw from the research at any time during the year. Furthermore, I will assure colleagues that the findings will be published as part of an EdD thesis and potentially through other academic outlets. The research is not related in any way to person or school specific quality assurance, assessment or employment issues.

This means that confidentially for the school and ALL individuals will be assured at all times throughout the research process and within the final thesis.

Responses will only be published through statistics or anonymised quotations. Any reviewed documentation will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be returned to the school. No photocopies will be taken or retained.

The final report produced for the school will be for the benefit of the Governors and school leaders and will not be shared with any third party. All participants will be informed as to how the research findings will be published used.

Consent from all prospective participants will be sought at the start of the research process. I would appreciate support in encouraging participation from ALL members of staff but colleagues not wishing to participate will be able to withdraw at any time. They will be reminded of this option throughout the various interactions.

As some colleagues in your school may have worked with me in my role as Manager, Titan Partnership Ltd, I will ensure that my role as a researcher will remain as independent as possible by NOT directly interviewing those

colleagues unless absolutely necessary. If there is a need to interview these colleagues, then I will clearly explain my different role within this context.

Any interviews will be carried out with regard to sensitivity, confidentiality and in an environment of trust. Colleagues will be re-assured that despite me been known by the Head teacher that complete confidentiality is assured. I am prepared to provide the interviewee with a signed letter to this effect if required.

Interviews will be carried out at a time to cause as minimal disruption as possible to the school and individual. The research process will be as unobtrusive as possible and processes to achieve this will be agreed with the school.

All data-gathered will be stored on a personal computer that is located away from any school site or public building and not accessible to others on a network. Hard copy documentation/data will be kept in a locked cabinet at the same location accessible only to the researcher.

A Risk Assessment will be carried and shared with the school for agreement.

I will provide the school with all details relating to CRB checks and safeguarding legislation in addition to any other documentation required by the Governors. This research will involve me as the researcher and no-one else.

Time-scales

Summer Term 2012

I will liaise with Governors, Head teachers and leadership teams in order to agree processes, a time-line, etc. I will carry out staff briefings if required.

Autumn Term 2012

Issue questionnaires; completion and return of questionnaires; analysis; follow-up interviews

Begin observation and document analysis

Spring Term 2013

Continue with observations and document analysis

Summer Term 2013

Issue questionnaires; completion and return of questionnaires; analysis; follow-up interviews

Autumn Term 2013

Final analysis of data; write individual school report; feedback to schools

APPENDIX 5

Participants Information

University of Leicester
21 University Road
Leicester
LE1 7RF

Dear Colleague,

Your school has been invited to participate in a research project which aims to investigate the school as a Professional Learning Community (PLC).

The PLC concept has been proven in the United States of America (USA), Finland, Singapore and Japan to make a significant and sustained contribution to school improvement and raising standards of attainment.

I am an experienced educational professional with over thirty years involvement in teaching, leadership and management, initial teacher education and schools' partnership working. I have a particular interest in supporting school improvement and in teacher/education professionals' development. To this end I would like to work with teachers and classroom support staff in your school in order to audit your current practices and benchmark these against the characteristics of an effective PLC. The work with school-based colleagues involves short questionnaires, short interviews, observation of meetings/professional development activities and analysing school documentation.

The consent of all participants is requested and participation in the research is optional. Participants will also be able to withdraw at any time.

All data and information will be held in a secure place away from any school or establishment. All information remains confidential and will only be used for analysis in order to aid my understanding of how the school is progressing towards, or already is, a PLC. It is hoped that the information collected will be used to form the basis of academic writing and possible publication in order to share good practice with others in the field of education.

If you require further information or would like to discuss any aspect of this research in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I strongly feel that participation in research such as this will support the school to improve and move forward.

John Bridgman

APPENDIX 6

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Full title of Research Project: An investigation into the exploration and possible establishment of a special school Professional Learning Community.

