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David Nkengbeza

Building a Professional Learning Community in a Conflict and Post-conflict Environment

A Case Study of a High School in Liberia

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ABSTRACT

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This study reviews the general literature on professional learning communities (PLCs) from the perspectives of various writers and more emphases have been placed on core components that are used as a conceptual framework. A high school in a conflict and post-conflict environment (Liberia) is used as a case. Liberia in conflict and in post-conflict is briefly described and the focus is on education. This gives the reader not just an insight into how unstable Liberia was, especially at the end of the second civil war in 2003, but also an insight into the environment from which the case school emerged. The reforms and hope brought by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf from 2005 are briefly explained. My main research objective is to find out how a PLC is built in a conflict and post-conflict environment.

A qualitative research approach is used to gather data from the school, mainly through interviews, observations and document review. Focus is also placed on research objectives, data collection, data analysis, and the validity and ethical considerations of the study. A theory/content analysis is used in formulating the themes and the results (including the core components of building a PLC in a conflict and post-conflict environment) found in the case school are explained. Using the vicious circle of violence, poverty and educational disadvantage, how violence such as civil wars hinders education development is shown. The importance of education in conflict prevention is explained and I have argued that peacebuilding education should be the goal not only in conflict and post-conflict environments, but also in pre-conflict societies to eliminate violent conflict in societies**.** The lessons learned from conflict and non-conflict environments are explained. The study provides education institutions and other nation builders in pre-conflict, and especially those in conflict and post-conflict environments with a model for building PLCs. The study ends with a summary and conclusion and suggestions are made for further studies. For further discussions on this topic, suggestions have been made on who may benefit from the study.

Keywords: Professional learning communities, conflict environment, core components, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, shared personal practice

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David Nkengbeza

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACS	American Colonization Society
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AFRICOM	United States African Command Force
ALP	Accelerated Learning Program
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEO	County Education Officer
CERI	Centre for Educational Research and Innovation
CHAL	Christian Health Association of Liberia
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJC	Cuttington Junior College
CMI	Crisis Management Initiative
DEO	District Education Officer
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EfA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management and Information Services
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoL	Government of Liberia
HDZ	Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica (Croatian Democratic Union)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
ILO	International Labour Organization
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
JSS	Junior Secondary School
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KRTTI	Kakata Rural Teacher Training Institute
LAP	Liberian Action Party
LEAMP	Liberia Education Administrative and Management Policies
LEAR	Liberia Education Administrative Regulations
LEL	Liberian Education Law
LPP	Liberian People's Party
LRDC	Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee
LSB	Local School Board
LUP	Liberian Unification Party
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
NASP	National Association of Liberian School Principals
NCHE	National Commission for Higher Education
NCTAF	National Commission on Teaching and American Future

NDPL	National Democratic Party of Liberia
NGO	Non- governmental Organization
NIP	National Integration Party
NTAL	National Teacher Association of Liberia
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PRC	People's Redemption Council
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RS	Republika Srpska (My Republic – a political entity in BiH)
RTC	Responding to Conflict
SDA	Stranka Demokrastke Akcije (Party of Democratic Action)
SDS	Srpska Demokratska Stranka (Serbian Democratic Party)
SEDL	Southwest Education Development Laboratory
SPM	Student Palaver Management
SPMC	Student Palaver Management Centre
SPMT	Student Palaver Management Team
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNCF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UPP	United People's Party
USD	United States Dollar
WAEC	West African Examinations Council
WFP	World Fund Project
ZRTTI	Zorzor Rural Teacher Training Institute

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1 INTRODUCTION

Many researchers such as Morrissey (2000), Hord (2003), Dufour (2007) and Bullough (2007) have written on professional learning communities (PLCs), but none has focused on building them in a conflict and post-conflict environment. In addition, many researchers such as Davies (2011) and Elbadawi, Hergre and Milante (2008) have written on the importance of education in conflict and post-conflict environments. Davies (2011), for example, wrote on *Understanding Education's Role in Fragility: Synthesis of Four Situational Analyses of Education and Fragility: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and Liberia* (Davies, 2011, p. 2). Gallagher (2006), in his review of *Education and Conflict: Complexity and Chaos* by Davies (2004), has also elaborated on the impact of violence on education and the effects of education on conflict. He explained that Davies has examined the effects of violent conflict; for example, the exodus of skilled people, the use of child soldiers, hatred and the consequences of trauma.

This research reviews the general literature on PLCs from the perspectives of various writers such as Senge (1990), Gephardt and Marsick (1996), Hord (2003), Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006) and Stoll and Louis (2007), and more emphasis is placed on the attributes or core components of PLCs. As no researcher, to the best of the author's knowledge, has written on building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments, this research aims at shedding more light on how educational institutions in conflict and post-conflict environments could be transformed into PLCs, while being aware of the differences in culture and other factors. This research also challenges educators and other stakeholders in nation building, especially those in conflict and post-conflict environments, to examine their educational institutions and to see to what extent this paradigm could be applicable in their societies or communities. It is my view that this would also shed more light on the dark areas that failing schools – especially those in these types of environments – have not been able to identify.

While the study defines conflict and post-conflict environments and describes Liberia under pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict environments, it presents the argument that in many conflict and post-conflict societies, the

progress in education has been measured by mechanisms such as the number of schools which have been constructed, total enrolment, books provided and the number of teachers hired. My main argument here is that this is a very narrow way of looking at success in education in these types of societies. There is no doubt that every education institution must be safe, and conflict-prevention strategies must be in place for both children and adults to successfully learn.

It is my belief that we therefore do not have to be content with educational progress in conflict and post-conflict societies by only looking at the gross enrolment and the number of schools reopened or constructed, or by using other weak mechanisms to examine success; it is time to start looking at the strategies for turning these schools into PLCs and evaluating them using the core components of PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments. For it is in these types of schools that there will be love, no hate or discrimination, trust among all the stakeholders and available, qualified and duty-conscious teachers guided by a curriculum that meets the aspirations of the children and that is constantly reformed to meet the demands of the society. Due to the fact that the main aim of this research is to find out how a PLC is built in a conflict and post-conflict environment, I used expert testimony and other factors to select a school as a case (Anabela High School) in a conflict and post-conflict environment that I thought met the standards of a PLC and the following research questions were formulated. I wanted to know how PLCs are built in schools in conflict and post-conflict environments and because no researcher has written on building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments, I also wanted to know how and what core components could be used in building or measuring schools as PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments.

In order to answer the above main objectives, I formulated other sub objectives. I also wanted to know what core components of PLCs exist in Anabela High School, the challenges Anabela High School faced in its development process and how those challenges were handled, the challenges Anabela High School is currently facing, and how the school is handling them or how it intends to tackle them. I also wanted to know what other factors contributed to the development of Anabela High School. The findings do not only give us the difficulties that schools go through in their process of development in these environments, it also presents us with the core components of building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments.

I have suggested that those in leadership positions, both in national and international communities, should start focusing more on conflict-prevention strategies even in pre-conflict societies and that conflict prevention could also become a subject for study in primary and secondary schools. This study has also stressed the view that it is important for people to fully understand what conflict and, specifically, war conflict will bring to their lives and societies. The Liberian Education Law (LEL, 2011) and the Liberian Education Administrative and Management (LEAM) policies, volumes four and five (2011), are used to show how social and emotional learning – a process where both children and adults learn how to recognize and manage their emotions in a positive, responsible and constructive way, can be incorporated into the law. Even though some readers may argue that this has come too late for Liberia,

this study present it as a tool that is really needed in post-conflict Liberia for future conflict prevention.

The study suggests that peacebuilding strategies in conflict and post-conflict societies should address underlying social tensions, and the curriculum can play a crucial role in that process. What children are taught, the language that is used, the approach to religious education and others factors all play a vital part in shaping the attitudes that children carry into their adulthood, and they are the people who will make policies and lead our nation. This study also presents the view that many nations and societies have failed to prevent violent conflicts and these conflicts have returned with a ripple effect, and are destroying not just our schools and infrastructure, but also our hopes and ambitions, which are key foundations in nation building (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2011).

This study also suggests that inclusive education should also be a tool for fostering education and social change. An effective inclusive education would not only seek to address the traditional and structural problem of poverty, but it would also address social and cultural integration and the growing diversity in our societies. Inclusive education could aim at promoting respect and human dignity among all the students regardless of their background (intellectual, physical, economic or social). In every society, there should be more awareness of social tolerance and all forms of segregation should be eliminated. Advocates of inclusive education should be aware that it is not enough for society to know about the existence of inclusion, but advocates should aim at changing the attitudes and behaviours of all the individuals so that they become more tolerant (UNESCO, 2008).

This study presents the argument that our current measurement mechanisms for success in education in conflict and post-conflict societies are inadequate, and this explains the importance of this study. I agree that war is an enemy of education and development. This study on the one hand suggests that the way forward for our education and societies is to prevent conflict in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict societies, and on the other hand build PLCs in schools in conflict and post-conflict environments. The study ends with a discussion/summary and conclusion. Suggestions are given on how different stakeholders can help to build an inclusive educational environment in conflict and post-conflict societies. In order to start a new discussion on what the stakeholders in this study could do, I have made suggestions for Liberia, Anabela High School and other stakeholders and have suggested lessons learned from other conflict and none-conflict environments.

2 SCHOOLS AS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

This section of the study begins by focusing on the concept of a PLC and the term PLC, and various definitions of PLCs are given. It then examines the development towards PLCs, and my own definition of a PLC is given. Key terms used in this study are defined in the text and are also available in the appendix, the core components of PLCs [conceptual frameworks], which are used in this study are examined and practices that support the building of PLCs are explained.

2.1 The term and concept of professional learning communities

Even though Argyris and Schon (1978) and other researchers such as Morrissey (2000) and Bullough (2007) have written on PLCs, none has focused on building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments. The concept of a PLC is not that new, especially when it is viewed from the notion of enquiry, reflection and self-evaluating schools (Stoll et al., 2006). Stenhouse (1975) has challenged teachers to be school and classroom researchers and, equally, for them to play a major role in curriculum development. These schools have been named differently; while Bolam (1977) called them "thinking" or "problem solving schools", the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation [CERI] (1978) called them "creative schools" and in the 1980s these schools were called "self-reviewing or self-evaluating schools" (McMahon, Bolam, Abbott, and Holly, 1984).

The 1990s marked a turning point in the research on PLCs, as through the continuous search for school-improvement strategies, educational researchers became more aware of the concept and perceptions of PLCs. As the concept was new, various perceptions led to various definitions of PLCs. Senge (1990) defines PLCs as organizations where people are in a constant state of expansion in a search for the better results that they desire, where collective aspiration is

set free and where learning together is a continuous process. While Gephardt and Marsick (1996) see PLCs as organizations that enhance the capacity to learn, adapt and change, Morrissey (2000) believes that a PLC is a school that "engages the entire group of professionals in coming together for learning within a supportive self-created community" (2000, pp. 3–4) and, according to Hord (1997), PLCs are schools where professionals study and act together with the aim of improving students' achievements.

Despite these various perspectives and definitions, many researchers such as Hord (1997), Bullough (2007), Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006), Maddin (2013), and Bausmith and Barry (2011) have generally agreed on the core processes or components of PLCs. These components include supportive shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions and shared personal practice. These components are used as the conceptual framework and are individually examined in section 2.4. Beginning in the 1990s, educational researchers became more aware of the concept and perceptions of PLCs. As it was somehow a new concept, the researchers looked at PLCs from different perspectives and this led to a variety of definitions.

Gephardt and Marsick (1996) argue that all organizations learn, but not all of them employ better ways for learning. In their view, a real learning organization is an organization that enhances the capacity to learn, adapt and change. They further explain that in this type of organization, learning processes are not only analysed, monitored, developed and managed, but are also aligned with improvement and innovation goals. Organizational vision, strategy, leaders, values, structures, systems, processes and practices should work to enhance people's learning and development.

The concept of a learning organization, as developed by Argyris and Schon (1978) and made popular by Senge (1990), has a significant overlap and correlated definitions with learning organizations, which together reflect the essential characteristics of learning organizations. According to Senge (1990), in PLCs, people not only continually expand their capacity to create the results that they truly desire, but they also nurture an expansive pattern of thinking; people's collective aspiration is set free and they continuously learn how to learn together. According to Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1991), a learning organization is an organization that facilitates learning of all its members and continually transforms itself.

The essential characteristics include shared insights or vision; learning based on experience; a willingness to change mental models; individual and group motivation; team learning; learning nurtured by new information; and increasing the learning capacity to reach a state of continuous change or transformation (Pedler et al., 1991). Brown and Isaac (1994) and Huffman and Jacobson (2003) also believe that PLCs refer to school organizations in which all stakeholders are involved in joint planning, action and assessment for student growth and school improvement.

Moreover, according to Hord (1997), PLCs refer to professional staff studying and acting together to direct efforts towards student learning. Huffman and Jacobson (2003) then believe that the greatest challenge is how to get all the stakeholders involved in the improvement process; that is, helping parents and other community members to understand educational issues and reform recommendations. They argue that when this is done, the community will feel comfortable in supporting a school-improvement effort that promotes a high level of learning for all students. They also see collaborative leadership as important, because successful learning communities develop the capacity to include all the stakeholders: students, teachers, families and the community.

My definition of professional learning communities

In this study, PLCs are defined as inclusive institutions that continuously question the status quo and seek for better means to improve their institutions, what Hord (2003, p. 1) called "communities of continuous enquiry and improvement". In such schools, all the stakeholders (teachers, parents, administrators, students, the government and the community) work together for the overall improvement of the school. Power is genuinely shared and every stakeholder carries out its duties professionally. Supportive conditions are available and teachers share their individual practices for the betterment of the whole team/school. In such schools, its shared values and vision act as a guide for the development of the school and they are supported with on-going genuine communication, collaboration and trust among the stakeholders.

According to Stoll et al. (2006), Mitchell and Sackney (2000) and Toole and Louis (2002), PLCs are a group of people sharing and questioning their practice in an on-going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented and growth-promoting way. PLCs, therefore, as Stoll et al. (2006) further argue, involve all the stakeholders coming together to enhance each other's learning, including school development. Louis and Gordon (2006), while emphasizing the inclusive nature of PLCs, have explained that all the staff should be included in building these communities and that those dealing with young children and children with special needs are equally critical for the success of these inclusive learning communities.

Despite these differences in definitions, most researchers such as Hord (1997), Stoll and Louis (2007), Wells and Feun (2007) and Bullough (2007) have agreed on most of the factors which influence PLCs, even though the factors have been named differently. While writers such as Hord and Rutherford (1998) called them core components of PLCs, others such as Huffman and Jacobson (2003) called them core processes, Hord (2003) called them attributes, and Gephart and Marsick (1996) and Wells and Feun (2007, p. 147) called them dimensions of PLCs. These factors that influence PLCs are fully identified in the next section under the attributes of PLCs.

School transformation as professional learning communities

Senge (1990) explained that any organization aiming to transform itself into a professional learning organization must develop five core disciplines

(capacities); namely, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and system thinking – the cornerstone of change.

Coppieters (2005) believes that people in the organization should have good self-knowledge regarding what they wish to achieve. Coppieters (2005) argues further that Senge, Kleiner, Robert, Ross, Roth and Smith (2000) failed to clearly define the importance of knowledge management for a learning organization. He believes that all learning processes are nurtured by knowledge. Knowledge must therefore be available both internally and externally. Therefore, schools need systems to capture vital external knowledge, which is essential for their core business. Probst and Romhardt (2000) identify the core process of knowledge management to consist of knowledge identification, retention, utilization, communication, development and acquisition. Furthermore, Senge et al. (2000), using concrete cases, have shown how development of the five disciplines can be implemented in schools. In interviews with teachers, conditions within the school, which they believed either fostered or inhibited individual or collective learning, were identified. This led to a list of characteristics of schools as learning organizations (Leithwood, Doris, and Steinbach, 1998). The school vision and mission, school culture and school strategies, among others, were identified as the most important factors.

O'Sullivan (1997) and Holly (1994), while defining real learning communities, have moved beyond categorizing the key features, and identify, from a number of sources, what learning organizations actually do. This is potentially another powerful way of looking at this concept, as it emphasizes the types of action that need to be undertaken to transform an institution into a real learning community. O'Sullivan (1997) explains that professional learning organizations look to the future by looking at their present, they treat planning (and evaluation) as learning, and pace their learning and their development. Moreover, learning organizations learn from themselves, learning organizations are lifelong learners and "learning organizations use meta-learning"; that is, "they learn how to learn" (O'Sullivan, 1997 p. 222).

Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006) have argued that PLCs can be categorized into three stages. There are those at the early stage of development (early starters), those that have gone further along the development process (developers) and those that are fully established (mature). It is a mistake to view PLCs as fixed entities. There are so many factors that determine the time that any PLC can spend in each stage. This view is supported by Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, Wallace, Greenwood, Hawkey and Ingram (2005). According to them, PLCs are not fixed; they are fluid and evolve with experience.

There were different frameworks that could have been used in this study and they include the leadership, organization and culture frame (Mullen & Schunk, 2010) and the conceptual frame of shared supportive leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (Hord and Rutherford, 1998; Bullough, 2007; Hord,

1997; Southwest Education Development Laboratory [SEDL], 2000 a; Maddin, 2013; Bausmith and Barry, 2011). I decided to use the five conceptual frameworks because they are very popular in the domain of professional learning communities. These frameworks have been in existence since the 1990s and many researchers such as Hord (2003), Maddin (2013) and Bausmith and Barry (2011) have written on them. The five frames have been tested especially in measuring educational institutions as professional learning communities (Olivier, Antoine, Cormier, Lewis, Minckler & Stadalis, 2009) and this is much related to my second research question [How and what core components are used in building a professional learning community in a school in a conflict and post-conflict environment?]

2.2 Attributes of professional learning communities

The principal plays an important role in determining whether change will take place in an educational institution or not. Thus, a good beginning would be to examine the strategies that educational leaders and others use to implement positive change within an educational institution. Hence, transforming educational institutions into PLCs would be more effective when the leader sanctions and effectively nurtures staff development as a community (Boyd and Hord, 1994). Even though many researchers have not agreed on a single definition of PLCs, they have generally agreed on the core components, attributes or core processes of these real learning communities. These components include supportive shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions and shared personal practice (Hord and Rutherford, 1998; Bullough, 2007; Hord, 1997; Southwest Education Development Laboratory [SEDL], 2000 a; Maddin, 2013; Bausmith and Barry, 2011).

To transform any institution into a professional learning organization, the principal and the senior management team should examine the school's strategies, structure and culture. According to the Maltese case study by Bezzina (2004), before PLCs can be established, certain prerequisites at the system level are helpful, and they include (a) a genuine belief in the benefits of decentralization and the various forms it can take; (b) the development of a clear strategic plan that allows all stakeholders to change, adapt and develop the appropriate attitudes, values and dispositions to take on more responsibilities at various levels of the education system; and (c) that there should be an appropriate infrastructure that would allow such a process to be introduced (Bezzina, 2004).

A careful examination of a principal or school whose staff operates as a PLC (such as Cottonwood Creek School described by Hord and Rutherford, 1998) seems logical in determining what these communities are, what they look like and how they are actually transformed into PLCs.

2.2.1 Supportive shared leadership

Supportive shared leadership is one of the core components of PLCs and the principal has a key role to play. When the principal is viewed as someone who knows everything, it may make it difficult for the staff to come out with different views on school development (Hord, 2003). Hence, the staff and principal must work together, questioning, investigating and seeking solutions for school improvement. Here, the need for everyone to contribute is more important than a hierarchy based on who knows more. According to Hord (2003) and Joyce (2004), if this new relationship is well established, both administrators and teachers view themselves as playing on the same team and working towards the same goal. The principal ought to work with teachers as a peer and colleague and treat teachers with respect (Olivier, Antoine, Cormier, Lewis, Minckler, and Stadalis, 2009). In a case study of Cottonwood Creek School, Hord and Rutherford (1998) explained that a partnership had been formed between Cottonwood Creek School and Hilltop University in 1987 to provide teachers with the opportunity to develop leadership and decision-making skills. According to them, teachers attended meetings at Hilltop University to design a teacher education program, thus taking part in making decisions that would impact their school's program and students. Teachers believed that they were empowered by this, as their decisions were to affect Hilltop University students who were doing internships in Cottonwood Creek School. A representative from each grade level in Cottonwood made up the Hilltop University Forum (Hord and Rutherford, 1998)

According to Hord and Rutherford (1998), in 1987, the Cottonwood Creek School principal enhanced supportive shared leadership in three ways. First, the school's principal encouraged innovation and change and applauded the school's partnership with Hilltop University. Second, the district created the teacher and leadership team decision-making structures on the campuses. Third, the partnership with Hilltop University provided the opportunity and support whereby Cottonwood Creek School staff practiced the art of decision making with available supportive conditions (Hord and Rutherford, 1998, p. 2). Other great outstanding factors included the fact that the principal accepted a collegial relationship with teachers, shared power and decision making, and promoted and nurtured leadership development among the staff (Olivier et al., 2009).

Bezzina (2006) suggests that a PLC needs strong leadership and that the requirements include a visionary principal who serves as a role model and steward, a commitment to involve and empower teachers in decision-making responsibilities and the necessity of negotiating a vision that staff understand and share. The school leader should also assist the staff with learning to share different opinions, and all staff should learn to give and receive constructive criticism, and the principal should equally create a conducive/better environment for discussion about everything, including a broader reform vision. A visionary principal must not only be a change agent, but also a coach, spokesperson and a direction-setter. According to Hunter (2013, p. 2), "Without

direction, the implementation of PLCs will fail, much like a ship traveling on a tempestuous sea in the dark."

Fullan (1995) and Sarason (1993) have also argued that for any institution to transform into a PLC, teachers must do their best for the growth and development of students. However, teachers will not sustain such caring and giving attitudes unless the school leader creates conditions that are conducive for the continuous growth and development of the teachers. According to Fullan (1995), teachers must lead the way in being continuous learners throughout their careers. Teachers must keep changing and adapting to the habit of critical reflection and professional continuous engagement in self-improvement and the principal must provide the staff with the opportunity to initiate change (Olivier et al., 2009). Morrow (2010) sums it up in the following words: "The administrator plays the role of facilitator and demonstrates an ability to create a structure that promotes participatory decision making among all represented groups within the organization" (Morrow, 2010, p. 37).

2.2.2 Collective creativity

Another core component that has been discussed by many researchers like Hord (2003) and Hunter (2013) is collective creativity. For collective creativity to be successfully implemented there should be good collaboration among the stakeholders. Collective creativity is how the principal and teachers come up with new thinking that generates or recognizes ideas, possibilities or alternatives in creating the results that they desire. Andrews and Lewis (2007) have argued that shared values and vision are at the centre of success for any learning community. Both the principal and staff are involved in a continual expansion in terms of their capacity to create the result that they desire and also through learning to learn together (Hord, 2003; Hord and Rutherford, 1998). This may take the form of staff working together, holding conversations about students, teaching and learning, and also identifying related issues and problems. Moreover, enquiry helps the principal and teachers to create ties that bind them together as a group and thus become a community of learners. Here, participants work together in coming up with new ideas and in looking for solutions to problems. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, team work has become very important. Hord (1997, p. 3) puts it as follows:

> ... As the principal and teachers enquire together they create community. Inquiry helps them to overcome chasms caused by various specializations of grade level and subject matter. Inquiry forces debate among teachers about what is important. Inquiry promotes understanding and appreciation for the work of others.
>
> And inquiry helps principals and teachers as a special group and that binds them to a shared set of ideas. Inquiry in other words helps principals and teachers become a community of learners.

Dufour (2004) has explained that educators in PLCs, to achieve their collective aim of working together to achieve their purpose, must be involved in a culture of collaboration. According to him, collaboration as a major characteristic of a

PLC "Is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyse and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an on-going cycle of questions that promote deep team learning; This process in turn leads to higher levels of student achievement" (Dufour, 2004, p. 1). Educators wanting to transform schools into PLCs must adhere to this trend. Learning today should no longer be viewed as an individual phenomenon and this seems to explain why writers such as Senge (1990) defined learning to include collective learning of, and decision-making by the group.

According to Seashore, Anderson and Riedel (2003, p. 3), by using the term PLC, they emphasize not just the "discrete acts of teachers sharing" but the establishment of a wide range of school culture that makes collaboration genuine and on-going and one that is focused on critically examining practices to improve student learning. According to them, teachers work both in and out of school in things such as taking part in professional training, which thus improves student learning.

The sharing and deliberation in any "ideas group" or team is not always an easy process, and can be quite stressful at times if it is not professionally handled. While the main aim for the group coming together is to share ideas for professional development, individual members sometimes have different ideas about what should drive their planning, teaching and learning. Andrews and Lewis (2002) describe reconciling different views as "working in a mine field where you want everyone in the team to feel that they have participated in the process, and you want to come up with something which is valid and something to be proud of" (p. 244). Professional dialogue is energizing for any group. Being able to talk about what one does in the classroom with absolute enthusiasm helps to build the type of cohesiveness where all views are valued and differences are explored. When this happens, everybody's different point of view is heard and his or her differences are known.

Mullen and Kochan (2000) believe that teacher networks do play a significant role in enhancing the continuous professional development of teachers. Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) and Mullen and Kochan (2000) have identified the features shared by successful teacher networks. Such networks tend to provide a clear focus combined with a common purpose and identity. According to them, these networks include activities that function as opportunities for self-direction, involve interdependent communities where teachers solve problems together, and create opportunities for leadership both within the network and through transference to other domains, with a focus on schools.

Andrews and Lewis (2002) have explained that by working within a group, members learned together, and in so doing, they developed into a PLC, or what Hord (1997, p. 3) called a "community of learners". Members talk about their collective learning such as sharing a purpose, sharing experiences and entering into professional dialogue. For this to be successful, members of any group must be tolerant and respect one another. The diverse nature of the group should only help to improve learning experiences of its members and/or

critical thinking across departments, and that is how a great deal can be learned about different forms of pedagogy, different forms of assessment and different ways to motivate students when departments talk to each other. Other writers such as King and Newmann (2001) and Leiehwood and Louis (1998) have agreed that members of any PLC take collective responsibility for the success of all the students.