John Bridgman, Postgraduate Research Student, School of Education,
University of Leicester

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am able to ask questions, express concerns or withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.
3. I understand that my participation in this project will possibly involve the observation of me in meetings and/or participating in professional development activities, the audio recording of me being interviewed by the researcher (if selected) and in me completing a short questionnaire at the start and end of the academic year (2012-13). I understand that there will be a deadline return date for these questionnaires.
4. I understand that the information/data provided by me will be held confidentially, such that only the researcher can trace this information/data back to me individually. I understand that my information/data will be anonymised at the end of the study and that after this point no-one will be able to trace my information/data back to me. The information/data will be retained until the end of the study when it will be destroyed. I understand that I can ask for the information/data I provide to be destroyed at any time up until the data has been

anonymised and I can have access to the information/data up until the information/data has been anonymised.

5. I understand that the information/data gathered by the researcher WILL NOT be passed on to my Head Teacher or to any other member of the school staff, governor, union official, a Local Authority official, consultant or to any third party. The information WILL NOT be used as part of, or to inform, my performance management/appraisal and WILL NOT be used in any actions against me.
6. I understand that the data will be used to form the basis of academic writing which may be published so that good practice may be shared with others in the field of education.
7. I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with feedback on the study.
8. I agree to interviews been recorded if I am selected.
9. I agree to complete and return the questionnaires by the deadline dates.
10. I agree to be observed in meetings and when participating in professional development activities.
11. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

I _____(NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by

John Bridgman, School of Education, University of Leicester.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

I, John Bridgman, will abide by the above and I will ensure that the information/data gathered will only be used for research purposes and WILL NOT be passed on to the school staff or to any third party. All information/data will be anonymised and WILL NOT identify individuals.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

APPENDIX 7

Teacher Questionnaire

Professional Learning Communities

Teacher Questionnaire

Name:

Role/Position:

Number of years at this school:

Number of years teaching:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Please write a comment/provide evidence/examples in answer to each question and then circle a number (where applicable) on the scale that best indicates how you assess your response/feel.

1. What is your understanding of the term 'Professional Learning Community'?

You can continue over the page if you require more space.

2. In your opinion, which of the PLC characteristics does the school demonstrate? Please tick all that apply:

- shared values and vision (all staff contributed; staff are constantly reminded of these; majority of staff work towards the vision and demonstrate the values)

☐

- collective responsibility for pupils' learning (majority of staff members understand that they are collectively responsible for pupil's outcomes) ☐
- collaboration focused on learning (majority of formal collaboration is focused on the impact of pupil's learning) ☐
- individual and collective professional learning (majority of staff members understand the importance of ongoing self-development and they understand and participate in sharing/working collaboratively/learning with others) ☐
- reflective professional enquiry (majority of staff members participate in, and allocate time to collective reflection and enquiry) ☐
- openness, networks and partnerships (majority of staff are open to improving their own practice through sharing/reflecting with others within school and with others outside of the school) ☐
- inclusive membership (the majority of staff, irrespective of roles and responsibilities, fully participate, and are allowed to contribute towards professional development – personal and school – and can contribute) ☐
- mutual trust, respect and support (all views are valued and listened to; staff members are empowered to lead on initiatives; 'taking risks'/innovation is valued and encouraged; majority of staff members are willing and able to support others) ☐

Comment:

3. What professional development activities have you taken part in this year? Please tick all boxes that apply and explain the activity(ies) in the comments box below.

a) Whole-school training days ☐ **b) Whole-school training (other)** ☐

(Explain below)			
c) Attended conference Or event	<input type="checkbox"/>	d) Targeted in-school training (Year group; team, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Carried out individual research of a group	<input type="checkbox"/>	f) Carried out research as part	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Accredited course (Part-time) others? (Masters, NCSL, coaching, other)	<input type="checkbox"/>	h) Have you delivered training to others? (Explain below)	
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Comments/Explanation/Other professional development activities not listed above:			

4. Were any of the above professional development activities linked to your annual performance management review? If so, which ones and also explain why you participated in the other activities (Explain in the comments section)?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comments:

5. Are you currently required to monitor the impact of your professional development on your practice – teaching, or on pupil's learning? Explain below and comment on whether or not you think that this is/would be beneficial to you and to the school.

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comments:

6. In your opinion, what is the purpose of professional development and what does effective professional development look like? You may wish to provide examples as evidence to support your response:

Comments:

7. How involved are all staff members/team leaders in deciding on/influencing the focus for collaborative professional development, e.g. training days, team training activities?

Comments:

1	2	3	4	5	6
(Very involved)					(Not involved)

8. What impact do the training days have on improving the quality of teaching/learning through staff members' 'deep learning/understanding'/reflection on practice/learning from others?

Comments:

1	2	3	4	5	6
(Significant impact)					(No impact)

9. What are your views on your personal professional development through formal and informal structures: do you learn more through organised, purposeful and focused activities or through informal, non-planned discussions/sharing? Please DO NOT state 'both' or 'equal'. Please decide on one or the other and explain in the comment section:

Formal

☐

Informal

☐

Comments:

10. Do you consider that existing school systems provide the opportunity for on-going professional development – rather than 'one-off' or irregular events? Please comment below on what works well, what could be improved in your opinion.

Comments:

11. Is ALL current professional development in this school ultimately focused on improving pupils learning experiences and learning outcomes? Please explain.

Comments:

**1
(All PD learner outcome focused)**

2

3

4

5

6

(Not learner focused at all)

12. Do you have a leadership role in the school/lead a team/lead on an initiative? Please explain in the comments section below any opportunities that have been presented to you in order to develop your leadership skills.

Yes ☐ No ☐ Cannot comment – new to the school ☐

Comment:

13. How would you describe the school's leadership model? Please tick one of the boxes below that best describes the model in your opinion. Please explain your answer by providing reasons in the comments section.

Top Down ☐ Distributed/Shared ☐

Comments:

14. Some work in schools can be described as 'transformational'. Has this school gone through a 'transformation' in any aspect of its work? Please provide an example below if your answer is yes.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Comments:

15. Is there anything else regarding professional development processes, systems, structures, opportunities that you would like to share with me that you consider may support this research?

Comments:

Permission to use information/data:

The data collected will remain confidential, participants will NOT be named. The data will be used in research focusing upon the school as a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The research data will be used to:

- gather views on the current levels of understanding of PLCs
- collate views and opinions towards professional development within a PLC context
- to gather data on the types of professional development activity within the school – collaborative/individual
- to gather data on current processes, structures, systems that support professional development
- to gather data on the school's leadership model and capacity to become a PLC

By signing the Informed Consent Form you have agreed that the answers provided on this questionnaire can be used for this research only.

Thank you for participating in this study. Your time and contributions are much appreciated.

John Bridgman

EdD Researcher

Support Staff Questionnaire

Professional Learning Communities

Classroom Support Staff Questionnaire

Name:

Role/Position:

Number of years at this school:

Number of years teaching:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Please write a comment/provide evidence/examples in answer to each question and then circle a number (where applicable) on the scale that best indicates how you assess your response/feel.

16. What is your understanding of the term 'Professional Learning Community'?

You can continue over the page if you require more space.