In these types of institutions, the spirit of collaboration, trust among colleagues and accountability promote individual and group learning. These communities of learners are inclusive whereby all the stakeholders are involved and learn from each other (Bolam et al., 2005). We must understand, as Hargreaves (2003, p. 160) rightly pointed out, that our future prosperity depends on our ingenuity and our collective capacity for inventiveness, creativity, problem solving, developing networks, and the ability to cope with change and maintain lifelong learning. Hargreaves (2003) further argues that teachers should not be seen as deliverers, but as developers of learning, and that teachers need to add values to reforms that build the community. Hunter (2013, p. 6) has concluded that "It is the principal's role to facilitate the process of highlighting the link between data and instruction and to ultimately guide the process of developing collective intelligence."

2.2.3 Shared values and vision

Another core component of PLCs that has been agreed by many research like Hord and Rutherford (1998), Bullough (2007), Southwest Education Development Laboratory [SEDL] (2000a), Maddin (2013), and Bausmith and Barry (2011) is shared values and vision. According to Hord (2003), vision in this context includes a mission, purpose, goals, objectives or even a sheet of paper near the principal's office. Isaacson and Bamburg (1992) link vision to the mastery of the organization and the commitment to telling the truth. Sharing a vision is more than agreeing with the good ideas; it may be looked upon as a mental image of what is important for both the organization and the individual. Hunter (2013, p. 2) believes that an effective vision should have "a broad appeal, deal with change, encourages faith and hope, has high ideals [and] defines the destination and the journey". The staff should use the vision as a guide post in decision making. Isaacson and Bamburg (1992) argue that a true shared vision is never imposed. It emerges from the people who see their organization's vision as comprising of more than their individual goals. Fullan (2001) has argued that effective schools or learning communities establish mutual supportive relationships and develop shared norms and values. According to him, establishing a collaborative culture in a school environment helps to move schools towards a PLC (Olivier et al., 2009). This idea is also supported by Louis, Kruse and Bryk (1995). According to them, shared values provide a framework for sharing and making ethical decisions, which are vital for changing schools into PLCs.

Hord (2003) explains that focusing on student learning is a key characteristic of PLCs. Through shared values and a shared vision, new binding

norms that the staffs share are eventually produced. There is trust and open communication among the staff and the principal. According to Senge (1990), it is a true shared vision that guides the organization in times of stress – which has become an epidemic in some schools today. Vision helps us align what we say with what we do. It could also help transform physical, mental and emotional labour into creative acts. Shared vision binds educators together and thus becomes the heart of professional learning organizations.

Bezzina (2006) and other writers such as Stoll and Fink (1996) have explained that establishing relationships between teachers helps to extend their morale and encourage the development of a clear and shared sense of purpose (vision), greater collaboration and collective responsibility for student learning. Collegial relations and collective learning are at the core of building the capacity for PLCs.

According to research by Hord and Rutherford (1998), a good school's vision ought to evolve from the values of the staff, and lead to binding norms of behaviour that the staff support and the vision should be used in the school in making major decisions, especially in terms of teaching and learning. While Andrews and Lewis (2007) believe that having a shared vision is crucial for the success of any PLC, Louis et al. (1995) and Stoll et al. (2006) conclude that a shared value base in any PLC would provide a framework for shared, collective and ethical decision making.

2.2.4 Supportive conditions

Supportive conditions is a major component in building PLCs. Supportive conditions are determined by when, where and how the staffs usually come together as a team to learn, make decisions, solve problems and do other creative work that supports PLCs. This may either take the form of physical conditions or people's capacities. Physical conditions that support PLCs include the time to meet and talk, teacher empowerment, the communication structure and shared autonomy. People's capacities, on the other hand, include the willingness to receive feedback and work towards improvement. There should also be respect and trust among colleagues at all levels and the possession of the appropriate skills needed to enhance teaching and learning and supportive leadership (Hord, 2003; Olivier et al., 2009). Morrow (2010) has explained that establishing a collegial atmosphere among the stakeholders is necessary for the successful establishment of supportive conditions in every PLC. This collegial relationship, according to the SEDL (2000b), includes respect, trust and genuine relationships among the stakeholders.

According to Hord and Rutherford (1998), the nature of Cottonwood Creek School helped to enhance supportive conditions. The "size of the school, the proximity of the staff to each other, well-developed communication structures, a time and place reserved for meeting together were in favour of a supportive environment" (Hord and Rutherford, 1998, pp. 5–6). Time was not only allocated for their meetings, but Hilltop University also gave them a

stipend each week. This issue of time and space to meet has also been stressed by Morrow (2010) and Olivier et al. (2009).

Hord and Rutherford (1998) believe that another supportive aspect involved is the "respect and trust among colleagues that promotes collegial relationships, a willingness to accept feedback and to work to establish norms of continuous critical inquiry and improvement, and the development of positive and caring relationships among students, teachers, and administrators" (Hord and Rutherford, 1998, p. 6). At Cottonwood Creek School, there was a full-time parent coordinator at the school who organized and communicated with parents. Parent–teacher conferences were equally conducted and individual teachers contacted parents in different ways.

2.2.5 Shared personal practice

The final core component that is used in building PLCs is shared personal practice. Shared personal classroom practice and a review of a teacher's behaviour by other staff members are important characteristics of PLCs. Even though this practice should not be evaluative, it should, however, be a peer-helping-peer process. Mutual respect and understanding are great requirements for this type of culture to be established in the workplace. Researchers such as Hord and Rutherford (1998) have concluded that this type of practice assists in transforming educational institutions into PLCs. PLCs provide an environment where "Everyone has a responsibility to share their personal practice and provide support for their peers" (Morrow, 2010, p. 39).

Bezzina (2006) points out that a school provides opportunities for teachers' personal learning and development mainly through seminars and staff development meetings. As for collective or group learning, they can generally be organized according to subjects or departments. Working in groups is useful because it helps teachers share ideas, direct their teaching and solve problems that emerge. Sharing personal practices during meetings helped to create opportunities to address issues together. Brainstorming has been quite helpful for many groups. Furthermore, the opportunity to share allows teachers to come together and abide by decisions taken, share ideas about how to do things and stick together in planning various activities (Bezzina, 2006).

Any educational leader is challenged to encourage the teachers to share and develop various structures designed to enable the whole faculty to succeed. At Cottonwood Creek School, for example, there was even an optional monthly forum that provided an opportunity for open discussions on issues or concerns of the teachers (Hord and Rutherford, 1998). Decision-making bodies that met regularly were equally in place. The principal frequently visited classrooms and was versed with what teachers were doing. Teachers were praised and their good work was shared with other teachers.

Fulton, Yoon and Lee (2005 p. 1) argue that for American schools to transform into learning communities in the twenty-first century, they must abandon their "isolated teaching in stand-alone classrooms". They challenge teachers to share knowledge and become professionals. Supported with

statistics showing the number of teachers who abandon teaching within the first four years after joining the profession, Fulton et al. (2005) explain that shared knowledge and supportive conditions will help newly trained teachers (novices) to survive the first few years. The National Commission on Teaching and American Future (NCTAF), according to Fulton et al. (2005), should review its programs in the twenty-first-century learning communities through teacher development, supportive conditions, and mentoring and induction. Fulton et al.'s (2005) recommendations support the view that quality teaching and shared personal practice are prerequisites for transforming institutions into real learning communities. Teachers must continuously share in order to continuously promote their professional growth (Morrow, 2010).

Osborne and Hennessy (2003), Blurton (1999) and Jackson and Temperly (2007) have emphasized the importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and networking in education today, especially in building learning communities. From the above views, it would be right to incorporate ICT and network learning into the components of PLCs, as both will facilitate the functioning of the learning community. As Blurton (1999, p. 46) has rightly noted,

> Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are ***a*** diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate and to create, disseminate, store and manage information**.**
>
> In recent years, educational access to digital ICT tools, application, networks, and media worldwide has grown dramatically. Digital ICTs are quickly becoming more accessible, but it is important to note that earlier technologies continue to play a critical role in education worldwide.

According to Osborne and Hennessy (2003), ICT has offered great potential in transforming teaching and learning. They have explained that ICTs "offer a range of different tools in school science activity" (Osborne and Hennessy, 2003, p. 4). These tools include "processing and interpretation", "graphing, databases spread sheet", "multimedia software", "information systems", "publishing and presentation tools" and many more (Osborne and Hennessy, 2003, p. 20). All of these tools have been at the forefront in effecting the functioning of PLCs in a network environment. In addition, as explained by Jackson and Temperly (2007, p. 45), "The school as a unit has become too small scale and isolated to provide for professional learning ... in a knowledge rich and networked world". They argue that collaborative learning and enquiry, as used in PLCs, require that learning should be expanded to include sources from outside the school like other schools and Universities. They have however admitted that "We currently know too little about the dynamics and relationships between professional learning and network learning" (Jackson and Temperly, 2007, pp. 45-46).

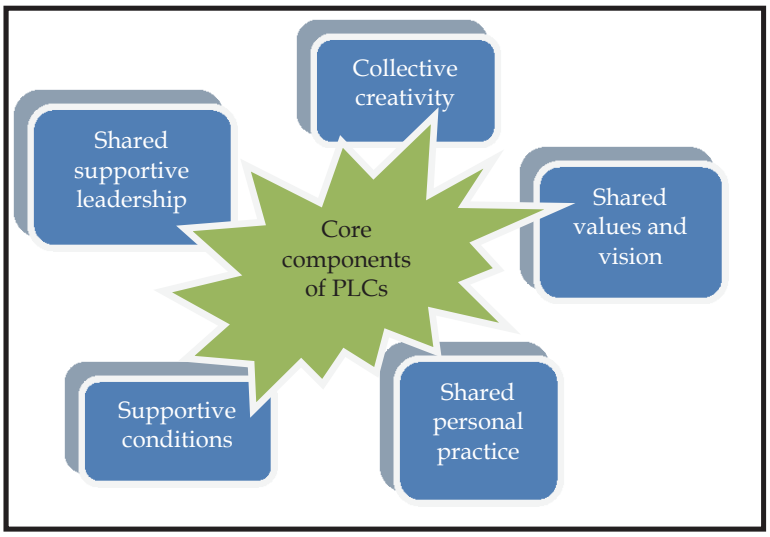

FIGURE 1 The core components of professional learning communities

Figure 1 above is a summary of the five core components that have been used in measuring PLCs in ordinary environments. These components include shared supportive leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions and shared personal practice. These frameworks have been explained in detail in section 2.4 under "Attributes of professional learning communities". These five core components do not work in isolation; they complement each other and are also supported by other factors like accountability, continuous inquiry, genuine relations, a purpose and focused vision, genuine communication and trust. (Please see section 2.4 figure 2)

2.3 How schools develop into professional learning communities

Steps/practices that support the building of professional learning communities

To better understand how an effective PLC is built, it would be a good idea to turn to the change process in the school learning community. Many school leaders have worked hard to bring about change in their schools, but in the end, they have failed due to the fact that the change was not institutionalized and could not be sustained. As Speck (1996) rightly puts it, "With sustainable, systemic change, school improvement survives the departure of the initiating principal and becomes part of the school community culture" (p. 69). To build and sustain a PLC, it is important to begin laying the groundwork by forming a small team and explaining to them why a move towards building a PLC is necessary and, as suggested by Stoll et al. (2006), the PLC should be promoted, continuously evaluated and sustained, and it should be led and managed.

Laying the Groundwork: It is ideal to form a small team to start with, then explain your views to the major stakeholders because external sources of funding and structures are needed to promote the PLC. Starting the process by forming a small team is quite important, as the principal will rely on that team to lead, sell and promote his/her ideas. Speck (1996) has explained that it is necessary to discuss the change process so that the people understand the problems and the outcomes that change will bring. According to him, the principal must convince the stakeholders why change is needed, what the content of the change is, where the change will take place, what its direction will be, and how the change will be effected. For this process to be successful, all of the stakeholders and other outsiders should be involved, the school must have a good vision, the capacities and incentives needed for the change must be understood, the resources and plan for change must be available and the politics of the change must be understood. The school vision and values need to be in place, the various teams and how collective creativity and team dynamics will work need to be mapped out and, of course, there should be a system in place for mentoring and shared personal practice. If you were a County Education Officer (CEO), you would begin by discussing the process with various principals in the county and explaining the process to them (SEDL, 2000a; Speck, 1996).

The key factors are to look for time and space, including a staffroom or any other facility that will be used to promote the PLC, and equally, to examine the sources for funding. For the PLC to be sustainable and permanent, it should be included in the policy documents and development plans. Available supportive conditions need to be in place. For effective communication, ICT should be used. There is no guarantee that everything will work exactly as planned, as there are always challenges. Daggett and Jones (2008) rightly put it that schools as systems have a very close link between the way that they are designed and the results that they produce. If different results are desired, the focus must be to change the system, not simply demanding that the system works better (Daggett and Jones, 2008). For an effective start-up of a PLC, the above factors will play a key role (Stoll et al., 2006).

Promoting Professional Learning: Staff professional development will be needed for the growth of a professional learning community. The effectiveness of staff induction, appraisal and mentoring needs to be ensured and all of these factors should be consistent with the values of developing a PLC. Supportive conditions must be in place. The vision and values should be in place and well understood by all the stakeholders (SEDL, 2000a). The principal should ensure that power is genuinely shared or distributed and that leadership is promoted and nurtured among the staff. The staffs require key information and need to be knowledgeable regarding the working mechanism of the PLC; they should be guided by the institution's vision, and decision making should be carried out in committees and communicated across the whole institution. There needs to be adequate support to ensure effective teaching and learning (Olivier, 2009; Stoll et al., 2006).

Evaluating and Sustaining the PLC: Sustaining and evaluating the learning community is crucial for its constant improvement. Continuous inquiry ensures that the development of the PLC is regularly monitored and that the values of the learning community are considered when hiring new employees. Sub components of collective creativity should be in place and the evaluation mechanisms should ensure that collegial relationships exist among all of the staff, that collective learning takes place through open dialogue and that any obstacles to the PLC's development are eliminated. Critical friends should be invited to provide an external view of the PLC (Olivier, 2009; Stoll et al., 2006).

Leading and Managing to Promote the PLC: Leadership should promote, lead and manage an inclusive PLC. The SEDL (2000a) has acknowledged that shared and supportive leadership should be modelled. The power relationship ought to shift and the principal must ensure that power is genuinely shared or distributed across the school board and that leadership is promoted and nurtured among the staff. Trust, accountability and other subsystems must be in place for the smooth functioning of the learning community. Even though every school is different and there is no guarantee that what worked in one school will eventually work in another, there is, however, a lesson to be learned (Daggett and Jones, 2008). There should be coaching and mentoring, and leadership has to be distributed throughout the whole school or organization, and opportunities must exist for everyone to be able to share their views. Important issues should be discussed and the principal should incorporate the advice from discussions when making the final decisions. School improvement, reinvention or building a school as a PLC is a necessity, because we need to "keep pace with the changing society and economy" (Daggett and Jones, 2008, p. 2). The SEDL (2000a) has suggested that decision-making structures should be established if they do not already exist (Olivier, 2009; Speck, 1996; Stoll et al., 2006).

In a study by the SEDL (2000b) that was aimed at creating communities of continuous inquiry and improvement, co-developers were placed in schools as agents of change and they worked together to transform the school into a learning community. In the study, the co-developers in schools were colleagues in a PLC of co-developers. The co-developers were external facilitators and field-based developers in their schools. The co-developers were also contributors to applied research and project disseminators (SEDL, 2000b).

Other tools used in building professional learning communities

Certain practices have brought about change and support the groundwork for developing PLCs in high schools. These practices include broad leadership, engaging students' voices, improved communication and collaboration, continuous inquiry, finding time, school decisions based on evidence, external funding and support and managing turnover to support the PLC (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007).

Broad Leadership: For a sustainable PLC to evolve, leadership must be distributed across units. This will capitalize on teachers' knowledge and

expertise in leading and making strategic decisions. For this to be successful, the principal must be able to recognize the qualities in the teachers so that they can be placed in areas that they are best suited for. In a study by McLaughlin and Talbert (2007), they reported that while one principal "Set up a mini grant that allowed teachers to be in charge of projects" (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007, p. 157), another principal tapped into his new leadership team from the "group that was responsible for designing and conducting teaching and learning study groups" (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007, p. 157). As opportunities for new areas of leadership emerge, the principal should then be able to appoint people to those positions.

Engaging Students' Voices: As leadership broadens, students should also be appointed to key positions and their voices should be listened to. This will not only improve the teacher–student relationship, but it will also allow for the students to be involved in leadership and to be part of the decision-making body. Improved communication and collaboration are also crucial in building PLCs in high schools. Cross-department collaboration and teacher collaboration are also quite important in building PLCs, because they provide a mutually "supportive relationship between the interdisciplinary school community and individual department professional community" (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007, pp. 158–159).

A Culture of Inquiry: Continuous inquiry has been mentioned by many researchers as playing a major role in creating PLCs. Through this process, various departments and stakeholders are brought together with the aim of seeking various strategies for their school's improvement. When the whole school is involved in this type of culture, general school problems are better solved and teachers see themselves as belonging to one unit – their school with a single vision. Of course, time is needed for collaboration and joint inquiry to take place. At Cottonwood Creek School, Wednesday was half-day school and the teachers used the other half for conducting meetings and other PLC activities. Some schools may motivate teachers to work during the holiday for about four weeks, because during school, teachers are quite busy teaching, grading assignment papers, preparing lessons or doing other school activities (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007; Hord and Rutherford, 1998).

Decision-making Based on Evidence: The principal should seek teachers' views before making major decisions. Teachers even use the inquiry research base to provide evidence linking teaching and student achievement. External resources and support are equally needed for this process to be successful. It is very important to locate external quality support providers because they will give an independent evaluation and direction. It is also necessary to search for sources of funding, because without funding, the program may not either start or be sustained. These sources of funding need to be continuous and not just for a short period. It is a good idea to search for various external sources of funding right from the beginning. It makes sense if the funding is able to "buy teachers time" and provide them with the needed resources. Another important aspect will be the ability to manage teachers' turnover in order to sustain the PLC.

Only teachers who support the culture of PLCs should be hired, and those who fail to align with the new culture after professional development and mentoring should be allowed to leave (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007).

To avoid the standardization of schools and recognize that schools are developmentally different, it is ideal to use the school's "complementary growth strategies", as suggested by Hargreaves (2003, pp. 155–159). According to these strategies, failing schools should embark on short- and long-term plans simultaneously. For this to be successful a leadership team with complementary strength (managers, leaders, and short- and long-term efficiency leaders) is needed and all of them need to work as a team. For this to be successful, some leaders should work on removing ineffectiveness by working on lesson plans, specific training skills, and improving behaviour and attendance. Others should focus on various areas such as developing trust, creating collaboration and long-term capacity building (Hargreaves, 2003, pp. 155–159).

2.4 Challenges in building professional learning communities in high schools

Generally, building schools as PLCs has not been easy due to the existence of numerous obstacles. These obstacles, as pointed out by McLaughlin and Talbert (2007) and Lieberman and Miller (2011), include administrative, philosophical, physical and psychological factors. The administrative factors include, for example, the lack of a communication channel between the stakeholders, power struggles and limited resources. Lieberman and Miller (2011) have explained that the most obvious challenge face by many PLCs is conflict of culture. They believe that many schools still adhere to a bureaucratic model while PLCs require the values of openness, mutual respect, trust, and accountability.

Some obstacles may also be philosophical (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007). This is due to the fact that parental involvement in schools sometimes leads to mistrust among parents and teachers. Lieberman and Miller (2011, p. 20) see this challenge to concern "the locus of control for the content and process of agenda of a learning community". They explain that faced with the challenge to provide quick fix to many school complex problems, many PLCs find it difficult to find time and maintain conversations at an appropriate level that teachers' voices are heard.

Some obstacles are physical like the poor maintenance of school buildings and classrooms, and the lack of adequate space and time for meetings (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2007; Lieberman and Miller, 2011; Maddin, 2013). Finally, psychological problems such as changing the traditional culture are a major problem in building PLCs. Some teachers and administrators often do not want to change their ways of doing things because they have been doing them the same way for so long. In an era with rapidly changing demands for teachers, teaching and learning, a culture that sustain and promote the

development of PLCs must be encouraged for the creation of shared values that focus on student learning (Lieberman & Miller, 2011).

Maddin (2013, p. 5) has stated that "when, where and how" various teams come together in a school to solve problems and make decisions, is very crucial for the sustainability of a PLC. Maddin sees time to meet, conflicting schedule, and physical proximity, structures for communicating and feedback, isolation, and access to resources as major barriers in building PLCs. These views have also been echoed by Harries and Jones (2010). There are major obstacles in building PLCs; building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments poses even more challenges (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007).

Challenges in building professional learning communities in high schools

In a study by McLaughlin and Talbert (2007), they argue that the positive effects of PLCs are having a great impact in all types of schools in the United States (small and large, rich and poor, culturally diverse or homogeneous). According to them, even though there are general challenges in building PLCs, high schools present certain particular challenges. These challenges come from the way in which the high schools are structured, their leadership, professional culture, perceived culture of students' disrespect for teachers and the external context (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007).

The way high schools are structured is a major hindrance in building PLCs in high schools. There are various departments with subject teachers. Sometimes these teachers teach about five classes a day of about 45 minutes each. They spend the rest of the time planning lessons, marking test papers or assignments and planning multiple lessons, among others, to the extent that they do not have extra time for other activities. It also reduces the chances of getting to know every student better in order to tailor their teaching towards every student's needs. Harries and Jones (2010, p. 178) support this view by explaining that the way schools are structured and "Strong subject boundaries can prove to be barriers in building whole school learning communities. The PLC group is premised on a collective ability to influence the practice of others and to affect whole school change". They also see the inability of some teachers to collaborate with teachers from other schools as a problem, and a general reduction in time for other activities like lesson planning as another problem in implementing PLCs. McLaughlin and Talbert (2007) have argued that high school leadership is also different from the leadership in elementary and many middle schools. According to them, High school principals are looked upon to provide leadership in too many subject areas, and where this is not possible, staff look up to them to provide a model for "inquiry, risk-taking and professional learning" (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007, p. 152).

The professional culture of high schools is another hindrance for the development of PLCs. Teachers concentrate more on teaching their subjects rather than understanding their students. In a study by McLaughlin and Talbert (2007), they found that many teachers do no set high standards for their students or push them to achieve those standards and that some teachers just pass on marginal students. Harries and Jones (2010) have explained that a

school culture may either support or undermine the building of a PLC. They believe that a supportive principal will be needed to overcome this resistant to change.

Student disrespect for a teacher is another factor, especially in schools in the United States. In McLaughlin and Talbert's (2007) study, the majority of students in large and small high schools acknowledged that students did not treat their teachers with respect. External factors are another major drawback in building learning communities in the high school. In high schools, success is measured by high scores, performance in public exams, or even by the number of students succeeding in joining high-performing universities or professional schools. There is also pressure from external inspections and others (Harries & Jones, 2010). Consequently teachers tend to concentrate more on these external measurements, leaving them no time to concentrate on collaboration with colleagues or professional growth of the whole community. The specific problems that schools face in conflict and post-conflict environments are explained later in section 3.5 (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2007).

When looking at the knowledge and experience that PLCs do exhibit, Feger and Arruda (2008) believe that PLCs show an "Openness to improvement, trust and respect, a foundation in the knowledge and skills of teaching, supportive leadership, and socialization and school structures that extend the school's mission" (p. 7). In a study of six high schools regarding how PLC principles are implemented, Wells and Feun (2007) explained that the participant major concern for establishing PLCs included the "Concern for the negative" and "Resistant people who were vocal in every staff. Teachers described their colleagues as 'abrasive,' 'negative,' 'threatening,' 'bullies,' 'loud,' 'screamers,' 'angry,' and 'uncooperative.' They said they never knew how difficult it would be to collaborate" (Wells and Feun, 2007, p. 154).

Catalysts or challenges in building professional learning communities

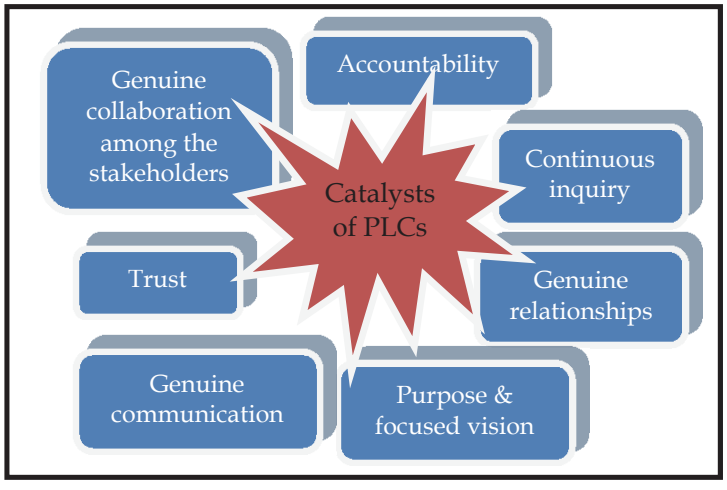

FIGURE 2 Catalysts for building professional learning communities

Figure 2 above shows what I call the catalysts for building PLCs. These components have not been identified as being at the forefront in building these communities, but without them, PLCs would not exist. The above components in figure 2 can also be viewed as challenges in building PLCs. When it comes to accountability, for example, every individual among all the stakeholders must accept responsibility and perform his/her duties or activities in a very transparent manner. Once this is effective, trust building among the stakeholders will improve.

Genuine collaboration among the stakeholders is another important factor that supports the building of PLCs. Hord (2003, p. 54) has explained that PLCs have "collegial collaborative cultures". Teachers and other stakeholders must work together as a team. Teachers, for example, must focus not just on teaching and providing inclusive education to all the children, but it is also their responsibility to train children to become responsible and compassionate citizens. Different strategies should be formed and teachers should also use them in their classrooms, so that students should not just memorize the saying that "two heads are better than one"; they should experience it at first hand and use the approach in collaborative team work. Dufour (2004, p. 1) has explained that in order to transform the school into a PLC, a systematic process must be built "in which teachers work together to analyse and improve their classroom practices ... engaging in an on-going cycle of questions that promote deep team learning". According to him, it is this process that produces better student achievement.

Continuous enquiry provides the stakeholders with the opportunity to constantly question their own activities and look for new ways to solve problems or plan for the future while being guided by a genuine relationship and a vision that is purposeful and focused on student learning. For a PLC to develop, of course, there should be trust and genuine communication among the stakeholders. Hord and Rutherford (1998) have explained that genuine communication is a key factor supporting PLCs. According to them, "respect and trust among colleagues" provide a collegial atmosphere – a corner stone in building PLCs (Hord and Rutherford, 1998, p. 5). When these catalysts are in harmonious relations, and with the core components for building PLCs in place, a collegial atmosphere will be built and a community of learners will emerge.

3 UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTS

3.1 What is a conflict and post-conflict environment?

If we agree that conflict is disagreement, then we may also agree that a conflict may be a misunderstanding that comes from a perceived or real threat. While many people see conflict as fighting and wars, others see it as differences in opinions, perspectives or even personalities. From the above views, conflict is friction or opposition resulting from actual or perceived differences. Davis (2004, p. 8) has defined conflict as a struggle "between two or more people over values, or competition for status, power and scarce resources". A conflict environment, on the other hand, is a society where the actual conflict takes place. In the case of Liberia, as shown in section 4.1.3, the conflict environment started in 1980 when President Samuel Doe took over power through a military coup, and lasted until 2005, when President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was democratically elected. Post-conflict Liberia, as shown in this study, begins with the coming to power of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf – it is when political, economic and social reforms were instituted in Liberia and the rule of law was implemented. Todorovski, Zevenbergen and Molen (2012) have argued that the post conflict starts when hostility ends, and they have divided post conflict into three main phases: emergency, early recovery and reconstruction. According to Brown, Langer and Stewart (2008), post conflicts are characterized by an end to major conflicts and violence, peace agreements, disarmament and reintegration, a functional state and reconstruction. In the case of Liberia, the post-conflict era extends from 2005 to the present day.

While much has been written on the positive side of conflict, this section of the study will dwell mostly on the negative side of conflict, focusing more on war conflict. Conflict in the Liberian context is defined as fighting, civil war and genocide. Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000, p. 5) have elaborated more on the definition of a civil war. According to them, a civil war

> Challenged the sovereignty of an internationally recognized state, occurred within the recognized boundaries of that state, involves the state as one of the principal combatants, [and] includes rebels with the ability to mount an organized opposition.
>
> Protracted armed confrontations occurring between governmental armed forces and the forces of one or more armed groups, or between such groups arising on the territory of a State [party to the Geneva Conventions] (ICRC, 2008, p. 5).

The organization Learn Peace (2012) has identified some root causes of conflict. It explains that the way a society is organized may not only provide the root causes of conflict, but it may equally provide a breeding ground for conflict to erupt. When people feel that they have been unequally or unjustly treated, or that their leader does not represent all the members of their society, this can erupt into conflict. Additionally, when human basic needs are not met (especially safety, food and shelter), people may protest, and this again may lead to a rebellion. When people are unhappy with the way that they are governed, this may equally provide another source of grievance for people to protest. A good society, therefore, is one in which people see difference and diversity as valuable for social growth and not as a problem or as "us against them" (Learn Peace, 2012).

3.2 Characteristics of conflict and post-conflict environments

Conflict and post-conflict environments are not unique; they have different characteristics depending on their different environments (Brown, Langer, and Stewart, 2008). While some characteristics are more common in conflict environments, others may be more visible in post conflict environments, and some in both. In this section of the study, I have decided to look at these characteristics together, without distinguishing which ones are in conflict and/ or post-conflict environments.

Unpredictability of Life: In many conflict and sometimes also in post-conflict environments, people do not venture into business because they are uncertain of the future. As a result, there is usually limited investment during conflicts. While many companies perish during conflicts, others prosper, depending on what they sell and their level of their protection. Many companies that survive during conflicts, especially those producing daily necessities such as food, usually prosper because the goods are often in short supply. Another closely related factor is that markets become disruptive. There is usually a breakdown of competition, and many goods are in short supply, thus driving up prices and trade becomes monopolized. In many circumstances, groups that prosper during civil wars are usually unwilling to see the war come to an end, but because these groups are usually a minority, peace settlements are usually possible. This situation may also be true in a conflict and post-conflict environment especially immediately after a peace accord has been signed and people are not yet certain if the peace will last. (Collier, 1999)

Increasing Criminality: In conflict and post-conflict environments, there is usually an increase in criminality because of the absence of the police due to the fact that they have either joined the military or may have defected to join the opposition. In some instances, some police abandon their jobs because of their risky nature during conflicts. Consequently, we usually see an increase in theft and a decrease in punishment. Another characteristic is an increase in corruption. During conflict and sometimes in post-conflict periods, there is usually less scrutiny of government officials and companies, or those in top positions in general and, as such, corrupt practices go unchecked. Warring parties usually fight to control major resources such as oil and other goods that they can easily use to finance their war. Collier and Hoeffler (2004, p. 6), while examining the "contribution of aid" in post-conflict recovery, found that growth is augmented by aid and policies, and conclude that countries coming out of civil wars usually need financial resources and policy advice (Collier, 1999).

Death and Injury: By the time a peace agreement is reached, many people may have died or have been injured. The Food and Agricultural Organization [FAO] Study 8, (2005, p. 10) has stated that "Over three million people are estimated to have been killed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo". While some of the conflicts are due to religious differences, others arise because of deep-rooted hatred for certain ethnic groups, and some from resources like the case of Sierra Leone [blood diamond] before 2002. One characteristic that is usually very visible is the massive displacement of people. While some of these displaced people settle on land without authorization, thus creating another major problem after the war, others escape to other countries and only return after the war and some never return (FAO Study 8, 2005).

Hunger and Starvation are a key characteristic of both conflict and post-conflict environments. During long conflicts, the food supply is drained and with increasing insecurity, it is usually difficult to supply more food from other countries. The groups that suffer most are usually the children, women and other vulnerable groups. In post-conflict situations, hunger may continue due to the fact that there may be limited seeds for planting, and it may also be due to the fact that the planted crops are not yet ready for harvesting. Another characteristic of both eras is the unresolved political and ethnic tension. In some post-conflict environments, this is heightened when the displaced people return to find that their enemies who forced them to go into exile have occupied their properties (FAO Study 8, 2005).

Infrastructure, Environmental and Record Destruction: There is usually a widespread destruction of infrastructure, environmental degradation and a large-scale destruction of records. During civil wars, very little is done to restore the infrastructure. Sometimes, bridges and roads are destroyed either to protect a major area from invasion or to inflict punishment on an enemy. In both cases, infrastructure and transportation present major challenges even after the war. Adding to the above challenges, there is usually a breakdown in other social amenities such as electricity, water and housing. In conflict and

post-conflict environments, there is usually environmental degradation. Sometimes there is littering everywhere, a lack of a sewage system and visible remains of decomposed bodies. The destruction of records also characterizes conflict and post-conflict environments. The lack of these records may pose a big challenge for the government, especially when it comes to areas such as land records (FAO Study 8, 2005).

Government Breakdown: A substantial breakdown in government is another visible factor. Even in post-conflict environments, government activities may not be visible in all parts of the country. In the conflict period, finance is directed to conflict-related activities such as the purchase of armaments. During the war, government officials are killed and some usually escape from the country while others abandon their positions. In post-conflict environments, these positions are usually left unfilled, either because there are no skilled people, or because there are no mechanisms to elect new people to those positions. In a situation where there are skilled people, another shortcoming and characteristic of post-conflict environments may be the lack of funds to run the government. Many governments in post-conflict situations are usually poor and burdened by debt (FAO Study 8, 2005).

Psychological Issues: There are also negative psychological characteristics. During and after the war, almost everyone is traumatized. During the war, almost everyone has been exposed to torture, murder, rape and other forms of human cruelty, and what is worse is that there is usually no treatment for traumatized victims. Another characteristic is the high expectations of various groups. While some groups may expect to benefit from a shift in power, others may want to see the perpetrators of the war punished. In addition, during the war, many women and children learn many skills and would like to continue with them after the war, but sometimes, women's empowerment is seen by men as a "loss of power" (FAO Study 8, 2005, p. 13). There is also often international intervention because the government does not have the capacity for peace keeping (FAO Study 8, 2005).

Land Tenure Issues: Another major characteristic, especially in post-conflict environments, is that of land tenure. Land is usually privately owned, and it includes a house owned by a family or an individual, and they have the rights over it. For communal lands, every member of the community has the right over it, for example, the right to graze cattle on that piece of land, or open access to that land where the land belongs to everyone and no one can be excluded. One example is the fishing rights in the sea. With state property, only state officials have the right over it for the benefit of the state. In post conflict, the above actors struggle over the land for ownership, value and the use of the land (Todorovski, Zevenbergen, and Molen, 2012).

Appel and Loyle (2012, pp. 87–89) have emphasized "Post-conflict justice as a signal of stability". According to them, in post-conflict justice, attempts to address the wrongdoings that led to the conflict or which took place during the conflict are made. These grievances may include "crimes against humanity, war crimes and ... violation of human rights" (Appel and Loyle, 2012, p. 88). This

usually comes in the form of restorative and retributive justice. They also argue that these forms of justice are aimed at reducing violence by holding both individuals and groups accountable for their atrocities. According to them, post-conflict justice will increase stability and the legitimacy of the ruling government and this may lead to foreign direct investment into the country. The above views by Apple and Loyle (2012) have also been expressed by other writers such as Biningsbo, Loyle, Gates and Elster (2012).

Davies (2004, pp. 95ff) has argued that children experience violence against themselves or against those taking care of them during war. According to her, children experience insecurity and the destruction of educational institutions, which deprives them of the education that would have given them a career and the chance to change their lives, thus giving them a better place in the world.

There has not been any clear cut on when the post-conflict period starts and ends. It also varies from one conflict or society to another. According to the FAO (2005) report, post-conflict starts when major hostilities have ended giving the way for international aid to begin. Again this boundary is not very clear as clashes may continue in certain parts of the country. There is usually the peace agreement in the post-conflict period. In this period activities are focused on three main areas: emergency relief, development, and policy implementation. While emergency activities usually begin in the first part of post-conflict, development activities come next and policy implementation come much later in the post-conflict period and it is characterized by political and social stability, the rule of law, establishment of a government, and land policies. FAO (2005, p. 7) has noted that

> The post-conflict period is considered to end at the point when basic legal frameworks and land administration institutions exist and there is reasonable capacity within the country for the development of policies. However, the end of a post-conflict period may be as difficult to define as its start, and there is seldom a clearly defined boundary. The process of "peace-building" may go on for a much longer period of time. (FAO, 2005, p. 7)

3.3 Problems schools face in conflict and post-conflict environments

The effects of civil wars are felt in every conflict and post-conflict environment. In this section, the analysis has been drawn from the conflicts and post conflicts in Rwanda and Sierra Leone. These problems generally include the loss of human resources and infrastructure, trauma, changes in the national language, destruction of the educational sector and killings.

The loss of human resources and infrastructure, and trauma

According to a study by Ibuka (2011), in the National University of Rwanda during the Rwandan civil war, there was a loss of human resources and

infrastructure. According to him, among the faculty members who died during the war were senior professors, specialists and researchers. According to his analysis, while some of the faculty members went into exile and chose not to return, some are in prisons serving sentences for crimes they committed during the civil war. Ibuka (2011) has explained that some staff members are still on the run and could not effectively render their services when needed. According to him, it is due to the above consequences of the civil war that the National University of Rwanda currently depends on foreigners and visiting lecturers, and this is costly. Ibuka (2011) has argued that without the genocide, Rwanda would have had enough intellectuals to fill those positions. According to Davies (2004, p. 96) in Iraq, for example, during the Gulf War (1991–1992), 40 per cent of the educational institutions were destroyed. In Somalia, school buildings were destroyed and school records were completely wiped out.

The National University of Rwanda's infrastructure was another major area that suffered from destruction during the genocide. Many university buildings and facilities were destroyed: "Many expensive equipment and machineries that we would have been using were destroyed" (Ibuka, 2011, p. 115). Ibuka (2011) has singled out trauma as another major consequence of the civil war. Like students in other post-conflict environments, students in the National University of Rwanda struggle academically because of trauma. It is estimated that about 25 per cent of the above university students are traumatized. According to the study by Ibuka (2011), the annual commemoration week from April 7 to 13 is a contributor to this trauma. During this week, there is no festivity and there is "a special day for mourning". It is also mandatory for students to attend the mourning-week activities. Ibuka (2011) has explained that during the week-long activities, both students and teachers "relive" the horrific period that they went through. Those who were not in the country at the time of the civil war listen to testimonies and watch videos, and this only leads to more traumas. It affects students' ability to learn and the teachers' ability to teach, especially after April 13 (Ibuka, 2011).

Trauma and its long-term consequences have also been discussed by Davies (2004, pp. 99–100). According to her, an investigation in Battacaloa District in Sri Lanka revealed that "Over 40 per cent of children had personally experienced violence … Over 50 per cent had close family members killed violently, including disappearance of a family member following abduction or detention; Severe levels of post-traumatic distress were found" (Davies, 2004, p. 99). Davies (2004, p. 100) concludes that psychological reconstruction is a long-term need for both children and teachers, and that help from aid and educational agencies are needed for its implementation.

Changes in the national language, destruction of the educational sector and killings

Language is another major change in post-conflict Rwanda. In 1994, English was introduced as an official language in Rwanda. Between 1994 and 2008, there were two official languages in Rwanda (English and French). In 2008, English became the only official language in Rwanda, replacing French, which

had been used since independence. It has been said that after the civil war, the majority of those who returned to Rwanda, especially those who were in English-speaking countries such as Uganda, spoke English, and they were the people who later took over the government. Giving a transitional period of 14 years for a change in the language of instruction was long enough and good for a smooth transition. A change in language was also seen as a shift from the old to a new Rwanda. The change in language brought negative consequences to the university. Lecturers who could not speak fluent English lost their confidence in teaching. Language became a barrier to their effective teaching (Ibuka, 2011).

Looking at Sierra Leone during its civil war, education was seriously affected. Hundreds of schools were damaged and it has been estimated that 70 per cent of children under school age had limited or no education at all during the civil war. It has been said that Njala University was a scene of destruction and many educational institutions in many parts of the country were closed down totally during the war. Schools were a major target during the war, beginning in Free Town, and spreading to other parts of the country. Many of these schools became rebel bases during the conflict. In 2001, the World Bank estimated that "Only 13 per cent of Sierra Leone's schools were usable, 35 per cent required total reconstruction and more than half required refurbishment" (United Nations Children's Fund [UNCF], 2011, pp. 28–29).

Thousands of teachers and children had been killed, maimed or displaced during the war, and others joined the various warring factions willingly or unwillingly. In a study by the UNCF (2011), it was found that 89 per cent of children interviewed indicated having seen someone injured or killed by guns, and a majority of the children also agreed that they saw dead bodies and body parts, and that they also witnessed the burning down of houses and properties. Ten years of civil war in Sierra Leone brought psychological trauma to students and the population in general, and led to the destruction of education infrastructure and materials (UNCF, 2011). According to Davis (2004, p. 96), beginning from 1994 in Rwanda, "Schools were used as congregation for mass killings" and other institutions were occupied and /or looted.

In the context of Liberia, even though the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (Davies, 2004, p. 101) forbids the involvement of children under 15 years old in conflict-related hostility or recruitment into any form of militia or armed forces, child soldiers were widely used by various warring factions. This, in addition to insecurity and the destruction of school structures, deprived the children of their right to education and a career for a better life. More information about education in the pre-conflict era is presented under section 4.2.2 (Education in the pre-conflict era), in the conflict era it is presented under section 4.2.4 (Education in the conflict era), and in the post-conflict era, more information is presented under section 7.8 (Government education policies in Liberia).

4 EDUCATION IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT LIBERIA

Introduction

As this case concerns Liberia, this section of the study begins with an introduction to Liberia and then examines the education system in Liberia. To lay a solid foundation in the reader's mind regarding the conflict in Liberia, Liberia is examined in three major eras – the pre-conflict era (1822–1980), the conflict era (1980–2005) and the post-conflict era (2005–the present) and each of these three major eras is further divided into three main domains: political, economic and social. It is my vision that this will give the readers an insight into how unstable Liberia was, especially by the end of the second civil war in 2003, and the extent to which things have generally improved, especially after the election of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in 2005.

4.1 A map and a brief description of Liberia

Liberia is located in West Africa and its neighbouring countries include Sierra Leone, Guinea and the Ivory Coast, and its coastline (Atlantic Ocean) stretches from south to west, as can be seen from the figure below (Liberia Political Map, 2012). Liberia is divided into three regions (North-Central, South-East and South-West) and there are 15 counties; namely, Bomi, Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Geddeh, Grand Kru, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado, Nimba, River Cess, River Gee and Snor (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2005). Its independence day is July 26, 1847, when Liberia became a Republic. The capital city is Monrovia [in Montserrado county], located in the South-West region (Liberia Political Map, 2012). Liberia has a population of approximately 4.4 million. (Country meters Liberia, 2013)

FIGURE 3 The political map of Liberia.
Source: Liberia political map (2012).

Liberia's development as a conflict environment: 1822–the present

As stated earlier, under this section of the study, Liberia is briefly examined in three major eras – the pre-conflict era (1822–1980), the conflict era (1980–2005) and the post-conflict era (2005–the present) and each of these three major eras is further divided into three main domains: political, economic and social. It is my hope that this will not only give the readers an insight into how unstable Liberia was, especially by the end of the second civil war in 2003, and the extent to which things have generally improved in Liberia today under President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, but it will also present to the reader an understanding of what Anabela High School went through in its development process.

4.1.1 Liberia's pre-conflict era: 1822–1980

Liberia's pre-conflict era is divided into political, economic and social domains and the main argument here is that there were already elements of conflict in this era even though conflict was not at the forefront, as it would be from 1980 onwards. From these three domains, it was clear that the stage for the conflict era had been set even from the origin of the country in 1822 (when Liberia was created) (Government of Liberia [GoL], 2009).

> Central to understanding elitism, inequality, underdevelopment and armed conflict in Liberia from 1979 to 2003, is the decision to establish the Liberian state and the psychology of that establishment that maintained a divided nation from independence in 1847 till [the] present. The early founders of the state had a choice to build a united Liberia of all its peoples involved in the building and development of the emergent nation or to form a separate "civilized" state with the mission to civilize and Christianize the "savage and barbaric" indigenous population as a precondition for citizenship and land ownership in the land of their birth and nativity. The American-born early leadership chose the latter option of building a separatist state as a political direction and philosophy. This choice of the latter is at the root of Liberia's as yet unresolved historical problem of political identity and legitimacy. (International Institute for Educational Planning/Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies [IIEP/INEE], 2011, p. 18)

Liberia´s pre-conflict era: The political domain from 1822–1980

Even though Liberia had been inhabited as far back as the twelfth century, its modern history only started in 1822 with the American Colonization Society (ACS) – the main driving force behind returning former black slaves to their freedom in Africa (Ejigu, 2006; Africana, 1999; IIEP/INEE, 2011). The settlers named the land Liberia, which in Latin means "Land of the Free". The newly formed nation received a lot of support and cooperated with the United States, and Liberia succeeded in maintaining its independence during the scramble for Africa. By the end of the nineteenth century, Liberia was highly indebted and its economy was drained by loan repayments and also due to a fall in the demand for its goods (Africana, 1999; IIEP/INEE, 2011).

By the end of the nineteenth century, Liberia had enjoyed a certain degree of democracy, and before the second half of the twentieth century, Liberia was considered as the most stable African country (Guanu, 2010; Africana, 1999). It is one of two African countries that were never colonized by the European powers during the scramble for Africa. The three branches of government were equal with no one exercising control over the other. By the mid-twentieth century, this had changed and it was to have serious consequences for Liberia for decades (Guanu, 2010). The reasons were socio-political in nature. The class system in Liberia before the mid-twentieth century was a major reason. Presidents such as Tubman and Tolbert were all from the upper classes. Even though they were seen as national leaders, they were also seen as "Leaders of the elite community and protector of elite interests" (Guanu, 2010, p. 61). Taking advantage of this situation, they played the "Godfather role" in Liberian society. President Tubman and Tolbert settled family problems such as marital problems, and disputes between families and churches. Through these actions, the government gradually extended its powers over the other branches of government (Guanu, 2010). Another major setback during this era was the monopoly of political power through the one-party system. Indigenous Liberians had no voting rights and their citizenship was only recognized in 1904 (GoL, 2009).

An attempt by President William Tolbert in the 1970s to end a system of patronage, introduce free speech and to encourage young indigenous professionals had mixed results and helped to expose the political inequality in the Liberian system. In addition, the expectations of a politically equal society

were not met, and coupled with other factors, led to the coup in 1980 led by Samuel Doe (IIEP/INEE, 2011).

Liberia´s pre-conflict era: The economic domain from 1822–1980

According to Sawyer (1992), contract labour existed in Liberia, especially after the abolition of the slave trade. In 1887, the Liberian government entered into an agreement to supply contract workers to construct the Panama Canal. According to this agreement, the Liberian government was to recruit and export about 5,000 individuals to build the Canal. The agreement was very specific on several issues, for example; workers could not be assigned to military services or subjected to harsh working conditions. Workers were to be transported to the Canal and back to Liberia at the end of their contract, which was to last for a maximum of 14 months. Despite these seemingly good terms, the Liberian government failed to investigate the harsh working conditions of its citizens during the Panama Canal construction, despite being warned by sources that were aware of the workers' conditions in Panama. By the end of 1887, approximately 1,006 Liberians had been transported to Panama, and out of the 1006, 90 died in the first year due to the harsh working conditions and labour abuses. It seems as if the government was more concerned with the taxes and other revenues it was getting from this contract (Sawyer, 1992).

In 1914, the Liberian government entered into another agreement with the Spanish government to supply labourers to Fernando Po. In addition, the Liberian government was to establish a consular office in Fernando Po to inspect the recruitment of contract workers and monitor and settle their grievances. The government expansion into the interior, coupled with other factors, made the recruitment of labour much easier (Sawyer, 1992, p. 228).

> First there was an urgent demand for labour and for taxes; second, the government capacity to recruit labour and collect taxes has improved with the establishment of the interior administration and the Frontier Force. Third, the structure set up by the Convention of 1914 had improved the government's capacity to extract resources from the workers.

The imposition of many taxes led to an appeal by the Kru and Grebo chiefs to the US government, the ACS and the international community to intervene and save their subjects from unjust taxation by the Liberian government. It was this unjust taxation that led to the uprising in 1915 by the Kru society. Even though the expansion of the American Firestone Plantation Company greatly improved Liberia's economy, and, during the Second World War, the United States provided technical and economic support to Liberia (Tijssen, 2006), the publication of the use of forced labour in Liberia in 1927 in US newspapers and the 1928 Fernando Po agreement on contract labour led to the League of Nations investigation. In 1930, the League of Nations Investigation Commission [the Christy Commission] published its findings confirming the existence of great abuses in the use of contract workers and their working conditions. On the question of local plantation workers, the Liberian government was accused of using its authority to recruit workers for private purposes. The League of

Nations' Commission, among other aspects, questioned the Liberian government's use of forced labour in public works, and recommended an end to domestic servitude, contract labour and the practice of pawning. The Commission also recommended the entire reconstruction of interior policies (Guanu, 2010, pp. 76–77; Sawyer, 1992, p. 232).

> Although all labourers to Fernando Po have not been forced, it is quite clear that force had been relied upon for numbers, that the blind eagerness for private profit carried the traffic to a point scarcely distinguishable from slavery …. A great deal could not be said of the danger, everywhere evident, to the wholesome economic development of the country, the deserted villages, neglected farms, and 'hungry time'. At least the important element of the native population, which is without doubt the strength of the country could not look but with restless, harried dissatisfaction upon the general abuses of the machinery by which they are ruled. (Sawyer, 1992, p. 232)

This exposure of the government failure to protect its people led to the resignation of President King in 1930 (Guanu, 2010, pp. 76–77; Sawyer, 1992). The elite controlled the wealth of the nation and distributed it among themselves through a network of patronage workers while leaving the indigenous population, consisting of approximately 95 per cent of the population, to rely on subsistence farming, menial jobs or forced work on foreign concessions. There were two laws in Liberia for the two classes of people – the settler law for Americo-Liberians and the custom law for the indigenes. The indigenous Liberians, through the indigenous laws, could not trade with foreigners or own land. Centralization of power, corruption, limited or no decision-making opportunities for the indigenous peoples and majority of the population led to 15 deadly confrontations between 1822 and 1915 (IIEP/INEE, 2011). Even though Liberia had witnessed economic growth in the 1960s, it became popularly known as "growth without development" (IIEP/INEE, 2011, p. 19) and this led to the questioning of the legitimacy of the political power in Liberia.

Liberia´s pre-conflict era: The social domain from 1822–1980. The apprenticeship system

The apprenticeship system was initiated in 1819 with the main aim of letting the natives acquire the needed knowledge in agriculture and religion. It started effectively in 1825 with about sixty youths placed in settlers' families (Sawyer, 1992). The apprenticeship law of 1838 stipulated that children from indigenous communities were to live with settlers' families until the age of 21 for boys and 18 for girls (Sawyer, 1992). For this to take place, the children and their parents, and the settlers' families had to agree. Disputes were to be settled by the monthly Court of the Colony or Justice of Peace (Sawyer, 1992). As explained by Sawyer (1992), even though the apprenticeship system was regulated, mistrust by many indigenous families led to them not placing their children in settlers' families.