17. In your opinion, which of the PLC characteristics does the school demonstrate? Please tick all that apply:

- shared values and vision (all staff contributed; staff are constantly reminded of these; majority of staff work towards the vision and demonstrate the values) ☐
- collective responsibility for pupils' learning (majority of staff members understand that they are collectively responsible for pupil's outcomes) ☐
- collaboration focused on learning (majority of formal collaboration is focused on the impact of pupil's learning) ☐

- individual and collective professional learning (majority of staff members understand the importance of ongoing self-development and they understand and participate in sharing/working collaboratively/learning with others ☐)
- reflective professional enquiry (majority of staff members participate in, and allocate time to collective reflection and enquiry) ☐
- openness, networks and partnerships (majority of staff are open to improving their own practice through sharing/reflecting with others within school and with others outside of the school) ☐
- inclusive membership (the majority of staff, irrespective of roles and responsibilities, fully participate, and are allowed to contribute towards professional development – personal and school – and can contribute ☐)
- mutual trust, respect and support (all views are valued and listened to; staff members are empowered to lead on initiatives; ‘taking risks’/innovation is valued and encouraged; majority of staff members are willing and able to support others ☐)

Comment:

18. What professional development activities have you taken part in this year? Please tick all boxes that apply and explain the activity(ies) in the comments box below.

b) Whole-school training days ☐

b) Whole-school training (other)
(Explain below) ☐

**d) Attended conference
Or event** ☐

d) Targeted in-school training
(Year group; team, etc) ☐

<p>f) Carried out individual research of a group</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>f) Carried out research as part of a group</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></p>				
<p>h) Accredited course (Part-time) to others? (Masters, NCSL, coaching, other)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>h) Have you delivered training to others? (Explain below)</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">Yes</td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">No</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	Yes	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<p>Comments/Explanation/Other professional development activities not listed above:</p> 					

19. Were any of the above professional development activities linked to your annual performance management review? If so, which ones and also explain why you participated in the other activities (Explain in the comments section)?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comments:

20. Are you currently required to monitor the impact of your professional development on your practice – teaching, or on pupil's learning? Explain below and comment on whether or not you think that this is/would be beneficial to you and to the school.

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comments:
<p>21. In your opinion, what is the purpose of professional development and what does effective professional development look like? You may wish to provide examples as evidence to support your response (e.g. we are expected to maintain a log of our professional development experience and use the log to evaluate/reflect on, overtime, the change in our practice):</p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>22. Do classroom support staff members have the opportunity to determine their own professional development needs as part of the performance management cycle or outside of the cycle? Please explain in the comments below how classroom support staff professional development is determined.</p> <p> Yes <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="checkbox"/> No <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="checkbox"/> </p> <p>Comments:</p>
<p>23. What impact do the training days have on improving the quality of teaching/learning through staff members' 'deep learning/understanding' and are the training activities relevant to classroom support staff?</p> <p>Comments:</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;"> 1 2 3 4 5 6 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 80%; margin: 0 auto;"> (Significant impact) (No impact) </div>

24. What are your views on your personal professional development through formal and informal structures: do you learn more through organised, purposeful and focused activities or through informal, non-planned discussions/sharing? Please DO NOT state 'both' or 'equal'. Please decide on one or the other and explain in the comment section:

Formal

☐

Informal

☐

Comments:

25. Do you consider that existing school systems provide the opportunity for on-going professional development – rather than 'one-off' or irregular events? Please comment below on what works well, what could be improved in your opinion.

Comments:

26. Is ALL current professional development in this school ultimately focused on improving pupils learning experiences and learning outcomes? Please explain.

Comments:

1 2 3 4 5 6
 (All PD learner outcome focussed) (Not learner focused at all)

27. Do classroom support staff members have the opportunity to have a leadership role in the school/lead a team/lead on an initiative? Please explain in the comments section below any opportunities that have been presented to you in order to develop your leadership skills or any examples as to when your 'voice'/ideas have been listened to.

Yes

☐

No

☐

Cannot comment – new to the school

☐

Comment:

28. How would you describe the school's leadership model? Please tick one of the boxes below that best describes the model in your opinion. Please explain your answer by providing reasons in the comments section.

Top Down

☐

Distributed/Shared

☐

Comments:

29. Some work in schools can be described as 'transformational'. Has this school gone through a 'transformation' in any aspect of its work? Please provide an example below if your answer is yes.