> Some indigenous leaders were conscious to have children from their communities learn the ways of settlers, but the climate of suspicion and lack of reciprocity in these relationships discouraged many parents from apprenticing their children. (Sawyer, 1992, p. 186)

Some critics of the apprenticeship system agreed that even though the system had a brighter side on paper, it became more of an exchange of labour for lodging. It is also said that some settlers kept apprentices far beyond their 18th and 21st birthdays with the aim of exploiting free labour (Sawyer, 1992). The dual-law system in Liberia had equally been the source of inequality. A system existed where the rights given to American Liberians from the settlers laws were greater than the restricted rights given to the indigenous Liberians from the custom laws (IIEP/INEE, 2011).

The development of the interior administration and indirect rule

The declining economy and the quest for an increase in productivity led to an expansionist policy into the interior by the Liberian government. G. W. Gibson (a former teacher and missionary) formulated a policy where teachers were placed to instruct influential chiefs in the interior and the chiefs became full government agents with a salary. Chiefs were also given the responsibility for collecting taxes. Ethnic groups were also amalgamated into districts (Sawyer, 1992).

President Barclay had admitted that his interior expansionist policy was a direct response to the Berlin conference call for effective occupation (Sawyer, 1992). The indirect rule policy championed by the government was criticized on many fronts and one of those areas was this notion of collective responsibility. The government's intervention in the selection of chiefs and then placing those chiefs in more authoritative created structures was a direct destruction of indigenous culture. Historians such as Sawyer (1992) have argued that this was an indirect way for the government to look for forced labour for the development of plantation economies rather than developing the indigenous agriculture.

By the late 1940s, the doctrine of self-determination that had spread throughout Africa threatened President Tubman. Being aware that the interior constituted about two-thirds of the population and that it might revolt against the central government, Tubman created the Unification Council and his enormous patronage network, which expanded to the villages. In 1952, the Liberian college (created in 1862) became the University of Liberia – a new cultural melting pot that would bring all Liberian graduates from all over the country together. However, this unity was disrupted in the 1980s and 90s, with the end of the political authority of soldiers of indigenous background (Sawyer, 1992).

The IIEP and INEE (2011) have summarized the political, economic and social dissatisfaction in the late 1970s and the stage that was ripe for a revolution in the following analysis:

> Political opposition soon began making public its claims and the government chose to deal severely with the situation, unable to mediate between the conflicting claims by the elite, who sought to maintain their privileges, and the popular opposition, who sought redress. Compounded by an economic crisis, political and social tension rose as economic conditions worsened, unemployment grew, and the cost of living, especially food, increased dramatically. When, in 1979, the government considered raising the price of rice, protests and riots ensued. The government responded violently, eventually calling in troops from neighbouring Guinea. (p. 20)

4.1.2 Education in the pre-conflict era

According to Sawyer (1992), even though the Liberian government had pursued the establishment of schools and training centres in Liberia, the ACS gave very little support. The establishment of schools was eventually left in the hands of missionaries. By 1929, there were a great number of missionaries in Liberia and the first vocational institution was established by the Phelps Stock Fund. Thirty years later, two other technical and vocational institutions were established (Sawyer, 1992). Before the Second World War, education in this era was mostly concentrated in the hands of missionaries and some private individuals. Three out of four schools were owned by individuals or by missionaries.

The Colonial Council Act passed in 1830, had aimed at establishing public schools. By 1893, it is said that "government public schools were still existing as 'free' for all children between six years and twenty-one years" (Taylor, 1998, p. 161). The Encyclopaedia Britannica (2013) has acknowledged that public and secondary schools in Liberia in the nineteenth century were mainly for settler children. Due to the lack of money, education was not extended to the interior for the indigenous population. Most students were trained in law and theology. In 1825, Lott Carey had also established the first school for native children in Monrovia.

As education was mostly in the hands of missionaries, individuals such as "Mr June Moore and Mr Solomon Hill [Businessmen of Arthington, Liberia]" had donated 1,000 US dollars each to the "Ricks Mission Endowment Fund" to promote child education (Taylor, 1998, p. 161). Even the Liberian first president, J. J. Roberts, willed most of his real property to the Methodist church to promote education. Mrs Corinna Hilton had also established a school in 1964, having started in her home in 1959. Education was only extended to the interior in the 1950s by President Tubman. It may be concluded, based on the available documents, that most schools in the pre-conflict era were concentrated in Monrovia (Taylor, 1998; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013). Rev. Father Gooding established Anabela High School in 1959.

4.1.3 Liberia´s conflict era: 1980–2005

In this section, I have decided to trace Liberia´s conflict environment from 1980, when Samuel Doe took over power through a military coup, to 2005, when President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected as the new president. The rise and fall of President Samuel Doe is explained and the atrocities of the first and second civil wars are presented. With the end of the second civil war in 2003, a provisional government was put in place to prepare the country for elections, and in 2005, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected.

Liberia´s conflict environment: The political domain from 1980–2005

After dominating the government for more than 130 years with single-party rule, the first Republic ended in 1980. Although the military takeover of 1980 was a welcome relief to many Liberians due to the repressive nature of

President Tolbert's government, it soon lost its support because it was unable to establish its legitimacy as President of all Liberians (Sawyer, 1992). The People's Redemption Council (PRC) was ineffective, repressive and ruled with the gun (Sawyer, 1992).

The fall of President Samuel J. Doe

> The history of African leaders has been one of power, greed and sit tight. Once they have tasted power, the urge and uncontrolled temptation by them to stay on has always been the problem. The five years rule of the PRC divided the country and laid the foundations for reprisals, hate and ethnic suspicions. Therefore, the rumors of 1983 that Doe had intentions to contest the presidential election heightened political tensions and caused several concerns. (Johnson, 2003, p. 21)

The Constitutional Commission set up in 1982 had the main goal of preparing Liberia for democratic election and was headed by Dr Amos Sawyer. This Commission interviewed many Liberians from different counties, visited many countries and studied various constitutions before finalizing a constitution for Liberia (Johnson, 2003). The Constitutional Advisory Commission established in 1983 was headed by Dr Edward Kesseley. It had representatives from all of the 13 counties. According to Johnson (2003), Doe was never interested in running for president in 1985; he wanted concessions from the politicians that he and his administration would not be persecuted for crimes that occurred during his administration. When Dr Kesseley (the brains behind the National Democratic Party of Liberia [NDPL] – Doe's party) was not selected as the interim vice-president, he became an opposition member and vowed that the concessions would not be given to Doe (Johnson, 2003). An appeal by Gabriel Baccus Matthews to politicians to keep Doe away from running as the next president failed. Doe was aware that his survival would only come from clinging to the presidency, and for this to be possible, Doe purged other political party leaders such as the leaders of the Liberian Action Party (LAP), Liberian Unification Party (LUP), National Integration Party (NIP), the United People's Party (UPP) and the Liberian People's Party (LPP) (Johnson, 2003).

Doe won the election and the coalition of opposition parties petitioned the Supreme Court, but their petitions failed. The US Secretary of State, Mr George P. Shultz, visited Liberia, and after discussing with both the opposition and government, he recognized the election as free and fair, many opposition leaders were not comfortable with these statements. In 1985, the failed coup by General Quiwonkpa led to more reprisals from the Doe regime (Johnson, 2003; Africana, 1999).

Reasons for the fall of President Samuel J. Doe

Many reasons for the downfall of President Samuel Doe have been given by writers such as Johnson (2003) and Africana (1999). One of those reasons may be traced to Doe's unpopularity with those he governed. Between 1980 and 1985, Doe executed 13 officials of the Americo-Liberians, including President William R. Tolbert Jr. (Johnson, 2003; Africana, 1999). These executions not only

pitted him against Americo-Liberians, but it also made many Liberians to view him as someone who disregarded human rights and they wanted him out. In addition, politicians who stood firmly against the irregularities of the 1985 election and felt that they had been persecuted for that also wanted him out (Johnson, 2003).

Doe's government was repressive and authoritarian, and many newspapers and opposition political parties were outlawed. In the 1985 election, Doe dismissed the election committee and replaced it with his own handpicked men, who later announced his victory (Tijssen, 2006). This led to disillusionment in the country and, on November 12, 1985, Quiwonkpa failed in an attempted coup to overthrow Samuel Doe. Doe became more repressive and, according to Tijssen (2006), his troops killed about 2,000 civilians and many politicians were imprisoned (Tijssen, 2006).

The gradual elimination of other key politicians from power, non-respect of the citizens by the security agents and limited press freedom were detrimental to his administration, and it was also believed that Doe had supernatural powers and that this had helped him to govern (Johnson, 2003). In addition, the Liberian military was not ready for a war, as they had never fought one and the air force lacked trained combat men (Johnson, 2003).

The fact that Charles Taylor was able to gather forces in Burkina Faso and later Libya also played a part in the downfall of Doe. Doe's poor relations with West African countries such as Ghana and Sierra Leone, and his fall out with the USA all worked against him (Johnson, 2003; Africana, 1999). With the second revolt in 1989, Liberia faced a series of problems including political chaos, civil unrest, famine and violence. According to the Encyclopaedia Africana (1999), about 10 per cent of Liberians were killed during the civil wars and about 80 per cent were dislocated (Africana, 1999).

From 1989 to 2003, Liberia witnessed two civil wars. It started when Charles Taylor (a descendant of the Americo-Liberians) and his supporters took up arms against Samuel Doe, and they were soon joined by many who were unhappy with Samuel Doe's government (CIA, 2005). Liberia's neighbours such as the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso also gave Taylor much support. In 1990, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was ready to intervene with a task force, and after the death of Samuel Doe in September 1990, his forces greatly weakened, and the interim president who succeeded Doe resigned in 1994 and power was handed over to a Council of State (Tijssen, 2006).

In 1997, Charles Taylor was elected as president of Liberia with support from Libya (CIA, 2005). His government was also repressive, even targeting political activists. Taylor's repressive government rallied the country against him and, by 1999, the second civil war started. By 2003, Charles Taylor's government had been greatly weakened and this made the United States and ECOWAS intervene to save the country from more repressive killings and counter killings (CIA, 2005). Taylor finally resigned and went into asylum in Nigeria, and the United Nations established a peacekeeping force in Liberia,

thus ending 14 years of civil war in Liberia, while Charles Gyude Bryant was selected to lead a transitional government (Liberia, 2009; CIA, 2005).

The effects of the Liberian civil wars

The total number of Liberians killed during the wars is difficult to establish. While the *World Factbook* (CIA, 2005) believes that more than 150,000 people are estimated to have been killed in both civil wars, Radelet (2007) believes that the number is more like 270,000. Accounts from reliable sources portray acts of inhuman cruelty committed during the wars. For example, according to a Filipino police officer deployed by the United Nations to investigate Liberian war crimes, pregnant women were among those who were, for no justified reason, cruelly killed during the civil wars (CIA, 2005).

According to a report by Demen, Schaack, and Marsh (2006), from 2004 about 200,000 Liberian refugees were thought to still be living in neighbouring countries. More than a decade of civil wars greatly destroyed the economy, leading to a very low growth rate with a high debt burden and about an 80 per cent unemployment rate, that was worsened following the United Nations' embargo on timber and diamonds in 2001 (Demen, Schaack, and Marsh, 2006). Child soldiers were rampant. It has been estimated that 15,000 children fought in the civil war. In a World Health Organization study in 2005, it was found that 90 per cent of women in Liberia had suffered from physical or sexual violence (Demen et al., 2006). While Liberia's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2004 stood at US$ 476 million, its foreign debt was about US$ 3.5 billion, thus depicting the looming burden of loan repayments. However, the cash for the disarmament program practised after the war led to the disarmament of more than 100,000 former fighters (Demen et al., 2006)

Liberia´s conflict era: The economic domain from 1980–2005

Many writers such as Radelet (2007) have traced the cause of the Liberian civil war to economic mismanagement. Additionally, in the 1970s, an increase in petroleum prices and a decline in most exports coupled with an alarming increase in unemployment equally sowed the seeds of conflict (Radelet, 2007). The civil wars and continuous mismanagement had greatly destroyed the economy by 2003. The infrastructure had been badly damaged by 2000, and the business class that would have invested in revamping the economy had all escaped from the country. With limited reinvestment, unemployment by 2003 stood at 85 per cent and about 80 per cent of its population was living below the poverty line (CIA, 2005). Even though the Liberian internal conflict had officially ended in 2003, by 2004, civil unrest persisted, thousands of Liberian refugees were still living in foreign countries and there was still fighting (even though this was limited) among rebel groups (CIA, 2005).

From 1980, the Liberian GDP and the GDP per capita income continued to fall, reaching a record low level between 1994 and 1996. Radelet (2007) has argued that this Liberian GDP fall has been the largest in the world since the Second World War.

4.1.4 Education in the conflict era

From 1980 to 2003, little was done in the domain of education. Education was disrupted during this period, and both students and teachers escaped with their families. While some were displaced within the country, others fled to different countries as refugees and some joined the warring factions. Child soldiers became rampant during this era and this practice was only ended during the cash for armaments era after the war, and with the help of the United Nations program aimed at sending these children back to school. Many educational institutions were destroyed during this period. It was after 2003 that the rebuilding of education started in Liberia.

This rebuilding process has not been easy for Liberia as many problems continue to plaque the education domain. In August 2013, for example, all the 25000 students who wrote the university entrance examination did not make it. Only a reconsidered list admitted 1600 students. Addressing the nation on this issue, President Ellen Johnson called for a complete overhaul of the education system in Liberia; calling the system "a mess" (Toweh & Bate, 2013, p. 1). The literacy rate in Liberia because of the war fell below 32 percent. A study by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education in Liberia in 2003 found that 20 percent of schools in the country had been destroyed by the war and the rest needed repairs.

As stated earlier, there are about 28 ethnic groups in Liberia. Out of the 28, the major ones among them [in terms of population] are: Kpellé, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mano, Krahn, Gola, Gbandi, Loma, Kissi, Vai, and Bella (Encyclopedia of nations, 2013). While the Kpelle ethnic group constitute about 20 per cent of the population, the Bassa constitute about 14 per cent (SOS Children, 2008). The causes of the civil war were many and diverse, all cutting across the political, economic and social domains. As Radelet (2007, p. 1) rightly laments below, many of those causes can be traced back to the origin of Liberia and how its constitution has been structured.

> The founding constitution was designed for the needs of the settler population, which subjugated the indigenous people for over a century. Land and property rights of the majority of Liberians were severely limited. Political power was concentrated essentially in the capital city of Monrovia and primarily at the Presidency, with few checks and balances and little accountability. Most infrastructure and basic services were concentrated in Monrovia and a few other cities, fuelling uneven development, a dualistic economy, and a major dichotomy between urban and rural areas. The political and economic elite controlled the country's resources for their own use and to consolidate their power. These factors led to wide gaps in the distribution of the nation's wealth and fuelled deep ethnic and class animosities and rivalries that divided the country.

During the war, the SOS Children's Village played a very important part in sheltering the population from the war atrocities. The first SOS Children's Village had been established in Liberia between 1978 and 1980 by Hermann Gmeiner. In April 1996, when the civil war was at its apex, there were about

7,000 refugees in the village where food and medical attention were available to all (SOS Children, 2008).

It is estimated that about 270,000 Liberians were killed during the civil war (United Nations Environment Program [UNEP], 2004; IIEP/INEE, 2011; Ejigu, 2006) and over 500,000 fled their homes, with some displaced nationally, and others as refugees, especially in neighbouring countries (Radelet, 2007). The situation was only remedied when the government of President Johnson-Sirleaf effectively took over power in 2006 and put in place a set of policies to foster peace and launch a reconstruction program that was inclusive and sustainable to economic growth (Radelet, 2007). As explained by Herreros (2011) in her conclusion, civil war killings do not usually stop at the end of the war; there is usually repression, especially from the winning side. In the case of Liberia, this was the case. Fighting did not totally end in 2003; it continued in 2004, but only on a low level.

4.1.5 Liberia's post-conflict era from 2005 to the present

This section of the study begins with the election of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf into office in 2005, and then examines the reforms she used to move Liberia forward politically, economically and socially, right up to the present day. It should also be noted that this is just an overview and it does not give the details of every reform that has been carried out in the above major domains (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013).

> Following her historic inauguration in 2006, she began a charm with international financial institutions which are familiar to her. An Economist trained at Harvard, the mother of four and grandmother of eight grandchildren, President Johnson-Sirleaf has worked for the UN and the World Bank. As a former Minister of Finance in the 1980s, her goal was to erase the debts and attract investors for job creation and reconstruction of the country. The fight against corruption and deep institutional reform in Liberia has always been central to this political action. (Gray, 2013, p. 1)

Liberia´s post-conflict era: The political domain from 2005 to the present – 2005 as a turning point in Liberia's history

In the 2005 presidential election, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf won in a highly contested election, and on January 16, 2006, power was handed to her by Charles Gyude Bryant – the interim president. With the election of the first female president in Africa, and in Liberia in particular, hopes were high. Many Liberians highly expected economic reconstruction and their wish was to see an end to the violence and corruption that had plagued the country for more than a decade (*Liberia: Year in Review*, 2006, 2009). Those hopes were revived when during President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's inauguration, she pledged to rebuild infrastructure and restore government accountability and also "During her first 100 days, the new regime made great strides in forming policy on internal security, development, corruption, labour, and education.... A Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up to investigate human rights abuses between 1979 and 2003; the entire staff of the Ministry of Finance was fired, a warning that the government meant to enforce anticorruption measures; and a

new program to expand female education was announced" (*Liberia: Year in Review,* 2006, 2009, p. 1).

During her presentation at the Centre for Global Development on March 20, 2006, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf continued to assure the international community that Liberia had taken the necessary first steps to restoring dignity to its people, that the economy was being reconstructed and that Liberia wanted its international credibility and reputation back. She assured the international community of progress made towards reconciliation, peace and security, good governance, rehabilitation of socio-economic infrastructure, job creation, and the development of partnerships that would use the mineral and forest resources for the betterment of Liberia and all its citizens (Johnson, 2006).

By 2007, Charles Taylor was at the International Court of Justice at The Hague, convicted of war crimes. The United Nations review on Liberia in August 2007 revealed that things had improved since 2003, and due to these improved conditions, the UN extended its peacekeeping mission in Liberia for only one year and its peacekeeping force was reduced by 20 per cent. With improved economic conditions and accountability, the UN lifted its ban on diamonds – a major source of finance for the civil wars (*Liberia: Year in Review*, 2007, 2009).

Even though there were some economic improvements in 2007, by 2008 those hopes had vanished. Liberia was ranked among the least developed countries in the world, with an 80 per cent unemployment rate and only 20 per cent of its population living above the poverty line. Worse still, life expectancy was only 42 years, and necessities such as drinkable water and electricity, were limited. Poverty, corruption and the failure of some donor countries to continue with their aid pledge, coupled with instability in neighbouring countries such as Guinea, made the UN extend its peacekeeping mission to September 2009 (*Liberia: Year in Review*, 2008, 2009). In addition, in 2008, Liberia accepted hosting the headquarters of the newly created African Command Force, the United States African Command Force (AFRICOM) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in Liberia also started its proceedings (*Liberia: Year in Review*, 2008, 2009).

Liberia's post-conflict era: The economic domain from 2005 to the present

President Johnson-Sirleaf, after taking office in 2006, moved forward to implement her great ambition of rebuilding the country by forming the Liberian Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC). This body was chaired by the president and its members included the ministers of defence, finance, planning and public works. It also included the European Commission, UN, USA, World Bank, ECOWAS and the African Union (Radelet, 2007). This body was further divided into four main committees. There was the security committee chaired by the minister of defence, the economic revitalization committee chaired by the minister of finance, governance and the rule of law chaired by the minister of planning and the infrastructure and basic services committee chaired by the minister of public works (Radelet, 2007).

One of President Johnson-Sirleaf's goals was to revamp the economic growth of the nation. In order to achieve this goal, she restored agricultural production and improved natural resource production – the engine of the Liberian economy (rubber, timber, mining and cash crops). She also aimed at creating as many jobs as possible for the returning refugees, ex-combatants and the general unemployed, especially the youths (Radelet, 2007). The government also introduced a new expenditure control, improved the revenue-collection mechanisms, cancelled all contracts entered into between 2003 and 2005, passed the forest reform act that regulated the forest sector and led to the lifting of the UN sanctions on timber exports and distributed farm tools and seeds to some 33,000 farmers (Radelet, 2007). Emphasis was also placed on the development of infrastructure and basic services. Major highways, secondary roads and bridges were constructed, and electricity connections and pipe-born water started again, beginning in major cities. Scholarships were given to students from all 15 counties in the country, and many schools either were rebuilt or reopened (Radelet, 2007).

Due to the fact that economic growth was a major determinant of future stability in the country, the government turned to other successful post-conflict countries that had succeeded in sustaining a high GDP growth such as Ethiopia in 1991, Mozambique in 1992 and Uganda in 1986 (Radelet, 2007). These countries were able to maintain accelerated GDP growth for more than a decade, fluctuating between 6 to 10 per cent per year. For the economic growth of this magnitude to flourish in Liberia, the government embarked on infrastructure reconstruction, improving natural resource production, creating a favourable business climate, and developing good education and training programs (Radelet, 2007).

All has not been successful economically, on the one hand due to the vast destruction of the country during the civil war and on the other due to the failure of some government officials to perform their duties efficiently. Gray (2013, p. 1) has stated that "the failures of some officials of government to justify the confidence place in them" and "the disturbing global financial crisis attributed greatly to the slowdown progress, but on the broader level, the last several years have been good for the country that suffered 14 years of carnages and ruins".

Her commitment to improving the living standard of her people is well commended. Since 2006 income per capital has risen from USD80 million to USD550 million. Before 2005, Liberia had a debt of USD4.9 billion, but now it is "virtually debt free". There are still lots of unfinished projects and a collective action of all Liberians will be needed to succeed. The Gbarnga to Ganta and Guinea border road link is also in the pipe line, and that "will extend the Liberian side of the West Africa highway that starts from Bo Waterside and ends at the Liberia-Ivorian border town of Loguatuo". (Gray, 2013, p. 4)

Her Open Budget Initiative [a tool that "shows how the resources are utilized to transform the lives and conditions of the people, and meet government's priorities"] (Gray, 2013, p. 4), is another major achievement. This

has helped to demonstrate transparency and accountability as the citizens are aware of how their country's resources are used. The banking system in Liberia remains strong and stable, and the Central Bank of Liberia is playing a major role in sustaining the growth of Liberian economy.

Liberia´s post-conflict era: The social domain from 2005 to the present

President Johnson-Sirleaf, in her first year, demobilized and reintegrated over 75,000 ex-combatants with 36,000 going into 3-year education programs. She also deactivated or retired over 17,000 members of the armed forces, police and special security services and began training a new armed force for Liberia and police. She brought back over 40,000 Liberian refugees and over 50,000 internally displaced persons were resettled in their communities (Radelet, 2007). Services were restored to over 350 health facilities around the country (Radelet, 2007).

The government also improved on governance and the rule of law in order to improve transparency and accountability. For the rule of law to be maintained in Liberia, the government aimed to strengthen the judiciary for it to gain credibility as a foundation for the rule of law. The president, ministers and commissioned officers had to declare their assets. Anti-corruption measures and civil service reforms such as stamping out "ghost" employees from the government pay roll were introduced (Radelet, 2007).

By 2005, many Liberian refugees were still living in many countries including the United States but the majority of them were in neighbouring countries such as Guinea and the Ivory Coast.

> Of the total of approximately 330,000 Liberian refugees as of 2005, Guinea hosted 12,7256, Côte d'Ivoire 70,402, Sierra Leone 65,433, and Ghana 40,583. The Liberian refugee flow even affected some countries outside the region, specifically the United States, where 20,339 Liberians lived in 2005. (United Nations High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR], 2006; Ejigu, 2006, p. 8)

Among the social problems in post-conflict Liberia, the problem of land ownership required urgent attention. According to Amnesty International, the problems of land and boundary disputes were among the biggest threats to peace in Liberia (IIEP/INEE, 2011). The land problem was further complicated by the war, as many people returned to find their property occupied by others with no documents available to prove ownership. All hopes are with the Land Commission, established by the Liberian government in 2009 to reform the land policy and laws, and to settle land disputes in a fair and transparent way (IIEP/INEE, 2011).

The youth also needed to be cared for. With no land for them to work on, especially in rural areas, and no alternative jobs available, this may be another potential source of conflict. The youths should be given the opportunity to bring positive change to their various communities, but this will not be realized if their basic needs are not taken care of. Women and other vulnerable groups should be protected. Many educational institutions are still undergoing reconstruction, as they were destroyed during the war. The teachers need better

training and pay. After the war, many teachers were hastily trained and put in classrooms. These teachers need constant support, especially through professional development. As I mentioned earlier, the GoL is doing a good job in looking at the formulation of education policies such as with the Education Sector Plan 2010–2020 and the Education Law of 2011. Much will be achieved if these policies are fully implemented. Education in this era is dealt with later under government education policies in section 7.8. The government, with the help of the international community, has reshaped education in Liberia.