Yes

☐

No

☐

Comments:

30. Is there anything else regarding professional development processes, systems, structures, opportunities that you would like to share with me that you consider may support this research? Do you believe that this school has the capacity to develop, improve and transform? Please comment on both questions.

Comments:

Permission to use information/data:

The data collected will remain confidential, participants will NOT be named. The data will be used in research focusing upon the school as a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The research data will be used to:

- gather views on the current levels of understanding of PLCs
- collate views and opinions towards professional development within a PLC context
- to gather data on the types of professional development activity within the school – collaborative/individual
- to gather data on current processes, structures, systems that support professional development
- to gather data on the school's leadership model and capacity to become a PLC

By signing the Informed Consent Form you have agreed that the answers provided on this questionnaire can be used for this research only.

Thank you for participating in this study. Your time and contributions are much appreciated.

John Bridgman

EdD Researcher

APPENDIX 8
Semi-Structured Interview Schedule
TEACHER/LEADERS INTERVIEWS

Key Questions – In Bold

Knowledge of PLCs

1. **How would you describe the ethos/culture of this school?**
2. **What part do you currently play in this/How do you support this ethos through your everyday work?**
3. To what extent do you agree with this ethos?
4. You responded to question 1 regarding your knowledge of a PLC by stating Can you please explain what you mean by this? What does this look like at this school, if at all? Which of these concepts can you recognise in this school?
5. You responded To the question asking you to describe what Professional Development looks like. Can you explain why/can you develop this further/ can you clarify what you meant by...
6. **What activities/events do you believe are involved/make up Professional Development?**
7. You responded To the question on on-going Professional Development. What do you understand by the term 'on-going' in relation to Professional development?

Collaborative

8. You believe that this school has shared values and vision. Can you please explain to me what these are? How have these been embedded in the school and how are they identifiable?
9. **How do you believe collective responsibility for children's learning is achieved? What processes are in place to support collective responsibility?**
10. **How, if at all, are all members of staff involved in pupil data analysis in order to inform future planning/track pupil progress?**
11. **What do you understand the PLC characteristic 'reflective personal enquiry' to mean? Do you believe that this is important and if so explain why? How could this best be achieved in this school?**
12. **How would you describe how you best learn and can you give me any examples?**
13. **You responded To the characteristic of 'openness'. Please explain why you responded in this way. How do you believe that this school could encourage staff members to be more 'open'?**

14. You responded To the characteristic of inclusive membership. Please explain why. (If relevant - What do you believe can be done to improve/develop in this area?)
15. Mutual trust is an important aspect of an effective PLC. You responded... How would you advise the Head teacher to...develop this further/improve, etc..?
16. Which teams, if any, do you consider yourself part of in this school?
- 17.

Situated

18. **How does this school encourage and facilitate on-going learning within the school?**
19. You indicated that you learn more effectively through formal/informal processes. Can you explain your response and give examples.
20. Learning often occurs when colleagues discuss and share effectively do you agree? If so, how does this school achieve this, if it does?
21. How are the priorities for this school decided upon?
22. Research/enquiry and self-directed study are all becoming more relevant and more popular methods for delivering Professional Development. How, if at all, is this school encouraging these approaches to Professional Development?

Systematic

23. How important, do you believe, is Professional Development for your own development, for the children's development and for the school's developments
24. Finding time is always a factor. How do you think this school could create more time for collaborative working?
25. **What school systems/structures, in your opinion, could be changed/improved to enable more effective collaborative working; develop higher levels of trust and openness?**
26. You responded that leadership is top-down/shared in this school. Please explain why you believe that to be the case.
27. In your opinion would more colleagues, both teachers and TAs value the opportunity to develop their leadership skills? Why do you believe this?
28. You responded.....to the question on the effectiveness of training days. Please explain your response. What improvements could be made to how training day time is utilised for the benefit of ALL staff's development.
29. You responded to the question of Professional Development planning activities by stating that staff members are/are not involved. Why do you think that this is the case and do you believe that this should change? Can you identify examples of missed opportunities?