A time line in the history of Liberia (1822 – the present)

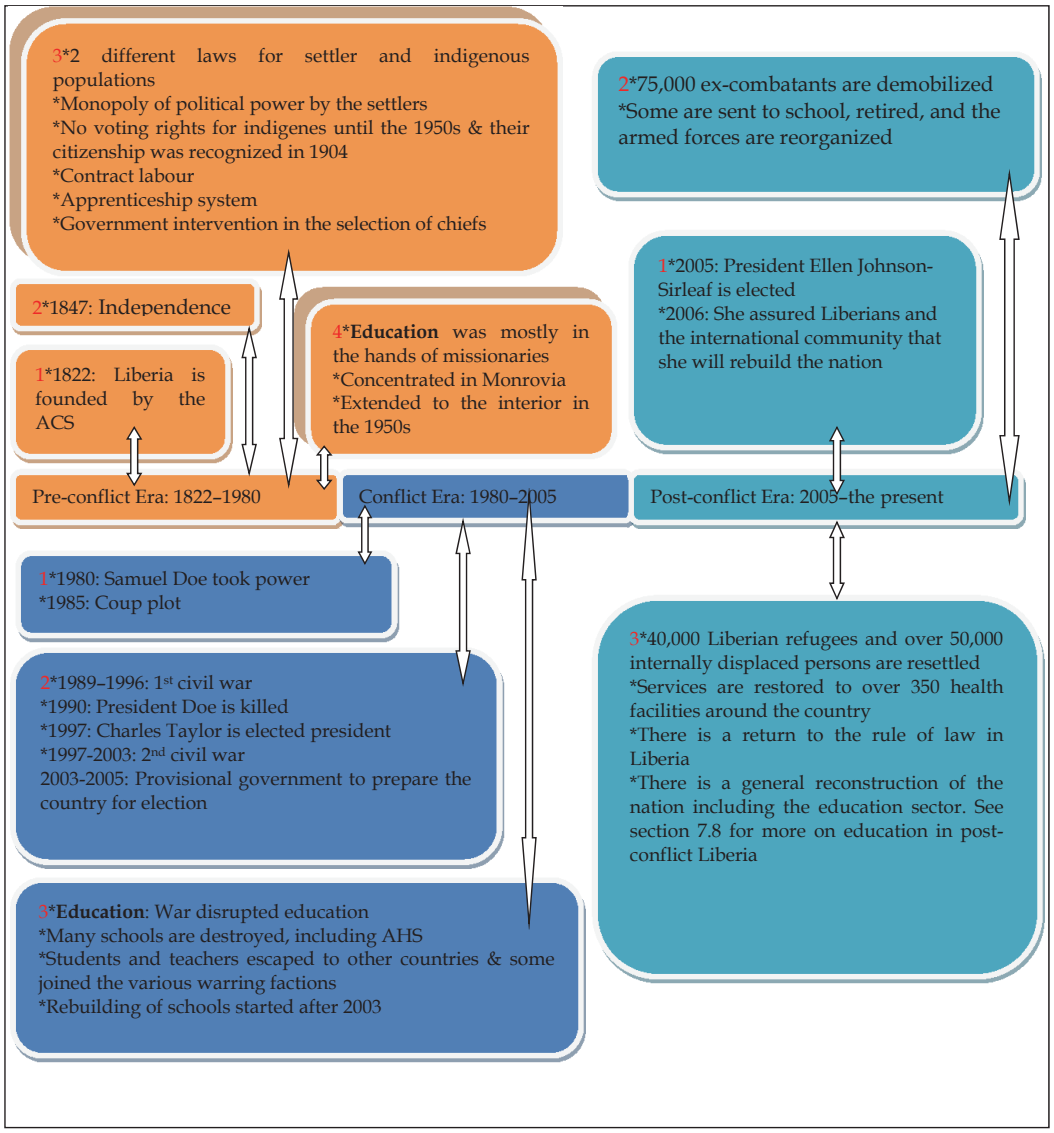

FIGURE 4 A time line in Liberia's history

4.2 The Liberian education system

Education in Liberia is governed by the Liberian 1986 Constitution, the Liberian Educational Law of 2001 and 2011, and other education acts such as the LEAMP volume five (2011), LEAR volume four (2011), and the Ministry of Education (MOE) National Curriculum, Revised June (2011), Grades 1–12.

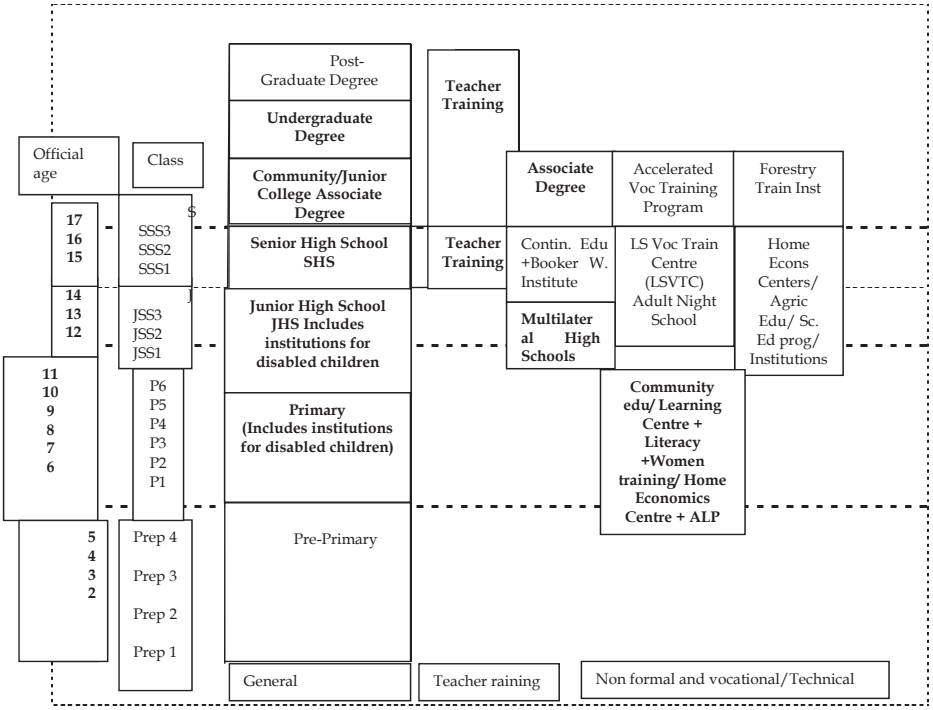

FIGURE 5 The Liberian education system.
Source: The educational sector plan for Liberia (2010, p. 12).

As can be seen from figure 5, the Liberian Educational Law of 2011 maintained two years for early childhood education (ECE). There is 9 years of basic education, and 3 years of senior secondary education or 3 years of technical or vocational education, and 4 years of university education for undergraduates. Children go into primary schools at the age of 6, and complete basic education at 14/15 and secondary education at 17/18. The law stipulates that every Liberian citizen has the right to education between the ages of 6 and 18, and basic education is free and compulsory (*Policies for Reforms*: LEAG volume five, 2011).

The MOE is headed by a minister and is assisted by three ministers: the Deputy Minister for Research, Planning and Development, the Deputy Minister for Instruction and the Deputy Minister for Administration. There is decentralization of education and in every county; there is a chief education officer for county education. According to the Liberian Education Sector Plan (2010, p. 14), "The governance of education is confronted with challenges primarily because of the seeming inability to implement and enforce many of the laudable policy statements that can be found in various legislations, policy documents and statements by policy makers". Critics of the MOE officials blame them for failing to perform their duties and according to the Liberian Education Sector Plan (2010, p. 14), it is not a lack of the ability to do so, "but other factors which need to be investigated". More discussion on the Liberian education system and its policies can be found in section 7.8 where major documents and partners shaping education in Liberia, pre-primary education and the context of the sector are backed up with enrolment statistics. In the same section, the primary, junior and high schools, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), teacher training and certification and higher education in Liberia have also been reviewed.

5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

5.1 The purpose and objectives of the research

The topic of this study is "Building a professional learning community in a conflict and post-conflict environment: A case study of a high school in Liberia". Even though many researchers such as Davies (2011), Elbadawi, Hergre and Milante (2008), Elbadawi and Sambanis (2002) and Davies (2004) have written extensively on conflict in general and on the importance of education in fragile environments, none has focused on it from the concept of PLCs. Davies (2011, p. 2), for example, wrote on *Understanding Education's Role in Fragility: Synthesis of Four Situational Analyses of Education and Fragility – Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and Liberia* (Davies, 2011, p. 2). Davies (2004, pp. 95–108, 109–199) has also elaborated on the impact of violence on education and the effects of education on conflict. She has examined the effects of violent conflict, for example, the exodus of skilled people, the use of child soldiers, hatred and the consequences of trauma.

On the other hand, writers such as Hord (1997), DuFour (2004) and Bolam et al. (2005) have written on PLCs and how they are created in ordinary environments. This again is good, but it is not good enough to cover this gap; that is, looking at how PLCs can be built in conflict and post-conflict environments. Bajraktari, Boutellis, Gunja, Harris, Kapsis, Kaye, & Rhee (2006, p. 14) have written on the current lack of real measurement systems in post-conflict environments. While examining the "problems with current performance measures" they argue that

> If and when measurement systems exist, they tend to be ad-hoc and focused exclusively on outputs, which consist exclusively of quantitative indicators of limited utility. They also often fail to capture outcomes. Milestones and performance indicators are not clearly defined, and few benchmarks exist upon which to evaluate progress. (Bajraktari, Boutellis, Gunja, Harris, Kapsis, Kaye, & Rhee, 2006, p. 14)

Due to this lack of research, many politicians and even nation builders have turned to measuring the success in education by using weak mechanisms such

as the number of teachers hired, the number of schools reopened or rebuilt and the number of children who are in school. To cover this current gap in the research, this research has examined how a PLC is built in a conflict and post-conflict environment, thus bringing a shift in paradigm regarding how education should be improved in these types of environments. This research has also uncovered the core components that should be used in measuring PLCs in these environments.

Having a better understanding of how PLCs are built in conflict and post-conflict environments would help to identify some of the solutions that educational leaders, teachers, communities, superintendents and others in conflict and post-conflict environments can provide to improve school performance. This will also bring a shift of approach in dealing with education in conflict and post-conflict environments. By focusing on Liberia as a case, and by further narrowing it down to one school, which in this study is named as Anabela High School (in order to keep the real name of the school anonymous), the major characteristics of building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments are examined, and Liberia as a conflict environment is also examined. I believe that this study will shed more light on the dark areas that failing schools in this area have not been able to identify.

By using interviews, observations and document reviews, this exploratory study focuses on two major research questions that are explained below under the subsection "Research questions". This study aims to identify some of the solutions that educational leaders, teachers, communities, superintendents and others in conflict and post-conflict environments could use in their school-improvement strategies.

An understanding of Liberia in the context of conflict and post-conflict environments under political, economic and social domains is very important because it gives the reader an understanding of what Anabela High School went through. Due to the fact that many researchers such as Hord and Rutherford (1998) have only written on PLCs in ordinary environments, this research, by looking at how PLCs are built in conflict and post-conflict environments, aims at shedding more light on how educational institutions in conflict and post-conflict environments could be transformed into PLCs while being aware of the differences in culture and other factors. This research also challenges educators and other stakeholders in conflict and post-conflict environments to examine their educational institutions and to see to what extent this paradigm could be applicable in their societies or communities. It is my view that this would also shed more light on the dark areas that failing schools, especially those in conflict and post-conflict environments, have not been able to identify.

5.2 Research questions

The main aim of this research is to find out how PLCs are built in conflict and post-conflict environments. To achieve the above major aim, the following two major research questions were formulated.

1. How is a professional learning community built in a school in a conflict and post-conflict environment?
2. How and what core components are used in building a professional learning community in a school in a conflict and post-conflict environment?

As there has been no research to the best of the author's knowledge on locating the core components of building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments, I first started by looking at whether the core components of building PLCs in ordinary environments were present in the case school and then examined other factors which helped the school in its development process. Details about the case school are given in section 6.4. To clearly answer research question one; the following research sub questions were formulated.

- What core components of professional learning communities exist in the case school?
- What challenges did the case school face after the war and how were those challenges handled?
- What are the other challenges the school is still facing and how is the school handling them or how does it intend to tackle them?
- What other factors contributed to the development of the case school?

5.3 Research process

Research design typically depicts how the study will be or is conducted (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 73) "There is no single blue print for planning research … The purpose of the research determines the design of the research". Figure 6 below shows the final design used in this study after it underwent some changes during the research process; thus, confirming that the researcher has the right to modify the design "as it evolves ... flexibility is crucial" (Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 45).

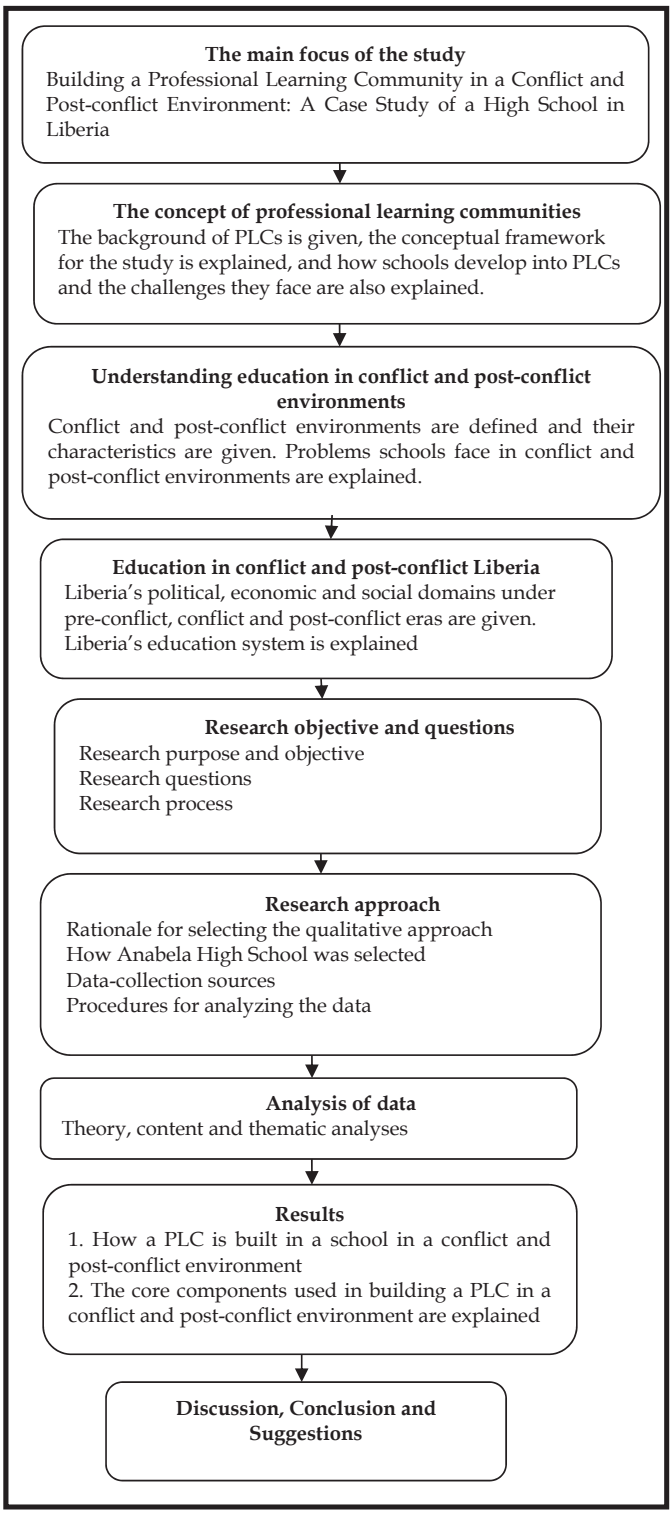

FIGURE 6 Research process

6 RESEARCH APPROACH

This section examines the research process that is used in this study in more depth. Components examined in this section include the qualitative research approach, a description of the qualitative approach, and the rationale for selecting the qualitative approach, how Anabela High School was selected and a brief history of Anabela High School, data-collection sources, the interview design, and the procedures for analysing the data.

6.1 Qualitative research approach

The qualitative research approach was used in this study. Strauss and Corbin (1990) broadly define the qualitative approach as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17). According to Patton (2002), qualitative research produces data based on real-world settings. Patton (2003), Strauss and Corbin (1990) and other qualitative researchers such as Agostinho (2005) have generally agreed that interviews, observation and document review are included in the major types of qualitative data-collection approaches. In this research, all these three methods were employed, but the predominant methods were interviews and document review (Nkengbeza, 2009).

Qualitative research inquiry cuts across many disciplines and different subject matter with the main aim of gathering an in-depth understanding of human behaviour. It aims at providing not just an understanding of the social world from the viewpoint of respondents and through detailed descriptions of their cognitive and symbolic actions, but also through the richness of meaning associated with observable behaviour (Wildemuth, 1993). Qualitative research has often been used in social sciences. However, in most recent studies, some researchers have used both qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed method). What we find in qualitative research is that the chief data-collection instrument is the researcher (Creswell, 2003), and usually this type of study is

exploratory in nature. The data sources below give an in-depth view of various aspects of qualitative research methods that were used in this research (Nkengbeza, 2009).

6.2 Rationale for selecting the qualitative approach

Researchers have developed various approaches to study human behaviour (Meredith et al., 2006). These approaches vary depending on the research topic and, specifically, on the research question(s). Thus, after formulating a research question or questions, the researcher should be able to determine what approaches would be the best in collecting data (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). In this study, the researcher used the qualitative approach, because he wanted to understand how PLCs are built in schools in conflict and post-conflict environments and, second, what core components could be used in building PLCs in schools in conflict and post-conflict environments.

Therefore, interviewing the principal, vice-principal, teachers, students and other stakeholders in the case school was the best approach to collect data on these research objectives. As McMillan and Schumacher (2006) pointed out, the qualitative research method should be used in exploring problems to explain events. Of course, every government plays a major part in shaping education in its country, so document review was also used to gather data. In order to ascertain if what I was told during the interviews and what I read from the documents were true, or as a form of triangulation, I also used observations.

6.3 How Anabela High School (the case school) was selected

To select a school to be used as a case study in Liberia, I used expert testimony. I contacted a professor of education at the University of Liberia (founded in 1862). I asked the Professor to select a good high school in Liberia for me to use as a case. In a letter to the Professor, I made it clear that I understood that it was really difficult to say exactly what a good school was, due to the fact that people turn to look at a good school from different perspectives. However, I explained that some research organizations have gone forward to state explicitly the qualities of a good school. Drawing my analysis from The Centre for Research and Evaluation, Standards and Students Testing – a research unit of the University of California, Los Angeles Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (2006), Baker, Herman and Bain, (1994) and Naker (2007), I explained that a good school has the following characteristics:

Professional Administrators and Teachers: Here, both teachers and administrators are very knowledgeable regarding the school curriculum and work closely to continuously develop instructional strategies and techniques and equally provide ample time for teachers' development. They communicate

with all the stakeholders and use the school resources for the benefit of all students (Baker, Herman, and Bain, 1994). They establish a good school vision and work to achieve it and equally maintain a balance of staff with multiple skills. There is high morale for students, coupled with limited teacher turnover, and teachers maintain high expectations for all students and class discipline that foster a good learning environment and good support staff (Naker, 2007).

Good Leadership: Professional leadership by the principal helps in building an effective school. No particular style of leadership is recommended for all schools. Principals should use a particular leadership style based on the needs of their institutions. An effective principal is someone who is not only active, but also a good initiator, and when need be, protects the school from outside unhealthy influences. Good principals share leadership with all the stakeholders and involve them in decision-making processes, thus building a sense of unity among the stakeholders, especially the staff. As Naker (2007) rightly puts it, such a school is led by visionary teachers and principal(s), whose vision is for a better society and who understand that their school plays an important role in achieving those values.

There should be a well-designed broad curriculum for all students and a rigorous instructional program that is tied to high standards, builds student knowledge and strengthens critical thinking skills. On the other hand, a fair assessment monitors students' progress including what they know and can/cannot do. There is a belief that all students can learn if taught well and there should be high expectations for all students. It should also have a good continuous assessment system. In such institutions, students know their rights and responsibilities and are part of the school leadership (Baker, Herman, and Bain, 1994).

A good school should also be conducive for learning. The environment should be clean, safe, caring and not only well organized, but also supportive. Such schools have enriched student activities, thus creating an environment where students can learn and grow (Baker, Herman, and Bain, 1994). In such schools, all stakeholders work as a team in running the school. Researchers such as Baker, Herman and Bain (1994) have stressed the stakeholders' involvement.

A good school provides an environment where children can strive and discover their real potentials. Such a school nurtures children in a culture that values their humanity and provides an environment where children discover their passions and "Develop self-definition, self-confidence and self-assurance, as well as the belief that they can make a useful contribution to their community and country" (Naker, 2007, p. 10). Finally, a good high school must prepare students to further their studies in both colleges and in their careers. This is very crucial in the twenty-first century because the environment and the job market are constantly changing and schools need to adapt to these changes.

I asked the Professor to select a good high school in Liberia based on the above characteristics plus other characteristics that he would consider when selecting the school. I explained that after selecting the school, I would select 12 to 16 potential interviewees in the school and they would be equally divided

into four different groups. The MOE wanted to know my research objectives and how the research would benefit Liberia.

In a letter, I explained that a turbulent environment here refers to an unstable society and, in the case of Liberia; it will be the period of the civil wars. To be very brief, I explained that the general aim of this research was to show how one school in Liberia after the civil wars quickly overcame its problems and transformed its self into a real learning community and that this was the reason behind the selection of only one good school. I explained that the study will show how, after facing a series of problems during the civil wars, the school turned around and overcame those problems and developed. I also explained that this study would also find out how unstable Liberia was, especially by the end of the two civil wars which greatly devastated the country, explore the core components of PLCs in Anabela High School in Liberia, find out how those components in Anabela High School have developed, thus transforming the school into a PLC, including the challenges they faced, and finally, based on the challenges faced by Anabela High School and how things have been done in transforming the school into a PLC, I would examine what solutions could be implemented to make the transition more smoothly or to make the school a real PLC. I made it known to them that I intended to use document review, personal experiences and others to come out with real solutions to the problems.

The selected school would also explain the problems it faced during its transformation period and how the challenges were overcome. I intended to give recommendations on how those problems could also have been handled differently (when need be) to improve student learning. I intended to draw examples to support my recommendations from other studies, personal experiences and others. I was certain that the selected school would reflect on the recommendations and see how things could be done differently in overcoming their difficulties.

It was also explained that the study would provide educators, politicians and other nation builders with the core components of PLCs and a model for rebuilding education institutions in conflict and post-conflict environments – a challenge which has become very prevalent in the twenty-first century. Based on my experiences in PLCs, educational leadership and international education, it is my vision that the Liberian case study will help to identify some of the major challenges in not only rebuilding education institutions, but also in transforming them into PLCs. Finally, I intended to provide recommendations to educational leaders, teachers, communities, superintendents and what other stakeholders in nation building can adopt to improve student achievement in their education institutions. Educators and others involved in rebuilding education institutions will be challenged by this study to reflect on their education institutions, and see to what extent this paradigm could be applicable in those institutions, and other communities and educational institutions in Liberia would not be an exception. I assured them that the name of the selected school and the interviewees would not be revealed in the study, and that the

school should have nothing to worry about. The selected school will tell their success story and get recommendations.

6.4 A brief history of Anabela High School

As explained by the principal, the priest and one other teacher, who had been in the community and teaching in the school for decades, Anabela High School was established in 1959 by the late Rev. Fr. T. J. O. Gooding – a Sierra Leonean who had settled in Liberia. From the onset, he was a businessman and owned trucks, and people used to rent them. The school started in a makeshift building close to its present campus. It initially catered for elementary pupils, and became a fully-fledged high school in 1969 (school archive 1): "In 1969 it became a full high school. I was here at that time. I used to come to church service here", one of the teachers recalled. The junior warden in the church explained that the boarding facilities up until 1972 were for boys: "I got promoted to grade 10 in 1978 and went to BWI. I graduated from BWI", the junior warden recounted.

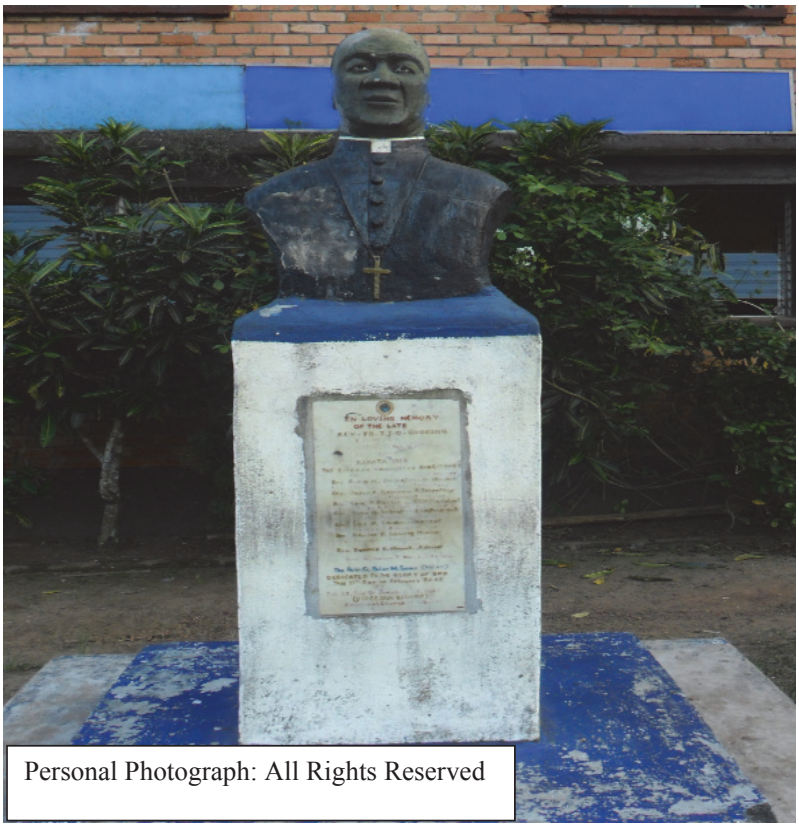

FIGURE 7 The late Rev. Fr. T. J. O. Gooding

Various informants have recounted that Rev. Fr. Gooding had a "call" from God, and he abandoned his transport business, went to a theological school and was trained as a priest. He established a church, which is located on the school campus, and then Anabela School. He died after the first civil war. It is said that before his death, he had fought to become a bishop and one informant even argued that some people believed that Rev. Fr. Gooding was marginalized because he was from Sierra Leone and he was not seen as a Liberian. However, he still continued his services in the church, and he did not give up. The informant continued that the competition was between him and the late Bishop Joyce C. Brown. According to him, "Bishop Brown had been very powerful in the church", and according to the informant, this therefore may have been one of the reasons why Bishop Joyce C. Brown defeated Rev. Fr. Gooding. Some informants have concluded that Father Gooding was called Bishop, "because of his hard work and respect", and one informant even suggested that had it been that Father Gooding "lived after the war, he would have been the next bishop". According to one informant, young priests used to be sent to him to gain experience.

FIGURE 8 The primary section of Anabela High School

Anabela High School's current campus occupies about 5 acres of land (school archive 1). The growth of the school from 1959 in numerical strength saw the need to transform the initial makeshift building to the construction of the Charles D. Sherman building right in the middle of the campus. The Sherman building now houses the elementary division of Anabela High School and the Cuttington Junior College (CJC) (school archive 1). Other structures on the campus include the Emmett Harmon Building, which is simultaneously used as

teachers' staff quarters. It is the building on the right next to the main building in this picture – the building directly in front of the car. It also accommodates the school computer laboratory and library belonging to CJC (school archive 1). The Elias Saleeby building, the newest structure in the campus, houses the administrative offices, junior and senior high divisions of Anabela High School – see figure 9 below (school archive 1).

FIGURE 9 The middle and high school section of Anabela High School

According to the principal, during the war, the facilities of the school were destroyed. The campus and its infrastructure were vandalized and looted. Repairs and renovation works on the buildings are still on-going. According to the principal and another informant, Rev. Father Gooding died naturally, and he was buried in the mission in Monrovia, even though it was his wish to be buried in his compound that he built after his retirement. One teacher remembered where he was when he heard the news that the Rev. Father Gooding had passed away:

> I was in exile at that time because the war drove us from our area, and I went to Guinea, and before I came back, they had informed us that Father Gooding has died.

It is said that the Rev. Fr. Gooding had worked so much for the church. The principal and other informants recounted that during the war, Anabela High School and the church were vandalized. The roofs were completely destroyed. The church had to repair the roof and the government and other organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) also helped in repairing the school. The church roof was repaired by the community and the

church members repaired the father's house. The school fence was constructed during the present principal's administration and was sponsored by the Alumni Association of Anabela High School. According to one informant, the high school has improved "even though we cannot compare with the pre-war level". As recounted by informants, after the war, it was very difficult to put the minds of the students together. After the war, Allison P. J. Smith, a Sierra Leonean who had been working in Liberia, was hired to run the school. Rev. Father Niche from Monrovia came with him, and a lot of unpaid voluntary work was done before the school started. After the death of the Rev. Father Gooding, Allison Smith claimed that Father Gooding gave him the school, and the community had to take the matter to court. When the matter was taken to court, the Bishop intervened, and the school was handed back to the church, and that is when the current principal took over.

The informants explained that the only source of finance for the running of the school was from the fees that students pay. They explained that getting quality instructors was a major problem after the war, and that the UN had established a program where most youths and even adults went back to school and the UN paid the school fees. They said many people took advantage of this and went back to school. With this program, students registered at Anabela High School, and the enrolment list of new students was taken to the UN headquarters in Monrovia. In order to verify that the students on the list were actually enrolled in the school, an official from the headquarters came to the school on a fact-finding mission. The program was very effective for a few years and then it was stopped. The food program established by the UN lasted for a short time and was supported by the community. Many informants agreed that things are much better now at Anabela High School, and much has been achieved after the war; however, quality instructors are still needed. There is no school science laboratory and teacher salaries need to be improved. The population of the school immediately after the war was very limited and no students paid fees. According to informants and school archive 1, Anabela High School has produced over 2,500 graduates – there was even a time when the school graduated over 100 students at a time. The school has been doing well in national examinations and usually less than 15 students fail. [Before I left Liberia, the vice principal and I agreed that the final high school examination performance from 2009 to 2011 would be sent to me, but this data was never received. This may be due to the fact that I did not make the necessary follow ups]. The students who attend the school are serious about their work. Most of the students started in the primary school and continued (in the same school) through to the high school.

Admission to Anabela High School is for all the denominations; however, up to 1978, the boarding facility was only for boys, and girls used to go back home after school. The development processes that the school has gone through, the building of the campus and the administrative tactics have really improved since 2005. One teacher recounted that he has seen many developmental changes "like building of the campus, the human resources have

developed, and the administrative tactics have improved". Anabela High School is a self-sustained Episcopal institution.

It depends solely on tuition and other fees collected from students. Anabela High School has produced over 2,500 graduates and some of them have really excelled in government and private institutions (school archive 1). According to the principal and school archive 1, "the greatness and prestige of this institution hinged on the calibre of men and women who have served the institution". About seven principals have served in Anabela High School since its creation in 1959 (school archive 1). One interviewee explained that things are "much better now. From where we took it after the war to where they are now – great achievements have been made".

6.5 Data-collection sources

Data was collected using the qualitative method. In this section of the study, the researcher examines the data sources, mainly interviews, observations and documents, and the researcher as an instrument. How the interviews were designed is also explained and the details of the documents I reviewed are given, including the number of pages.

In this research, qualitative multi-method sources of gathering information were used, for example, focus-group interviews, individual interviews, document reviews, on-site observations and an additional check list. This multi-source and multi-method data collection provided me with new lenses to triangulate the data I collected to ascertain its accuracy (Glesne, 1999). Three main types of qualitative data-gathering methods were used in this research. Face-to-face focus-group interviews, on-site observations and document reviews were used in gathering data at Anabela High School on (a) the core components of PLCs; (b) how those components in Anabela High School have developed, thus transforming the school into a PLC; (c) what challenges Anabela High School faced in the process of transformation, the problems they are still facing now and how those problems are being tackled; and (d) the part played by other stakeholders such as the student leaders, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the Student Palaver Management Team (SPMT) in transforming the school. Document reviews were used to gather data on areas such as government policies that helped to shape Anabela High School. After the interviews at Anabela High School, the principal also gave me access to the school archive to ascertain some facts, for example, on reconstructing a brief history of Anabela High School. For easy referencing, I have used archive 1, 2 and 3 to indicate the various documents I have used, which came from the Anabela High School archive. These documents are:

School Archive 1: A brief history of Anabela High School
School Archive 2: The school ode of Anabela High School
School Archive 3: The Student Handbook of Anabela High School

6.5.1 Interviews

Interviews were used as one of the main techniques here because I could not "observe behaviour, feelings, or how people interpreted" what they went through during the conflict era (Marriam, 1988, p. 72). In addition, due to the fact that we were dealing with past events that could not be replicated, interviews became the only reliable way to collect this type of data. While some interview questions were open ended (for example: Could you tell me the history of Anabela High School?), some were highly structured – the same questions were asked to all the interviewees in the same category, for example, such as those in section one of the interviews, and others were semi-structured (for example: What supportive conditions do you have in Anabela High School?). The dominant interview technique was the focus-group interview. The interviews in this study were grouped into four main sections. Section one consisted of interviews at Anabela High School. Section two was about reconstructing the school history, and the principal, the school board chair person and one teacher were interviewed separately. Section three was about the student leadership and the SPMT at Anabela High School, and section four was about the PTA, the Department of Education and the MOE.

Interviews with the principal, priest, vice-principal, teachers and administrative staff

There were sixteen teachers and administrative staff and they were divided into four groups of four persons in each group in the original draft of the interviews. In group one; there were the principal, vice-principal, the priest and the school registrar. The interview lasted for one hour and eighteen minutes. However, after interviewing the first group successfully, I discovered that the original interview design for groups two, three and four would not go as planned, because some teachers were teaching in more than one school, and others were busy, and getting them at a particular time became problematic. For this problem to be solved, teachers proposed and grouped themselves together based on the day and time that they would be free. This meant that the original plan of having four teachers in each group had to change.

Groups two, three and four consisted of other high school teachers, including other teachers who were not actually teaching in the high school, but coordinated other school activities throughout the whole school such as sports and religious activities. There were six interviewees in group two and the interview lasted for two hours seventeen minutes. This total time included an extended individual interview with one teacher who had been in the school for many years. He was interviewed to reconstruct the school history.

In group three, there were three interviewees and the interview lasted for two hours forty-six minutes and in group four there was one teacher. He had been employed in the school for less than a year. His interview lasted for twenty minutes. Out of the sixteen teachers in the original design, only fourteen were effectively interviewed. Even though I later spoke casually with one of the two teachers who could not take part, he is not considered as part of the

interviewees. Organizing all the teachers into these groups was slightly difficult, not because they did not want to take part in the interviews, but due to the fact that some teachers were teaching in more than one school and were busy. This was one of the reasons which made me to develop an additional checklist to find out why teachers were too busy and more.

The documents that I was given access to in Anabela High School and that have really helped in completing this study include:

- A brief history of Anabela High School
- The school ode of Anabela High School
- The *Student Handbook* of Anabela High School
- The *Student Palaver Management Handbook for Interveners and Palaver Managers* – 2nd edition, 1998
- The *Parent Teacher Association Development and Operational Manual* – 2008

Interviews with the principal, the school board chairperson and one teacher to reconstruct the history of Anabela High School

Section two was aimed at reconstructing the school history, and the principal, the school board chairperson and one teacher were interviewed separately. The principal graduated from Anabela High School, came back and taught there, and later, in 2005, came back as the school principal. The school board chairperson attended the school in the 70s and has virtually been around, and witnessed all the ups and downs the school has gone through. The interview with the church chairman lasted for sixteen minutes, and mainly consisted of reconstructing the history of the school. The one teacher who was also interviewed was an active member in the church and had been teaching in the school for a long time. He was recruited to teach in the primary school and, with time, due to additional qualifications and personal achievement, he had been promoted and was teaching at the senior level. The principal and the priest were also interviewed separately for five minutes each in order to get more details on Anabela High School values. The main interviews in this section were conducted in section one (see section 13.2: Interview questions, section 1A-G), and these brief interviews were only a follow up.

Interviews with the student leadership and the Student Palaver Management Team

Section three was about the student leadership and the SPMT at Anabela High School. In order to get an in-depth understanding of the student leadership in Anabela High School, the students were first asked to write essays about student leadership in their school, and about six student leaders were interviewed about how the student leaders were selected, what changes they had seen in their school and what they liked and disliked in their school. The interview lasted for thirty-four minutes.

The SPMT was also interviewed to find out how the Team functions, how disputes are handled, examples of disputes they have handled and the challenges they face among others. A team of managers and interveners (about

seven students) were interviewed and the interview lasted for fourteen minutes.

Interviews with the PTA chairperson, County Education Officer, the Ministry of Education, and the Society (CHAL)

Section four was further divided into three subsections, (a) the PTA, (b) the Department of Education and the MOE, and (c) the Society.

(a) **The PTA**: The PTA chairman and the PTA secretary were interviewed to find out about the functions of the PTA at Anabela High and also what part the PTA played during and after the war in reshaping Anabela High School. The vice-principal is the PTA secretary. The interview with the PTA chairman lasted for twenty-four minutes and was recorded. Interview with the PTA secretary were not tape-recorded, but notes were taken. I spent much time with him, and he helped to clarify my doubts in many areas and notes taking were used because sometimes important information was revealed during informal conversations.

(b) **The Department of Education and the Ministry of Education**: At the Department of Education, I spoke extensively with the CEO in charge of the region in which Anabela High School is based and he gave me documents that have helped to shape education in his region, including Anabela High School. Here it was more of a discussion on how things are shaping up in the education domain in his region. At the MOE, I also spoke with the Assistant Minister for Instructions and with the Assistant Minister for Planning Research and Development, and the international partners' coordinator and they gave me documents that have reshaped education in Liberia, especially from 2003 to the present. The documents that I was given include: The Education Sector Plan 2010–2020 (a well-elaborated document/ book containing the education system, government education policies and more) – a gateway to understanding the education in Liberia – the Liberian Education Administrative Regulations volume four (LEAR, 2011), LEL (2011), National Curriculum – MOE National Curriculum Revised June (2011) Grades 1–12 and LEAMP volume five (2011).

(c) **The Society**: I reviewed the work of the Christian Health Association of Liberia (CHAL) – the non-governmental organization (NGO) responsible for the creation of the SPMT in Anabela High School – and the extent to which it directly or indirectly facilitated the transformation of Anabela High School. I spoke with the coordinator of the student palaver management (SPM) in the region in which Anabela High School is based and the national CHAL chairperson or coordinator.

A voice recorder was used to record interviewees' responses. Focus-group interviews were used for groups one, two and three in Anabela High School, the SPMT, the CHAL chairperson, and the SPM trainer in Anabela High School area and in the student leadership interview in Anabela High School. Individual interviews were used in group four in Anabela High School, with the interview with the PTA chairman, the principal, the priest, the PTA secretary and the student palaver trainer in Anabela High School area.

6.5.2 Document review

There are a series of documents that I reviewed and they played a major role in shaping this study. Some of these major documents include: A brief history of Anabela High School, the school ode of Anabela High School, the *Student Handbook* of Anabela High School, the *Student Palaver Management Handbook for Interveners and Palaver Managers* – 2nd edition, and the *Parent Teacher Association Development and Operational Manual* (2008). Other documents which were also used included: The Education Sector Plan of Liberia 2010–2020 (a gateway to understanding education in Liberia), LEAR (2011), Liberia Education Law (2011), National Curriculum – MOE National Curriculum Revised June (2011) Grades 1–12 and LEAMP volume five (2011).

To examine Liberia's pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict environments, I used the library at the Booker T. Washington Institute in Kakata and the library at the University of Liberia. I reviewed many books from the origins of Liberia to post-conflict Liberia. Those books are not included in the list below. It is thanks to these multi-sources and perspectives that I think the study will really be of interest to different groups of people or a variety of readers.

Document	No. of pages
The Education Sector Plan of Liberia 2010–2020	180
LEAR volume four 2011	102
Liberia Education Law 2011	42
LEAMP volume five 2011	94
National Curriculum Revised June 2011 Grades 1–12	1080
A Brief History of Anabela High School	2
The *Student Handbook* of Anabela High School	13
The *Student Palaver Management Handbook for Interveners and Palaver Managers* -2nd edition	50
The *Parent Teacher Association Development and Operational Manual* 2008	59
Total number of pages	**1622**

FIGURE 10 Some documents I read for data collection

I reviewed the above documents to gather more data in addition to that collected from observations and interviews. The National Curriculum, revised in June 2011, Grades 1–12, was divided into three main sections. While section one contained the curriculum from grades one to six, section two contained grades seven to nine and section three contained grades 10 to 12.

6.5.3 Observation

Observation was another main method that I used in this study in gathering data. Researchers like Kawulich (2005) have suggested that participant observation should be used to increase reliability as it helps to provide a better view of the context and phenomenon that is being studied. Kawulich (2005)

believes that observation is stronger when used with other strategies such as interviews and document review in qualitative research because it facilitates the quality of data collection and interpretation. I decided to also use observation in data gathering because of some reasons. While the type of questions guiding the study were such that one could observe the interviewees to collect additional data, the site of the study (a school) could also be observed since we were dealing with PLC reconstruction, and opportunities were available at the site for observation (Kawulich, 2005). The students and teachers in the school were my main source of interviews and they could be observed. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 105) have suggested that one should observe the physical, human, interactional and program settings.

When I planned to use observation process to also gather data, I was aware of the three main observation processes: descriptive observation - a process where the researcher observes everything and then decides what is relevant, focus observation - this process goes with the interviews and the participants insight guides the researcher on what to observe, and selective observation - a process where the research decides on specific areas to observe (Kawulich, 2005, p. 10). The type of observation that I used in this study is "selective observation" (Kawulich, 2005, p. 10). I selected this method because the time was not enough to do any large scale observation. Even though some readers may accuse me of being bias, I do admit that selective observation gave me the opportunity to observe only areas that were crucial to my study. I visited many classes in the school, but observed only grade 11 and 12 classes. Due to the fact that December was towards the end of the term and students were writing their examinations, I also examined how examinations were conducted in the school. I was also invited to the church on Sunday and I attended the mass, and I was introduced to the congregation at the end of the mass and given some time to address them. I used the time to thank them and to explain to them why I was in Liberia and why I was studying their school.

I visited other schools in the Anabela High School area and after a brief observation of the schools and students, and discussions with the schools authorities; I became more aware of why Anabela High School was selected. Of the two schools that I visited, one was a mission school and the other a government school. In one of these schools, students were writing their end of first-term examination. I had a brief discussion with the principal and other officials at the school. In the mission school, classes were over, but I had a brief discussion with the principal. Due to the fact that this is not directly needed in this study, I have decided not to comment on it. I spent some time in the community and took many photos in Anabela High School and in the community. I have used some of those photos in this study and I must admit that using interviews, document reviews and observations have helped me in collecting relevant data to assure maximum objectivity and interpretation in my analysis and in reporting the findings.

In Anabela High School, I observed the physical setting of the school and documented it by taking photos. All of the buildings in the campus were

documented, including other symbols such as the scorpion and the statue of the Rev. Fr. Gooding. I also observed the human setting in the school. I visited various classrooms, observed how teaching was done in grades 11 and 12, and also observed how students wrote their examinations. The traditional method of using chalk is still used here with limited or no technology integrated into the classroom. In the interactional setting, I also had meetings with both students and teachers, and also observed students/students, teachers/teachers, and students/teachers relationships and interactions. I have combined the data from interviews, document review and observation to write this study. My observed data is from many photographs that I have used and also in my writing I have used phrases like according to my observation, from what I observed, to signal to the reader that the information being presented is from my observation. Even though interviews, document review and observation were used in data collection, most of the data was gathered using interviews and documents. The time that was spent on observation was limited and not enough to draw a concrete conclusion on its own and this explains why the researcher has used all the three methods in writing his findings.

Researcher as an instrument

As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative researchers, among other factors, must do the following things before starting their research: (a) they "must adopt the stance suggested by the characteristics of the naturalist paradigm", (b) "The researcher must develop the level of skill appropriate for a human instrument, or the vehicle through which data will be collected and interpreted", and (c) "The researcher must prepare a research design that utilizes accepted strategies for naturalistic inquiry" (Agostinho, 2005, p. 6; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The success of the whole study greatly depends on this foundation.

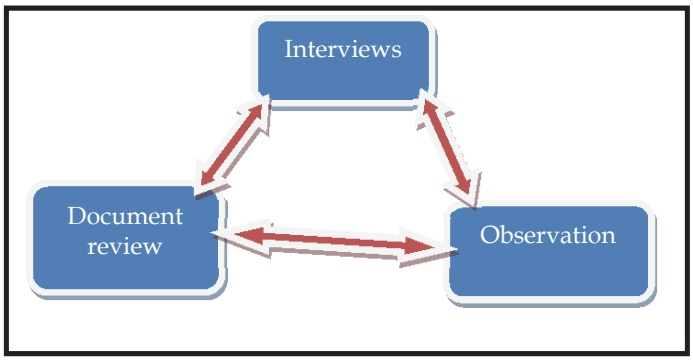

FIGURE 11 Qualitative data-collection method summary

Figure 11 above is a summary of the data collection instruments that were used in this research. This data collection instruments are interviews, document

review, and observation. Data collected using these instruments is used in answering the two major research questions which investigate on how a PLC is built in a school in a conflict and post-conflict environment and the components which are used in measuring schools as PLCs in this type of environment.

6.6 Procedures for analysing the data

As I collected much data from interviews, documents and observations, in order to select what mattered more, I started with my conceptual framework. By using a combined theory and content-analysis method, data was coded based on the theoretical framework and was supported with sub themes derived from the content of the interviews, documents and observations. As Marshall and Rossman (1989, p. 112) rightly stated, "Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data". According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data coding could be looked upon as an interpretive technique that both organizes the data and also provides a means to interpret it. In coding, the researcher is required to read the data carefully and group it into themes or segments based on the research objective (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

In this research, the interviews were recorded and notes were also taken during the interviews. When I returned from the field, all the interviews were coded and direct codes from respondents were maintained to ensure credibility. At the same time, I tried to remain as objective as possible, drawing an analysis from the major themes that were collected from the field. In this study, a conceptual thematic analysis was also used. Themes were selected based on the conceptual framework and some of the themes came directly from the research sub questions. All the data I collected from interviews, observations and documents (asking, watching or examining) was placed under those themes, including sub groups (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The data that was collected using interviews was fortified with the observed data and documents I reviewed to give more meaning to what I was told, what I read and what I saw. I equally reported to my colleagues on the findings I got from the field and also in the form of a presentation to my colleagues. The findings were also presented in an international conference in Antalya – Turkey (ENIRDELM, 2012). After reviewing the data I collected, it was grouped into various themes and carefully analysed.

6.6.1 Combined theory, content and thematic analysis

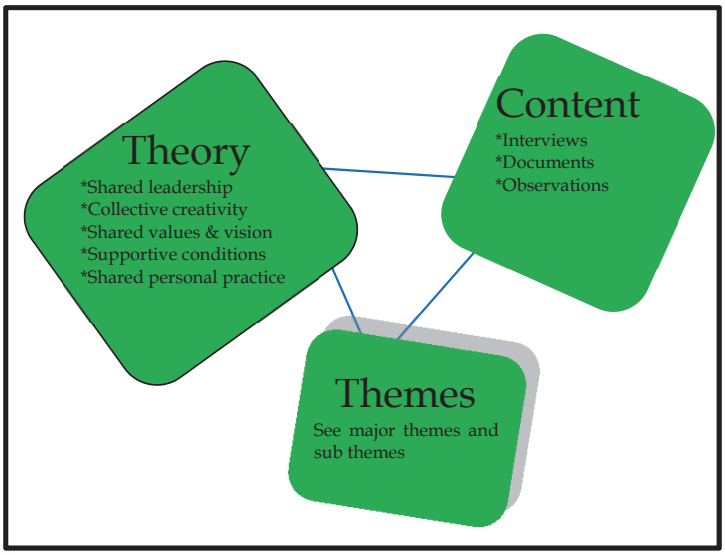

FIGURE 12 Combined theory, content and thematic analysis

As can be seen from figure 12 above, the theoretical/conceptual framework, content and thematic analysis have been used to analyse the data. As suggested by Maxwell (2010), the theory for building PLCs has been incorporated into the study, and the core components of building PLCs have been deeply investigated in the case school and the extent to which these components are present in the school are explained. Content analysis is also used in this study. Themes are generated from the content of the study; mainly from interviews, documents and observational data, and some of the major themes come from the research sub questions. As Marshal and Rossman (1989, p. 115) rightly put it, generating categories and themes in the data analysis section "is the most difficult, complex, ambiguous, creative, and fun" experience (Marshal and Rossman, 1989, p. 115), and this seems to explain why, after completing this study, I came back to reread and rephrase the method section for the better understanding of the readers.

6.6.2 Theory/content: Data analysis example

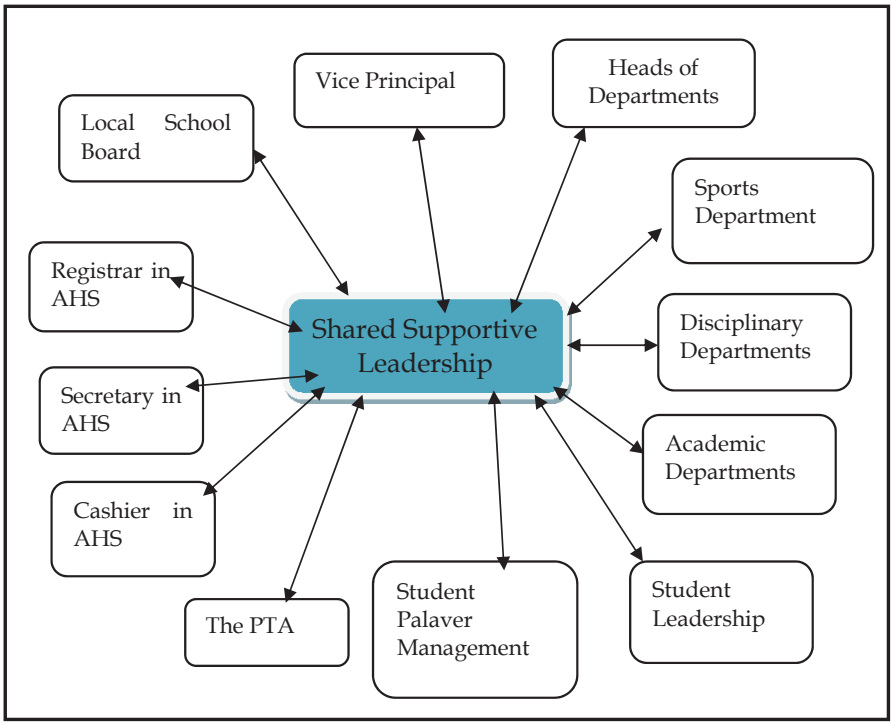

FIGURE 13 Combined theory and content: Shared supportive leadership and other sub themes

The example in figure 13 above illustrates how the researcher selected his major themes and sub themes from both the theoretical framework and the content of the interviews, observations and documents he reviewed. As can be seen from figure 13 above, shared supportive leadership is a core component for building PLCs in ordinary environments. However, the sub themes of the local school board (LSB), vice-principal, heads of departments, student leadership, the PTA, cashier, SPM and others were derived from the content of interviews, observations and documents reviewed.

6.6.3 Content/themes: Example analysis of the major barriers faced by Anabela High School after the wars

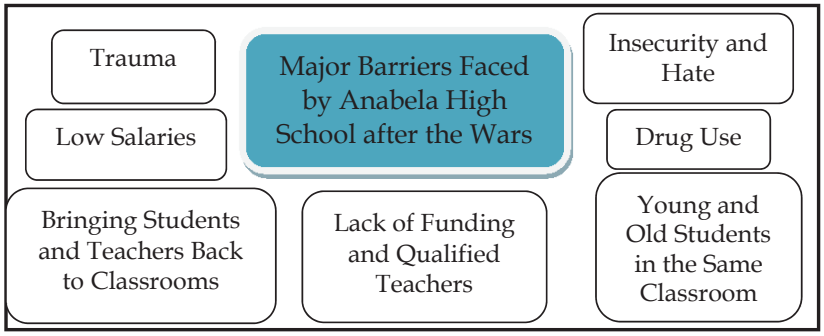

FIGURE 14 Major barriers faced by Anabela High School after the wars

The theme "Major barriers faced by Anabela High School after the wars", as shown in figure 14 above, was derived from one of the research sub questions. The sub themes of insecurity and hate, drug use, young and old students in the same classroom, lack of funding and qualified teachers, bringing students and teachers back to classrooms, low salaries and trauma were derived from the content of the interviews, observations and documents that I reviewed.