30. Investigating the impact of Professional Development is extremely important to school leaders and to individuals in order to know what effects change and improvement in practice. Do you agree with this and if so how do you believe that the school could improve its practices in measuring the impact on the quality of teaching and on the quality of pupil experiences/learning/outcomes?
- 31. What role do you see yourself having, if any, if this school moves towards becoming a PLC?**
- 32. What role do you think others, such as leaders or middle leaders, should have within a PLC structure?**
33. What do you understand the difference to be between 'top-down' and distributed leadership?
- 34. To what extent do you think that you are already fulfilling the role you described for yourself?**
35. What changes, if any, would need to be introduced to make this role more successful?

Transformational

36. What do you understand the word transformational to mean in the school context?
37. What do you believe needs to happen to make this school the best primary school in the area/in Birmingham? Please explain whether or not you believe this to be achievable and how it could be achieved?
38. This school has recently come out of Special Measures, converted to an Academy and re-structured the leadership team in order to involve more levels of leadership. In your response you mentioned/did not mention these factors. What 'transformation', if any, took place to enable these to happen? Were the staff members involved in these events/processes? Do you believe that all staff should be involved for transformation to take place?
- 39. You indicated that you believe/do not believe that this school has the ability to transform. Please explain why you believe this.**

Support Staff Semi-Structured Interview

Interview Schedule

Key Questions – In Bold. Interviewer to select appropriate questions and add participant specific as related to their questionnaire responses.

Knowledge of PLCs

1. **How would you describe the ethos/culture of this school?**
2. **What part do you currently play in this/How do you support this ethos through your everyday work?**
3. To what extent do you agree with this ethos?
4. You responded to question 1 regarding your knowledge of a PLC by stating Can you please explain what you mean by this? What does this look like at this school, if at all? Which of these concepts can you recognise in this school?
5. You responded To the question asking you to describe what Professional Development looks like. Can you explain why/can you develop this further/ can you clarify what you meant by...
6. **What activities/events do you believe are involved/make up Professional Development?**
7. You responded To the question on on-going Professional Development. What do you understand by the term 'on-going' in relation to Professional development?

Collaborative

8. You believe that this school has shared values and vision. Can you please explain to me what these are? How have these been embedded in the school and how are they identifiable?
9. **How do you believe collective responsibility for children's learning is achieved? What processes are in place to support collective responsibility?**
10. **How, if at all, are all members of staff involved in pupil data analysis in order to inform future planning/track pupil progress?**
11. **What do you understand the PLC characteristic 'reflective personal enquiry' to mean? Do you believe that this is important and if so explain why? How could this best be achieved in this school?**
12. **How would you describe how you best learn and can you give me any examples?**
13. **You responded To the characteristic of 'openness'. Please explain why you responded in this way. How do you believe that this school could encourage staff members to be more 'open'?**

14. You responded To the characteristic of inclusive membership. Please explain why. (If relevant - What do you believe can be done to improve/develop in this area?)
15. Mutual trust is an important aspect of an effective PLC. You responded... How would you advise the Head teacher to...develop this further/improve, etc..?
16. Which teams, if any, do you consider yourself part of in this school?

Situated

17. **How does this school encourage and facilitate on-going learning within the school?**
18. You indicated that you learn more effectively through formal/informal processes. Can you explain your response and give examples.
19. Learning often occurs when colleagues discuss and share effectively do you agree? If so, how does this school achieve this, if it does?
20. How are the priorities for this school decided upon?
21. Research/enquiry and self-directed study are all becoming more relevant and more popular methods for delivering Professional Development. How, if at all, is this school encouraging these approaches to Professional Development?

Systematic

22. How important, do you believe, is Professional Development for your own development, for the children's development and for the school's developments
23. Finding time is always a factor. How do you think this school could create more time for collaborative working?
24. **What school systems/structures, in your opinion, could be changed/improved to enable more effective collaborative working; develop higher levels of trust and openness?**
25. You responded that leadership is top-down/shared in this school. Please explain why you believe that to be the case.
26. In your opinion would more colleagues, both teachers and TAs value the opportunity to develop their leadership skills? Why do you believe this?
27. You responded.....to the question on the effectiveness of training days. Please explain your response. What improvements could be made to how training day time is utilised for the benefit of ALL staff's development.
28. You responded to the question of Professional Development planning activities by stating that staff members are/are not involved. Why do you think that this is the case and do you believe that this should change? Can you identify examples of missed opportunities?

29. Investigating the impact of Professional Development is extremely important to school leaders and to individuals in order to know what effects change and improvement in practice. Do you agree with this and if so how do you believe that the school could improve its practices in measuring the impact on the quality of teaching and on the quality of pupil experiences/learning/outcomes?
- 30. What role do you see yourself having, if any, if this school moves towards becoming a PLC?**
- 31. What role do you think others, such as leaders or middle leaders, should have within a PLC structure?**
32. What do you understand the difference to be between 'top-down' and distributed leadership?
- 33. To what extent do you think that you are already fulfilling the role you described for yourself?**
34. What changes, if any, would need to be introduced to make this role more successful?

Transformational

35. What do you understand the word transformational to mean in the school context?
36. What do you believe needs to happen to make this school the best primary school in the area/in Birmingham? Please explain whether or not you believe this to be achievable and how it could be achieved?
37. This school has recently come out of Special Measures, converted to an Academy and re-structured the leadership team in order to involve more levels of leadership. In your response you mentioned/did not mention these factors. What 'transformation', if any, took place to enable these to happen? Were the staff members involved in these events/processes? Do you believe that all staff should be involved for transformation to take place?
- 38. You indicated that you believe/do not believe that this school has the ability to transform. Please explain why you believe this.**

APPENDIX 9

Coding Manual and Record

Thematic Analysis - Coding Manual and Record

1. Unit of Analysis

Interview Schedule

The unit is defined as a sentence or a statement/phrase (more than one sentence) as this provides meaning and encapsulates the point being made. For the piloting of the thematic analysis process I decided to use the entire interview as it covered a number of different questions and a number of different areas of the research.

Questionnaire

The unit is defined as a sentence as this provides an overall meaning rather than a single word which will not and a single line may not fully encapsulate the point being made. I decided to use the entire questionnaire as it covered a number of different questions and a number of different areas of the research.

2. Inductive coding

Inductive rather than deductive coding will be used as I am attempting to gather information from the data (inductive) rather than apply to a theory (deductive). Coding was differentiated to identify the comments as positive or negative.

3. Data Segments

Initially I anticipated each segment, defined as each sentence, to be only coded once. Having begun the process, it became evident that some sentences could be coded under more than one heading, hence the conclusion for the data to be coded under more than one heading.

4. The code development

Throughout the course of the pilot the code evolved and was changed as new themes and sub themes emerged. It is anticipated that this may happen again during the main research.

5. Consistency of coding

For consistency I coded each interview transcript twice, each time independently and by using a new document to avoid seeing previous comments, coding and annotations.

I also had the support of an independent coder who analysed the data once. The coder was also asked to comment and provide feedback on the codes, sub-codes – definitions, examples, etc.