Throughout the study, especially in the analysis and results sections, I have referred to the person who said something. For example, when describing the duties of the registrar,

> The principal said 'She is the record keeper. She is the sole custodian of the school documents', for example, students' and teachers' records, enrolment, grading, and sees that students receive their progress report cards as scheduled. According to the PTA chairman and secretary, each child pays the PTA 25 Liberian dollars during registration each year and that amount is placed in the PTA coffer. This money is given back to hard-working students in the form of scholarship (for example) to the best students in the school.

In some instances, I have also used direct quotations to make the story line real and credible to the reader, for example, when describing the problems faced by the PTA after the civil war. The PTA chairman explained that "many students had become parents and some were married to their boy/girlfriends. They did not want to take orders in the school". I have also used pictures to illustrate what I observed, and in some cases, I have explained explicitly what I observed. Additionally, throughout the study, I have referenced the source document for the information.

The data was focused on real-life events that the interviewees experienced and were quite familiar with. I personally interviewed them, asked follow-up questions, and observed what the school has gone through, asked clarification questions and read documents that helped to clarify the collected data or doubts by answering the unanswered questions. It is from this data's "richness and holism" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 10) that I have presented vivid and true descriptions of life experiences in this study.

7 HOW A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY IS BUILT IN A SCHOOL IN A CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT

This section of the study presents the findings of the study. The major themes in this section include the core components of PLCs at Anabela High School, motivations behind Anabela High School's transformation and the major barriers they faced, the steps taken to overcome the barriers, current problems and how the problems are being handled or can be handled, the CHAL, the part played by the PTA at Anabela High School in developing it into a learning organization and, finally, it examines the contribution made by the Liberian government education policies.

7.1 Core components of professional learning communities in Anabela High School

This section of the study begins with a diagrammatic representation of shared supportive leadership in Anabela High School and then examines the other core components of PLCs in Anabela High School. These components include shared supportive leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions and shared personal practice.

7.1.1 Supportive shared leadership

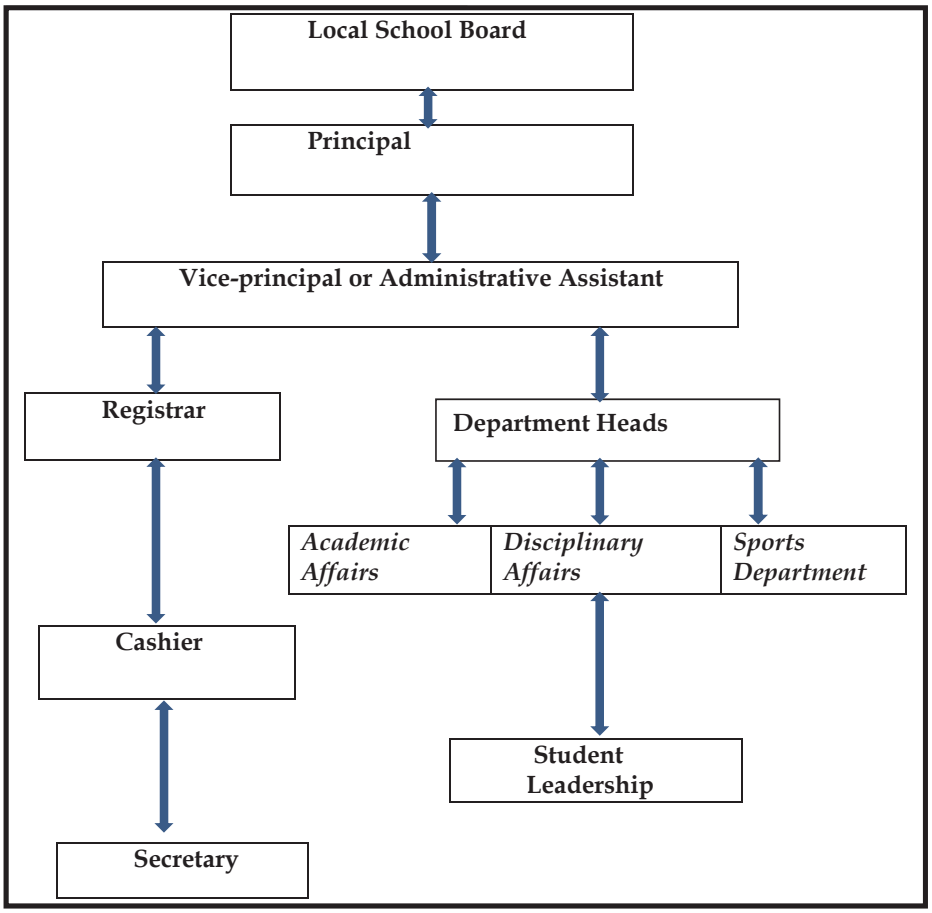

FIGURE 15 Leadership structure in Anabela High School

As can be seen from figure 15 above, shared leadership is practiced in Anabela High School. At the top is the LSB, followed by the principal and vice-principal. Under the vice-principal, for administration, is the registrar, cashier and the secretary. Additionally, directly under the vice-principal, for academic studies, there are three departments: the academic, disciplinary, and sports departments, and each of these departments is headed by a department head (every teacher belongs to one of these departments) and, finally, under the departments are the student leaders.

The local school board

The LSB, as explained by the principal, the priest and other staff, consists of nine members; the chairperson is the junior warden of the church and the

principal is the secretary of the board. The PTA chairman is a member and the Alumni Association has a representative. There is a businesswoman from the community, preferably a Christian. There is a lawyer, a medical practitioner or a person with a medical background and the priest. As explained by the principal, "generally speaking, there are two boards – the diocesan board and the local school board". The diocesan board is responsible for all Episcopal institutions in Liberia: "It is in charge of the drawing up of policies and seeing that those policies are implemented in the entire Episcopal school system", the principal elaborated.

As explained by the principal and other interviewees, in the local community where the school operates, there is a church and a LSB to help implement the diocesan school policies. The LSB develops strategies for funding, and sees to it that the school vision is achieved. The LSB meets twice a year. When asked if the LSB members are paid, "the principal explained that the members are not regularly paid, but at times they receive small stipends". The LSB's major functions are as follows: It oversees the general functioning of the school and approves teachers' employment. One teacher explained that since the beginning of the year, teachers have not met with the LSB, and that teachers' requests and feedback have been channelled through the principal.

Several interviewees also pointed out that the LSB also influences how the school functions by "directing the principal on how to govern", and "having a say on major decisions concerning the school before they are implemented". From their explanations, it is the LSB that makes final decisions on employment and also helps the principal in running the school. According to them, the board approves contracts before the principal employs teachers. They elaborated that when the principal finds out that there is a vacancy, he will inform the school board and the board will give the go ahead to the principal for hiring another teacher. After applications are collected, the principal takes those that he recommends back to the board, and they approve the decision before the contract is signed. The junior warden, principal and priest are signatories to the bank account. The school board approves all expenditures for the school. The principal, the priest, the vice-principal, the PTA chairman, the junior church warden and a few other teachers were more knowledgeable on the functioning of the LSB than the rest of the interviewees. This may be due to the fact that the principal, vice-principal, the priest, and the PTA chairman and secretary are members of the LSB.

The principal

The principal explained that he "handles the day to day functioning of the whole school ... supervises the staff, both teaching and administrative". According to other informants, the principal oversees the various activities of the students, even though this function is given to various committees. Those committees report to the principal. According to them, the principal "sees to it that plans are worked out like the curriculum implementation. He reports back to the local school board and the church."

"He is the overall supervisor of the school". Some teachers described the principal in the following statements: He sees to it that teachers do their work and students behave in accordance with the rules and regulations of the school. He employs and dismisses teachers. One of the interviewees explained that "No teacher has been dismissed recently, but a couple of years ago two teachers were dismissed". It is said that one was involved in a case with a woman in the city, while the other was constantly getting drunk. Another informant continued: "When such problems arise, the principal usually calls for a staff meeting to discuss the problem before making the final decision."

Other informants summed up the duties of the principal as follows: He makes sure that those activities that have been planned and agreed on are implemented strictly to the norms of the institution, upholding the rules and regulations of the institution, and he makes sure that the school functions smoothly. He sees that students and teachers are in class and he also provides materials for the teachers. "He recommends the dismissal of any teacher who does not perform well to the school board."

The vice-principal

Teachers explained that the position of the vice-principal was introduced in 2005. One of the informants stated that "Before the coming of the current principal, this position was called an administrative assistant and was merely ceremonial". The principal did not believe in genuine shared leadership and he concentrated all the powers in his hands – most of the powers were held by the principal. The vice-principal explained that he assists the principal and "various department heads report to the principal through the vice-principal". According to him, when there are problems, it is the duty of the vice-principal "to make sure that the problems are laid to rest".

He supervises the teachers. Any teacher who is absent must notify him. He only assists the principal and he may not sign all documents in the absence of the principal. He receives guests when the principal is not there and runs school errands. "He reports to the principal in relation to school activities".

The registrar

The principal said, "She is the record keeper.... She is the sole custodian of the school documents", for example, student and teacher records, enrolment, grading, and she sees that students receive their progress report cards as scheduled. In the absence of the principal and the vice-principal, the registrar will act on their behalf. Other teachers summarized her duties by stating that "She keeps all records of the institution", especially academic records. "She keeps the student register. She is the sole custodian of all school documents, especially the academics". Previously, the registrar used to play the part of cashier. The vice-principal explained that the registrar keeps student report cards and, currently, with the cashier available, her job has been made slightly easier.

The cashier

As the principal and other staff explained, the cashier collects money. However, for tuition and fees, she only prepares documents and payments are done at the bank. As one teacher put it, "She handles petty cash only". Tuition, school fees and other monies are paid directly to the bank. According to the principal, the cashier "is like the bursar, she is responsible for all financial transactions – banking money, withdrawal, deposit and she sometimes is supposed to be with me when teachers are paid". Teachers explained that, in the past, there have always been some students who came to school and did not pay their money on time. According to them, the cashier, from time to time, visits various classes to remind students who have not fully paid their fees to do so. The cashier keeps all records and makes sure that all students pay their school fees. It is her duty to keep a record of students who owe fees to the school. She is responsible for all financial transactions and sometimes works with the principal to make sure the teachers are paid on time. She handles tuition matters, and "keeps all accounts ready, at any time that financial documents are requested".

The secretary

According to the principal, "The secretary is the chief clerk of the school. She is responsible to type all communications". She works with the principal, types test papers and prepares registration papers. When asked how the secretary survives without computers, the principal explained that there were computers before, but that they were stolen at some point, but that he was planning to install them again. He explained that the secretary usually used outside services. The principal explained: "She is the chief clerk". Other interviewees confirmed that she receives and keeps all the items, especially test documents, and she also types examination papers for various subjects and documents requested by the principal.

Department heads

As shown in figure 15 and as explained by various teachers, there are three departments and each of them is under a department head. The department heads and others in various departments are teachers who have been appointed to various positions. The vice-principal explained that in the teachers' contracts it is stated that they will do extra-curricular activities. The academic department head, for example, is in charge of all subjects and, according to the vice-principal, "he plans the schedules for various teachers" and teachers submit their lesson plans to him every week. The principal also explained that the academic department head handles problems between students and teachers concerning exams and grades.

Academic affairs

As explained by the principal, vice-principal and other informants, each subject has a head and there is an overall academic head, as explained above. The academic affairs department "checks on teachers that they follow the curriculum, checks lesson plans and also the tests which have been

administered in accordance with evaluation requests". Teachers in the academic department review teachers' test scripts before deadlines and forward them to the registrar and secretary of the school for typing and documentation. The principal explained that if there was an incorrect grading, the academic committee would handle it, and that they would also handle other problems such as students cheating and that "they must review test questions before they are administrated".

Disciplinary affairs

Many teachers consider this department as the "most active in the school". This department makes sure that the school rules and regulations are respected. According to the vice-principal, the people in this department "determine the punishment for those students who go against the school rules and regulations and the punishment usually ranges from picking papers to hard labour". However, when it comes to suspension, the matter is referred to the principal. According to the principal, the department sees to it that the students adhere to the school dress code and they also monitor school devotions. Teachers are appointed to this position, and they have the right to punish and recommend different cases to the principal. This committee "implements the rules and regulations of the school, makes sure that students come to school on time and they are responsible for keeping the moral standard of the school". Another respondent explained that the post-war era came with many challenges such as in terms of student behaviour. To better handle it, "every teacher in Anabela High School monitors the system from the elementary to the high school and can refer a student to the disciplinary department if caught going against the school rules and regulations". According to this informant, there were also other problems such as the brain drain and trauma after the war.

Sports department

According to the vice-principal, this department ensures that students take part in sports activities. They equally arrange for inter-school competitions. According to my observations, there is a football field and other infrastructure such as a basketball court at Anabela High School. Usually, the school football field is used or the county football stadium. The principal also explained that the department is also "responsible for other social activities in the school and they work together with a student's council".

They take care of the sports department. One of the teachers explained that the department had really improved. According to her explanation, they usually came up with a budget for each activity, and at the end of the day, they would take the balance sheet and report to the principal. They also give scholarships to the most active students in sports. She pointed out that "The sports department also takes care of the social activities especially during the queen contest" and that "inter-school games are functioning quite well at the moment". Others agreed that "the sports department has improved recently". There are four houses, and each house is represented by a queen, and during elections the queen with the highest vote becomes the school queen. Major

social ceremonies include graduation, the school dance and colour days. Students do not wear uniforms during these social activities. There is also the end of year ceremony where each house in the school prepares food and all the staff and students jointly celebrate.

Another teacher on the sports committee explained that sports were organized to exhibit the students' talents in various areas. Inter-school games were organized and teachers believed that this helped to calm the students' minds. Students who performed very well were rewarded. "The sports committee recommends names of the students who perform very well to the principal and he forwards them to the school board. Sometimes students who excel in sports are given full tuition free and sometimes fifty per cent" (sports committee informant). Any student who has been given full tuition must perform well in his/her academic work and must be present in school. There is a register in the school where every student receiving this type of scholarship must mark his/her name on arriving and before departure from school on a daily basis. If a student is absent, he/she must send a note to explain why. If it persists, the student must be summoned for further explanation: "Student discipline is very important when it comes to sports" in Anabela High School (sports committee respondent).

As gathered from several interviewees, due to the fact that sports were attracting many students to Anabela High School, it was also very important to make sure that students did not forget the main reason why they were in school: "This is why they must also focus on their academic performance". One teacher supported this view and explained that "in Liberia today, if a school does not organize sports well, many students will not be willing to enrol in that school". In addition, any school that performs very well in sports attracts many students. Another teacher also said that before the war, there were sporting activities in schools, but the level was not as it is today. According to him, in some areas in Liberia in the 1980s, "some schools did not incorporate sports into their daily activities and the rate of competitiveness was not as high as it is today". People have come to learn that "it is possible to make more money in sports than in other areas". Sport has developed and it has become very important for student development.

Student leaders

As explained in the students' essays and as was also confirmed during interviews with the teachers, at Anabela High School, there are school and class prefects. While the class prefects are responsible for their individual classes, the school prefects must look after the whole school. "There are our main elected school prefects: the president, the vice-president, secretary and the chaplain". The rest of the positions are appointed. When asked if a girl had ever been a school prefect, one teacher explained that it was only a recent thing that women were gaining status in Liberia, as they used to shy away from politics. It was explained in the students' essays and also confirmed during the interview with the student leaders that in order to be a school prefect, a student had to be academically fit and in grade 12. The vice-president comes from grade 11, the

secretary from grade 10, and the chaplain and the rest of the other prefects come from any grade. The various positions include the president, the vice-president, the secretary, the chaplain, the treasurer and advisor. Others ministries include education, sports, finance, public relations, labour and health. Each of these ministries has its own functions. Only the president, vice-president, secretary (speaker) and chaplain are elected, the other positions are appointed by the president once he/she has been elected. For any student to contest for a student leadership position, he/she must be of good moral conduct and also academically strong. The list for the four key positions is usually screened by the discipline department before voting is undertaken.

One student clearly explained in his essay that the president must be able to fulfil three key functions; namely, "unity, advocacy and adequate and responsible representation". Unity: The president of the student government must ensure that all the students are united. This is usually done through constant dialogue with the students on how they can be united in the school and thus helps each other. Advocacy: The president must also be able to speak and engage with the school administration logically on issues that concern students the most. He channels student requests to the administration and bring feedback to them. Adequate and responsible representation: The president should also be competent in working with his/her ministries and must make sure that students respect their leaders and the school rules and regulations.

The role of the student leaders

As explained in the interviews with both students and teachers, and also in the students' essays, the president is the head of all students in the institution. He/she controls the activities of the students. The vice-president assists and represents the president when he is absent. The secretary keeps records and writes letters for the student government when need be. "The chaplain is responsible for bringing the words of God to the students. He/she is their spiritual leader".

Student leader election procedures

As explained by the vice-principal and other teachers and the student leaders during the interviews, and in the essays that students wrote, any student aspiring to become a student leader begins by forming a team that will eventually include a vice-president, secretary and chaplain. During the application period, a list is submitted by the aspiring president detailing the names of the candidates for the vice-president, secretary and chaplain roles. The discipline department takes care of the election and the lists are limited to five. Once the lists are screened and accepted, the date for the elections is announced and the campaign begins, and it takes about a week. "During the campaign week, the aspiring students will be given the chance to go into various classrooms to tell the students how they will represent them if they are elected. Elections are first done in various classes through secret ballot and a representative of each class then casts his/her final vote for the list that wins in

his/her class". It was also explained that there was also the queen contest in Anabela High School and that the school is divided into four houses and each house selects a queen. On the Election Day, one queen is elected to represent the school for one year. The main aim for this position is to "have a woman who will champion women's issues, inspire other women to take up positions and also represent the school as a morally upright institution".

Working relationship with the principal

Many teachers agreed that their relations with the principal were vey "cordial". According to them, the principal was quite open, and when there was a problem, he would discuss it directly with the person concerned. The vice-principal explained that "the working relationship is cordial, what we observe is that the principal is an open-minded person". The principal trusts and respects decisions taken by committees, and does not interfere in them. One teacher in the disciplinary committee explained that they have handled problems that would have warranted the dismissal of the student concerned if they were taken to the principal. According to him, when the principal finally learned about the problems, he did not interfere with their decisions because he trusts their investigations. The priest explained that the principal "respects decisions of the committees". The registrar explained that the principal supported her a lot in her job. When she has a problem with her work, she usually asks for his help.

For teachers, as explained by the vice-principal, "the principal makes sure that the text books and other materials are available". The priest confirmed that the principal made sure that teachers were paid on time and that many teachers were really grateful for that support: "He knows the teachers' problems. Payment dates are followed strictly". Each teacher at Anabela High School is given the privilege of bringing one student free of charge to the school. This is an encouragement to all the teachers and teachers agreed that this was a good motivation – an incentive for them in Anabela High School. The principal also explained that every teacher had been given the right to bring a student free of charge to the school.

Many teachers agreed that their working relations with the principal were cordial, and that the principal usually made suggestions on how to help each other in times of need. He was also noted for giving teachers lunch after meetings and encouraging them to really speak out, especially on school-improvement strategies. The teachers explained that they had a very good working relationship with the principal, even though sometimes there were disagreements on issues. According to them, "90 per cent of their relationships are good".

7.1.2 Collective creativity

The school club

Teachers explained that in the past, there was a school club where teachers freely joined and put their money in. If any teacher needed money, he/she

could go and borrow money form the club with a very low interest rate. At the end of the year, each teacher collected his/her share of the money that was actually put into the fund, plus a share in the interest charges, depending on how many people had actually borrowed money from the club, and also depending on the amount that was actually put into the club by the individual. "After the war, the teachers struggled with no success to bring back the club, because of so many commitments". Currently, there is something similar going on among the teachers (Susu). Susu is a new club system where, at the end of each month, every teacher in the association or club contributes a certain amount and it is given to one or two teachers.

The head of the various sections (primary, junior and high school) collects the money for their sections directly from the principal's office before payment is made to individual teachers. "The principal is very approachable". There is a school counsellor in Anabela High School. "If any teacher is going astray, he will discuss the problem with the teacher and find solutions". The club system is a new way for teachers to get money to carry out small projects. The process continues until everyone in the club has received the same sum of money. The vice-principal and principal, and confirmed by other teachers, explained that the money is deducted at source right from the principal's office before various teachers in the club receive their respective pay. The disciplinary and sports committees meet weekly and sometimes the disciplinary committee meets daily.

Academic affairs

The teachers in this department generally assist all the teachers when they have problems. When students are failing, this department looks for reasons and solutions. They meet "regularly and get access to students' academic records". They also "see students' performances in different subjects" and "introduce new subjects and drop others at the beginning of each year" depending on a careful evaluation based on the current and future society's needs. One teacher recounted how they used to have physical education, but it was dropped. There used to be responding to conflict (RTC) classes, but they were also dropped because of the war. The academic committee meets regularly, but there is a major meeting at the end of each year when students are promoted to the next class.

Disciplinary committee

From the interviews of the staff members in Anabela High School, it was explained that the disciplinary committee met regularly to look for solutions to problems such as "student behaviour, late arrival at school, and problems with alcohol" and that the priest assisted the disciplinary department. Teachers are also recommended to the principal by the school counsellor, especially in cases where the principal is part of the solution. Teachers explained that they had had a meeting three days previously and that what dominated the meeting was coming up with various strategies to improve student behaviour.

Professional development is done twice a year, usually during the first and second semesters, to sharpen the intellect of the teachers to achieve the goals of the school. "Events and the change of time" have made teachers constantly rethink their strategies and focus. Teachers on the disciplinary committee explained that the issue of who punishes was debated upon and it was concluded that "it should be left in the hands of the disciplinary committee". They also agreed that "All cases which require punishment should be forwarded to the disciplinary department". The disciplinary committee works together in solving problems almost on a daily basis. The other departments also work together and they have almost weekly meetings.

The sports committee

According to one teacher, the sports department has become very important at Anabela High School. Other teachers confirmed that the marked improvement in this department had attracted students into the school. Inter-school games had become very popular. Students practiced seriously before major games. One teacher in the sports department explained that usually parents were informed when the students would return when they leave school for various sporting activities, especially during inter-school games. During these activities, school players are taken care of, for example, with free transportation and drinking water for all players, and even sometimes, food is provided. The sports department has even opened its own bank account. The sports department motivates students using various methods. Students who perform well in sports are "given scholarships ranging from full tuition to partial tuition free"; however, these students must also achieve academically. Students receiving these types of scholarships must prove their ability through academic performance. They have separate forms they fill in each day in the school. They must mark their names in the morning when they arrive in the school compound and before they go home on a daily basis.

The teachers are very cooperative at Anabela High School. Teachers trust each other and always discuss both personal and school-related problems with each other and look for solutions. When a teacher is absent, he/she will talk to other teachers about covering his/her classes, and usually the teacher also informs the vice-principal. "This has really been very helpful in the smooth running of the school. Students hardly go without a teacher for what so ever reason". The disciplinary and sports committees work as teams. There are two major workshops for professional development within each year and usually trainers come from the MOE and sometimes from the teachers' college, including one of their own teachers.

7.1.3 Shared values and vision

The school vision

Anabela High School's vision is "strive to achieve". As explained by the principal, the school vision is to make sure that all their students who pass through the school make a significant mark on public life, either in the public or

private sector, so that they will always remember that the foundation of their lives was built at Anabela High School. The principal explained that "we always want them to be outstanding wherever they find themselves". It is suggested that because the founder of the school had this vision of striving to achieve, he rose from being a businessman to a priest, and established a church and a school, and was honoured with the title of Bishop.

How the vision was created

According to the principal, the founder of the institution's

> … Main goal was to see to it that in the long run, the institution became a vocational school that will train young men and women to form the middle class job population, and he believed that students would graduate with some vocational skills, mainly in the areas of science and engineering.

The principal has argued that it must have been in the above view that the school vision was founded. Rev. Fr. Gooding had believed that when students came to his school with this mind-set, they would have to work hard and would subsequently achieve their aims when they graduated. "The vision was founded in 1959 when the school was created". Many teachers have suggested that the school vision must not have been the idea of the founder alone, it must have been a church-based concept drawn from the experiences of Rev. Fr. Gooding. "The founder was a priest; it must have been team work from the church".

The school values

The school ode of Anabela High School

Converge ye sons and daughters all,
To walls of freedom, hope and light,
Where truth and wisdom are, shall fall on Liberia's youth.
With every right
Chorus
Anabela High School name we lift in praise
And sing this joyous song with pride.
Inspire thy stalwart youth to raise the aspiration
Far and wide
Anabela High School, sons and daughters yet unborn
Shall greet thee
Alma Mater Queen
From age to age thy name we sing,
Thou stalwart praise will long resound,
Over mountains, hills and valley ring,
Anabela High School fame all around

(Source: School archive 2)

The school ode primarily serves to explain the values of the school, and what the school intends to make out of the students that pass through the school. For example, the first line, "Converge ye sons and daughters all", as explained by the principal, means the institution gives its students freedom, and provides hope for the future to make them see their way through the school.

FIGURE 16 The symbol of the scorpion and other values

Figure 16 above shows the scorpion, the school vision, the bible, ink and some books. The principal explained that the "scorpion symbolizes hope, perseverance and strength". According to him, the "scorpion can survive in most terrains. Be it in wetland, dry land or even in the deserts". He summed up that scorpions were active in all seasons, they survived in difficult environments, and that the scorpion carries along with it the school motto: no matter the difficulties, no matter the problems, the scorpion perseveres. For the students, when they pass through difficult situations, it only helps to mould them and prepare them for the future.