A calculation was made to verify the consistency of the coding:

$$\% \text{ agreement} = \frac{\text{number of times both coders agreed}}{\text{number of times coding possible}}$$

6. Themes

A number of themes were pre-determined by the questions asked through the semi-structured interview and the questionnaire. However, the themes that emerged from the data have been collated and have led the research analysis. The following mechanism was used for theme analysis:

Identification of the participant	Identity of origin, e.g. Start of year questionnaire, observation record	Match relevant data to code noting positive or negative	Match coded data to sub theme	Match sub theme to key theme	Identify frequency of responses	Identity frequency of responses of groups e.g. teachers, leaders, established or new staff members	Rater agreement
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The identified themes:

Themes	Sub Themes	Conceptual Framework
Capacity building through Internal and External processes	Consultants Prof. Development and Learning Team development	Situated Systematic Transformational Collaboration
Conflict and Tension	Relationships Communication Systems, Structures and processes Academisation	Situated Collaboration Systematic
Perceptions of Leadership	Leadership style Distributed leadership	Situated Systematic Transformational

	Leadership of change Professional learning leadership PLC leadership	
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7. Creating the Code

Code	Label	Description or definition	Indicators, flags or key words	Examples (positive and negative)	Exclusions or special conditions

Based on the coding model suggested by: Boyatzis, R (1998) Transforming qualitative information: thematic analysis and code development, Thousand Oaks, CA, London, New Delhi; Sage Publications, pp 49.

8. Refining the conceptual codes

The model will be refined over time as further analysis of the data is undertaken, further research on thematic analysis is carried out and comparisons made with existing and new research techniques.

9. Determining the reliability of the code

In order to assure reliability, I have re-visited the data several times to ensure the themes are accurate and relevant. I have had an independent rater apply the code and themes independently. The interrater reliability has been tested. When applying the code to a greater amount of data in the main research study from the pilot, a review of the coding was required.

10. Validating the code

The number of responses relating to each of the themes by both analysts, myself and the independent rater, was recorded. We sought to identify any differentiation within the themes including positive and negative references.

11. Pilot coding exercise

To pilot a process for coding the following chart was used to record the results:

SAMPLE

Code	Coding 1 Researcher	Coding 2 Independent	Coding 3 Researcher	Number of references (Actual v Possible)	Comments/ observations

The broad codes were devised from the outset and refined as the data analysis process was undertaken. The code labels were shared with the independent rater who (a) used the codes (b) suggested additions/changes. The number of ratings that were judged the same and the number of those that were not, were counted and analysed. Comments were recorded where necessary.

APPENDIX 10

Number of Coded Responses – The Emergence of Themes

Theme	Sub Theme	Frequency (Number of responses) Start of year	Frequency (Number of responses) End of year
Capacity Building (Internal)	Team leadership and working (positive)	19	34
	Team leadership and working (negative)	9	2
	Individual (positive)	44	81
	Individual (negative)	20	13
		92	130

Theme	Sub Theme	Frequency (Number of responses) Start of year	Frequency (Number of responses) End of year
Capacity Building (External)	Working with Consultants (positive)	161	98
	Working with Consultants (negative)	18	15
		179	113
Total number of Internal and External contributor responses. (% of responses for this theme of total possible responses)		179+92= 271 (33.2%)	113+130= 243 (46.0%)

Theme	Sub Theme	Frequency (Number of responses) Start of year	Frequency (Number of responses) End of year
Conflict and Tension	Relationships (leaders and staff) (positive)	10	9
	Relationships (leaders and staff) (negative)	55	18

	Communication (positive)	76	24
	Communication (negative)	32	7
	Key Stage Divide (positive)	0	0
	Key Stage Divide (negative)	17	0
	Systems (positive)	115	58
	Systems (negative)	71	39
Total number of 'conflict and tension' responses. (% of responses for this theme of total possible responses)		376 (46.0%)	155 (29.3%)

Theme	Sub Theme	Frequency (Number of responses) Start of year	Frequency (Number of responses) End of year
Perceptions of Leadership	Leadership style (positive)	18	4
	Leadership style (negative)	17	3
	Leadership of change (positive)	70	83
	Leadership of change (negative)	53	25
	PLC leadership (positive)	9	1
	PLC leadership (negative)	2	0
Total number of 'perceptions of leadership' responses. (% of responses for this theme of total possible responses)		169 (20.7%)	116 (21.9%)



What happens when an English inner-city primary school attempts to introduce a PLC.