The school flag

According to the principal, and also based on what I observed, on the school flag there is the school's name, ink, books and bible. The principal explained that the name of the school reminds the students, staff, parents, community and others what the school stands for. The ink symbolizes the writing materials. The

book stands for the knowledge that the students will receive and the bible stands for guidance by Christian principles.

The mode for greetings
The principal and other teachers explained that students greeted visitors when the visitors entered into the classroom by saying, for example, "Good Morning Mr Smith, how are you?" Usually the visitors will respond by saying "I am fine". According to the principal, "This is how visitors are welcomed to our classrooms". I remember when I went to my first classroom visit, the students greeted me with "Good morning Sir" and those students who knew my name said "Good morning Mr ...." In my visits to other classrooms, the students greeted me with "Good morning or Good afternoon Mr ...." and they welcomed me to their school, city or Liberia.

The church
The priest explained that the Episcopal Church was a sacramental church. According to the priest, "We believe in the sacrament and we use the church to preach the word of Christ". The church gave birth to the school because the school was to be used for evangelization. According to him, "The church symbolizes the presence of Christ".

Prayers
According to the priest, "Prayers symbolize the presence of God". He explained that students are taught how to pray and time is provided for prayers in Anabela High School. He emphasized that students in Anabela High School "are not asked to change their faith, but they are asked to reflect and change their ways of behaviour to become good citizens and children of God". The students are taught various ways of praying and this was very necessary after the civil wars, because the whole of society was confronted with a variety of problems.

7.1.4 Supportive conditions

Several supportive conditions were identified in Anabela High School. The disciplinary committee, for example, has to make sure that students abide by the rules and regulations of the school. Their activities were credited for maintaining law and order in the school. The PTA also supports the teachers when it comes to discipline and the general functioning of the school. They play a key role in supporting the school and it has been explained in section 7.7. Another supporting factor identified was the free food program. It was explained that after the war, the free food program brought many students to Anabela High School. Currently, the free food program is only available to government and community schools. This is also explained in detail in section 7.4.5. The teachers explained that there are regular staff meetings, especially at the beginning and at the end of the year. There are other meetings within a year. "At the beginning of the year meeting, new teachers get their contracts,

and teachers' handbooks, and they are introduced into the school system. The staffs usually meet in the principal's office because the staff room is small". From my observations, the vice-principal, school secretary, the registrar, cashier and sports department all have various offices. Text books are shared by teachers, when need be. During meetings, teachers come together and share ideas and sometimes make recommendations to the principal.

Credit has been given to the current principal for undertaking a total reorganization of various departments in the school and placing teachers in departments where they could perform better. One teacher in the sports department explained that previously she was not taking part in sports and other social activities in the school, but when she was appointed into the department, she had come to love sports and was very active in championing various sporting activities in the school. Teachers are currently placed in departments that they love and where they have talents to share, and they have learned to work with each other as a team in a group and this has improved various groups' performances.

Combined factors

The collective responsibility of teachers has played a major role in changing the violent mentality of students after 14 years of civil wars, even though not totally. As one teacher put it, "at the moment we have experienced a certain degree of discipline in the school" and that the function of the academic committee had helped teachers to work in accordance with the curriculum. Of course, the student palaver management has also helped in settling disputes between students. Please see section 7.7.3 for more literature on the student palaver management at AHS.

Financially, Anabela High School depends on tuition fees paid by students, and "the church sometimes is supported by the school". One teacher recounted how he attended one of the financial report meetings and got to know how, financially, the school supports the church. Staff meetings are supposed to be monthly, but sometimes they may be held at more than a month's interval or less. As gathered from several interviewees, staff meetings are usually summoned when a need arises: "During meetings, issues are discussed and solutions sometimes are arrived at or other meetings are planned for further discussions". It is forbidden for any student to give a stipend for whatever reason to a teacher. If such an event occurs, it will be reported in staff meetings: "Teachers are always warned not to accept money from students".

Teachers explained that the following steps were in place for stopping students' misconduct. In any case where a student has attempted to give money to a teacher, the teacher will report it to the principal. When such a case happens, the principal will warn the general student body without naming the informant, because it may not be safe for the teacher. "Cases have also been reported with students handing in assignments with money inside. The principal usually reiterates the need for every teacher and the whole institution to live by the core principles of the church, which does not allow for such bad practices". The constant reminder by the principal is usually done "during staff

meetings at the end of every semester and also at the beginning and end of every year". There are chapel programs on Wednesdays where students can exhibit their talents, for example, they practice how to speak in public, do different recitations and debate. The teacher in charge of the week always accompanies the students. "Teachers always accompany the students during these activities".

The school fence

Teachers and student leaders agreed that the school fence has really helped in preventing the students from going home at will. One teacher explained that when the school was created, only Christian students were accepted into the school, but currently it is open to all faiths, both Christians and non-Christians. Another teacher recounted that they had a minor problem with the Jehovah Witness faith because it was compulsory for all students to go to church and pray, but it was "explained to them that it was part of school rules and regulations". It was also made known to them that all the school wanted was the best behaviour from its students. By taking the students to church, the students learned how to pray, love God and shy away from crimes that were plaguing the society. "A teacher is in charge each week to take students to church and usually the teacher is in school as from 7am and prays with students. Both hard-working teachers and students are rewarded at the end of the year". There is a Christmas party for all staff members. The rewards take the form of "cash, certificates and clothes among others". Teachers and students who have done extremely well in various areas are equally rewarded during this occasion.

7.1.5 Shared personal practice

Shared good classroom practices: One teacher recounted that when he was teaching at the primary school, his friends admired his methods (incorporating teaching with drawings in history topics) and he shared it with his friends. He also taught them the school ode and songs. Teachers explained that when the head teacher visits a classroom and finds out that the teacher is not doing something correctly, the head teacher will call the teacher after the class and share various methods on how the teaching can be improved.

Another teacher also recounted how students used to stand outside their classrooms every morning until the student "pass" system was introduced. When the teacher first implemented it in his class, it was effective and then it was shared with other teachers. Currently, the "pass" system has been implemented throughout the school. No student is allowed to be outside the class unless he/she has a "pass", and with the "pass" system, only one student can be out of the classroom at a time. The system was a success and was copied by other classes. Another teacher explained that there was mentoring, especially by the head teachers, and that the school counsellor counselled both students and teachers. In instances where the principal is part of the solution, the counsellor will refer the teacher to the principal.

7.2 Motivations behind Anabela High School's transformation

The current principal in Anabela High School studied and lived in Ghana during the civil war, and after the war, he came back with great ideas. He advised teachers to be real models. One teacher recounted how he went to school during difficult times and even wrote his final exam under the sounds of guns in the following statement: "In 2002, when we were writing our final examination, there was a time that we ran out of the classroom and then came back to complete the exam, because there was an attack on the city by another warring faction".

After the war, there was a need for infrastructure development, hence bringing with it an increased need for education. "The principal came back from Ghana with great ideas, which are being implemented" in Anabela High School. According to the principal, the love for the country, and the love for his job as a teacher played a major role. "The passion we had for the job motivated us to bring students back to school". When the school started after the war, the salaries were too low, until the arrival of the current principal.

Motivation to improve

Trial methods: It was explained that due to the fact that teachers were constantly looking for various methods to improve, they tried different methods. One teacher recounted that he started teaching at Anabela High School in the elementary school and was promoted to junior high school (JHS) and finally to the high school, because of his hard work and academic achievements. Another teacher explained that previously, she used to teach and then go home immediately after her classes without communicating much with her colleagues. She explained that the bond and trust between her and her colleagues was not there, but later, when they started communicating with each other and looking for improved teaching methods, sharing their problems, and ways to succeed as a team, she had gone home sometimes slightly late, because they always had more important things to discuss or implement. She admitted that her life is better than before and the trust between the staff has developed tremendously.

Teachers also explained that their former principal used to get recommendations about teachers from outsiders, but now it was done during meetings because the teachers had learned to speak openly and praise those who had worked harder during the year. Teachers agreed that their open discussions and suggestions, for example, about teachers who should be rewarded at the end of each year, were due to the increase in trust that had developed among them.

7.3 Major barriers faced during Anabela High School's transformation from conflict to post conflict

Insecurity and hate

As explained by the vice-principal, many Christian churches had observed that students actively took part in the war, and according to them, there was no great solution without actively involving them in the solutions. The CHAL came up with an idea to establish the SPMT in various schools to take care of solving problems between students, thus giving teachers the opportunity to concentrate more on teaching. This helped greatly in bringing students together, thus ending religious differences, tribalism and other problems on campus (*SPM Handbook*, 1998).

The vice-principal explained that students themselves were trained to settle disputes among students. According to him, "some students had been used to getting money through looting, but after the war they found it difficult to change". When asked about the current crime rate in the country, the principal explained that, for example, from 2001 to 2004, crimes were not taken seriously in the country. An army car, for example, could drive into a gas station and put fuel in his car and go without paying. He continued that "the crimes were there but they were not taken seriously". The police were corrupt, and some of those boys involved in crimes had been commanders during the war. Consequently, when they were taken to the police stations, not much was done because they met their junior-rank colleagues or friends. According to him, the situation changed after 2005, and he felt that people were currently being jailed for crimes.

In 2010, one student removed his knife to stab a teacher. The student threatened to kill the teacher in his house because he did not change his grades. Teachers explained that immediately after the war, students dictated their grades with threats. One teacher recounted how he survived after the war by telling the students that he was related to a well-known "strong man" in the city and that was how the teacher "stood the test of time". He told his students that the strong man was his uncle, and he usually greeted the man when they met. Teachers recounted how life in Anabela High School had drastically improved. "Student behaviour is much better at the moment". One teacher, when looking back over the past ten years that he had been teaching in the school, explained that "some students did drop out of the school immediately after the war because they could not cope". According to the teacher, most of those "students had been robbers during the war and after the war they could not see themselves coming back to the classrooms to submit to the teachers". However, he explained that things have changed, and many students have now returned to school and his thanks go to the President of Liberia – President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. According to him, the President brought girls back to school. One teacher recounted how a student wanted to kill him in another school and how he was saved by other students.

Drug use

Drug use was another major problem after the war. Students even brought them to school. The vice-principal explained that "students were not able to buy study materials of about 150 Liberian Dollars (LD), but they could buy drugs for 2000 LD". Another problem was the fact that there were students who "were government employees like police men in the school and sometimes some were not really cooperative". There were "men in school who were already established both rich and poor", and some of them looked down on the teachers.

Lack of funding and qualified teachers

Funding was not available, especially after the war, and thus, many teachers had very little pay. There was also a lack of qualified teachers; however, with time, the school has succeeded in bringing in more qualified, good teachers. The principal explained that Cuttington College was currently renting part of Anabela High School, and that this had provided some additional finances with which to run the school. After the war, the students came back to the classroom and it was a big challenge. Eighteen-year-old students, for example, were in the 3rd or 4th grade – "the war had delayed them so much".

Bringing students and teachers back to school, low salaries, crimes and other social problems

One major problem after the war was how to put students and teachers back into classrooms. Both students and teachers were traumatized by the war. Immediately after the war, both students and teachers distrusted each other, and this further made it very difficult to discipline the students. Some teachers recounted how students used to threaten them, for example, if they failed a student or punished him/her, he/she would tell you openly "Okay, I will meet you", which, according to them, simply meant that the student would seek revenge.

In addition, the salary was very low. It was difficult to support a family on the salary. Some teachers decided to teach and also to run some other small businesses to survive. Another major problem after the war was that children of various ages were in the same classroom. For example, fourteen- to eighteen-year-old children were in the third grade. Teachers had to make many sacrifices. One teacher recounted how, after the war, she started teaching with a monthly salary of 1000 LD (that is about 10 to 15 Euros).

This was too little for her family, and she recounted how she would come back from school wondering how her "family would survive the day". She survived this period "only by the grace of God". Some survived by cultivating cassava and selling it. Sometimes the minimal amount of food for the family would only be given to the children, and she and her husband would go without food.

There were other social problems, for example, some students followed their colleagues to the nightclubs for the whole night and subsequently slept in the class the next day, and some spent all their time watching football matches

on television. They would not do their homework, and when they came to class the next day, they simply copied the homework from one another. Teachers explained that immediately after the war, there were a variety of problems: "some of the students got used to money through looting and other means … after the war, you had to go to school or work before you earned something. They found it difficult to understand that". When asked about the current number of people sent to prison because of crimes, one teacher explained that the rate after 2005 increased, and that "the explanation is simple". According to the teacher, up to 2004, crimes were not taken seriously. Crimes such as stealing were punishable by "a few hours of detention" and the criminal was then set free. There was corruption everywhere. After the election in 2005, every crime was taken seriously and criminals were sent to jail.

7.4 Steps taken to overcome the barriers and thus bring students back to Anabela High School

7.4.1 Solving the problem of low salaries

Teachers recounted how they wrote to the chairman of the school board asking for an increase in their salaries, and that there was no response; they decided to go on voluntary attendance for a week, with teachers showing up in school only when they wished to and going home at will. There was a time that their former principal failed to address the grievances of the teachers; the church intervened and the principal was dismissed. It is even said that on one occasion, the principal had openly told the teachers that he would not increase their salaries, and that those teachers who were not willing to stay could go; teachers were not happy with this type of administration. "The problems were solved when the new principal came". When he came, "he told the teachers that he will increase their salaries, but it would not be as high as what they were asking". In addition, "extra paid classes were given to teachers to cover up the salaries"; sometimes, these classes were even arranged in different schools.

7.4.2 Reforms by the new principal

The change of principal improved the school morale and many students started coming back. Another major reason that brought students back was because the principal was quite respectful. Due to the fact that the salaries were inadequate, some teachers decided to teach in many schools. "Some even taught in four to five schools and one could wonder how effective it can be". Those who had relatives abroad received assistance mostly in the form of money. The difference in salaries was another major problem.

Sometimes teachers were discouraged by the high salaries that their colleagues in government schools were getting. Some teachers have even argued that teachers themselves were a problem after the war. They fought

during the war and some of them were "sharing apartments with women". Immediately after the war, they came back into classrooms still traumatized by the war. They had no counselling and some of them had "behaviour problems". It is even said that some teachers were more like "robbers and boxers". Students were equally traumatized. They had either fought in the war or went through the civil war witnessing unprecedented cruel killings of friends and family members. Teachers recalled how students used to threaten teachers by giving the teachers the ultimatum, "If you do not … you would meet me in the city".

The teacher described some teachers who were in classrooms immediately after the war as boxers. Gradually, most of those teachers were sent away as more trained teachers became available. It was also explained that the school morale had been very high before the war, and after the war, due to the quarrel between the principal and the teachers because of low salaries, many students left the school. With the coming of the new principal and the end of the salary conflict, many students came back to Anabela High School. Academic performance at Anabela High School also brought many students back.

7.4.3 The school uniform

The introduction of the school uniform was another factor that brought students back to Anabela High School. "Students were distinguished in the city and coupled with an improved student's morale", this made them really outstanding. The counselling given to students after the war was another factor. Some students even took the responsibility of counselling other students from other schools on the effects of the war. This chain of counselling led to a general improvement in student behaviour beyond Anabela High School, and Anabela High School was credited for it.

7.4.4 The school fence

The school fence also helped considerably. Before the fence was constructed, the students used to go home at will. With the construction of the fence, students were controlled. It is said that when the fence was constructed, many parents were able to control their children. They knew when the school would close and the exact time when the students were supposed to arrive home. Another problem was the different ages of the children in the same classes. "It was not all that easy to teach all of them in the same class, and sometimes there was tension between the young and old children". Many children used to joke about the older students. "Sometimes a young child will call an older student grandpa or grandma". However, this problem was handled with the "fast promotion" of most of the older students, and some were also moved to the night school and through the faster promotion system.

The principal elaborated that ECOWAS provided about 80 per cent of the cost to build a school fence. The ECOWAS Peace Fund extends funding to institutions. They do not give funds to individuals. "Before the fence was

constructed, students used to get out of the class and go home". Student control was a major problem and this presented a serious challenge to the disciplinary department. The roofing of the school was done by the church. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) also assisted in a limited way in roofing the school.

7.4.5 Free food program

The feeding program sponsored by the UN brought many students back to school. When food distribution ended, a cafeteria was opened, and when Cuttington College took over the other part of Anabela High School where the cooking was done, "the principal arranged with outsiders to come and sell food to the students. The days, time and prices were agreed on by the principal and the food retailers". Some teachers recounted how some students used to come to school without eating and would stay in school the whole day without eating anything. Even though many teachers decided to teach in many schools, some, for other reasons, decided to teach only in one school. One teacher recounted how she decided to teach only in one school and spent the rest of her time with her children. Another teacher explained that he used to teach in three schools and he used to be very tired at the end of the day. When he became very tired, he dropped one school and he is currently teaching in two schools. Another problem was that teachers in the elementary school could not teach in different schools because they had to be with pupils throughout the day. Each teacher in the primary school is in charge of a classroom and has to teach all the subjects.

Another teacher recounted about when she decided to go for teacher training and she was discouraged by her friends. Friends told her that "teachers had very little salaries, and that teachers are poor people". She did not listen to them and proceeded with her teacher training. According to her, she was quite aware of the fact that she could not continue to depend on her relatives abroad throughout. It is also important to note that immediately after the war, both private and government teachers' salaries were equal. The salaries between private and government schools were equal after the war and some teachers even recounted that private schools were better. Teachers were not being paid immediately after the war, but the situation quickly changed and private school teachers were taken care of better than their government school colleagues. Later, the government decided to increase the salaries of the government school teachers and, currently, government school teachers are paid more than teachers in private schools.

7.5 Current problems and how the problems can be handled

The MOE is in charge of curriculum preparation. Teachers expressed their disapproval of certain issues in the curriculum and explained that their grievances had been taken to the principal and channelled to the right

department, but it seems as if they have not been listened to because no action has been taken. Another teacher explained how in four weeks he is supposed to teach about fourteen large sub topics. According to the teacher, the curriculum was created without taking into consideration the beneficiaries. The teachers agreed that it was not only a major problem in Anabela High School; it was a nationwide post-conflict problem. Some teachers suggested that "it would be good if every county has its own curriculum, and that the teachers should have a say in drawing the curriculum". Teachers' complaints included the fact that "issues in one region, for example, the southern region, in the curriculum, are treated as if all the students and teachers are from the southern region".

In addition, the limited reference material is another major problem. Teachers also complained that "85 per cent to 90 per cent of schools in Liberia do not have libraries". Every subject should have available books, but that is not the case at Anabela High School. Most teachers have to buy their own books. According to the teachers, they have asked the principal to take the matter to the school board so that the board can help to set up a library. They explained that the Episcopal mission is quite big and it could assist in setting up the library. Teachers questioned how a child can actually learn in the twenty-first century without references and how teachers can teach effectively with limited resources.

The limited reference material is further complicated by the fact that there is no computer laboratory in the school. Teachers agreed that if there was an Internet connection in the school, things would be better. According to them, the problems are not only limited to Anabela High School, they extend right up to the university level. Drawing examples from his university, one teacher explained that "when a lecturer gives an assignment and asks students to use the Internet to locate the assignment materials, some students complained that they do not even know how to use it and some do not even know where to find one".

Another problem is that the West African Examination Council (WAEC) syllabus and the school curriculum are not identical. Teachers lamented that the curriculum had been "imposed on various schools without taking into consideration the level of the students". For geography and physics, it was impossible to complete the curriculum within the given period of time. They also lamented that the "curriculum developers did a very poor job and that it is not very professional". The teachers also complained that the curriculum was bulky. A topic can be taught for 4 to 5 periods and it would not be finished. According to them, "the developers should have considered the level of the students, the society and the learning atmosphere where it is being taught".

Additionally, the curriculum was not distributed to schools in booklet form. "Schools were only given the curriculum on a CD and teachers complained that due to the fact that many schools in the interior have no access to computers (like many in Lofa County), it was very difficult or impossible for some schools to print". They also lamented the fact that they had undertaken research and made recommendations and forwarded their findings to those at

the top and no action had been taken on them. "The cost of printing the curriculum alone for the whole school may be about 50,000 LD and some schools do not have that money". In geography, the book they are using is outdated. "It was written by a German geographer in the 1970s. No Liberian has written on that". Teachers suggested that the international bodies sponsoring curriculum development in Liberia should go down to various schools and talk with teachers who are actually dealing with the situation.

Low salaries, limited textbooks, student behaviour, and the change in the school calendar have really slowed down the transformation process of Anabela High School. Schools used to open in March and close in December. This gave students and teachers the opportunity to work during the vacation. Currently, the new school year is from September and the holidays begin in June during the rainy season. This means that the students can no longer work. There is a debate on whether to go back to the old system. In the old system, if you moved from another country to Liberia, you would have to wait for one semester. "The holiday period is now shorter and June is in the rainy season". Some teachers doubted if the country could actually move back to the old system. They explained that if this had to happen, the "whole country would have to wait for a semester, which seems to be impossible".

The major problems now facing the school relate to finance. The teachers are not well paid and they would like their salaries to be improved. According to them, "an increase in salaries will also increase our motivation in the school". The current school infrastructures are inadequate, and it is the school vision to bring the school to the pre-war level, but without the needed finances, it is impossible. "In 2013, the nature of examinations in sciences will be changed. The sections of science laboratory would be included and this would only be possible for students if there is a science laboratory". Most schools do not currently have a laboratory. To build a science laboratory is "very costly and even maintenance is hard" and the chemicals are costly too. A library is also needed too for both teachers and students. Currently, the teachers rely on textbooks.

7.6 How the problems can be handled

Continuous and improved counselling

Many teachers agreed with the view that every school should have school counsellors and that they should be well trained and should not teach, so that they can spend more time handling their job much better. Teachers suggested that the "government could invest more on this type of training, so that teachers could have more time to concentrate on their actual teaching instead of handling multiple problems". Teachers emphasized that the government could implement a law that "every school should have a trained counsellor". Another problem is the fact that there are too many subjects. "In the high school, for

example, there are 16 subjects and are just too many for the students to specialize in".

Low salary solution

The teachers have learned to be patient and wait for things to improve. They explained that most of their problems were being solved gradually. According to the teachers, the problems they had five years back have been solved and they are certain that most of the problems will be handled effectively.

Limited textbook solution

Teachers recounted that before, they used to photocopy parts of the book and give this to students and "some teachers misused it and teachers were then limited from such privileges". The country has decentralized the system of education and every county will decide on its own county textbooks. Teachers agreed that after the war, there were 13- to 18-year-old students in the primary school, but that had gradually changed, and that they now had the teenagers in the high school.

The roles of various stakeholders in developing the school

The teachers were in charge of instruction and discipline, and were generally transformers. When the school was open after the war, the students were asked to bring a chair each as part of their registration because the school could not afford to buy them at that time, and students also brought tissue paper. In brief, "teachers helped to mould the students, and the principal was an administration technician and a leader of change". The school administration solicited assistance and oversaw the activities of the school. The PTA and the Department of Education also helped in the food program championed by the MOE. The MOE also provided a new curriculum.

While the community encouraged the students to come to school, the parents worked with teachers to improve the students' conduct. Report cards were only given to parents because some students used to "promote themselves by tampering with their report cards before getting home" and it is even said that some students did not take their report cards to their parents. Anabela High School is really committed to continuous improvement. If one of their students moves to another school, they will find out why that particular student has left: "Not that we want the student to come back, but because we want to handle the problem". In addition, other schools do not accept students without proper documents from their former school. A good record is needed before a student is accepted in another school.

The Department of Education and the MOE helped to implement government policies in the education domain. The curriculum was drawn up and distributed to various schools. Various educational laws such as the 2001 law were equally implemented to shape the education in Liberia, including that in Anabela High School. Other major documents that the GoL has used to shape education in the country include the Education Sector Plan of Liberia (2010–2020) and the most recent 2011 Education Law of Liberia.

7.7 The role of the Christian Health Association of Liberia (CHAL) in developing Anabela High School

7.7.1 A brief introduction to CHAL

The CHAL was established in 1975 with the main aim of providing basic services such as drugs and medical supplies, primary health care, water and sanitation, family life education, health information and community-directed treatment to the people of Liberia. When the first civil war broke out in 1989, CHAL services expanded to include reconciliation and healing for victims of the war (Peacebuilding Portal, 2012).

> The association was the only local health organization catering to persons in extreme needs on all sides of the military strata during the heat of the crisis, thereby saving lives. In normal times, CHAL would boast of nearly 40 per cent of health services rendered in Liberia with its existence in twelve of the fifteen counties. (p. 2)

Its members are major Christian churches such as the Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist and Anglican churches. As explained by the vice-principal, by 1991, CHAL discovered that the war had brought new challenges that were hampering the true rendering of their services. At their health centres, drugs were not being administered to all of the patients; not because of a lack of drugs, but because of hate and tribalism. These types of challenges were everywhere: at home, in the community, school and the workplace. These were the consequences brought about by the "senseless civil war" (*SPM Handbook*, 1998).

7.7.2 The origin of student palaver management

The CHAL had conducted a census in schools in 1994 and concluded that increased violence in many schools was as a result of perceived injustice, name calling, unrestrained violent tendencies and poor student–teacher and student–student relationships (*SPM Handbook*, 1998). As a result of the above findings, CHAL invited administrators of Christian schools to Monrovia to discuss and produce recommendations to end the conflict in schools. This meeting came up with the following recommendation: conflict-management centres should be called Student Palaver Management Centres (SPMCs) and established in all schools. It was believed that by training students to take care of conflict in schools, it would relieve the teachers of such duties, strengthen peer relationships and increase student awareness of non-violent, peacebuilding and reconciliation activities (*SPM Handbook*, 1998).

CHAL accepted funding of the program and the school administrators agreed to support the SPMC in their respective schools. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) had also launched an education for peace plan in Liberia in 1991, and by the end of 1994, UNICEF

and CHAL entered into an agreement and UNICEF was to support peacebuilding in schools through the SPM in schools (*SPM Handbook*, 1998).

> Since 1995, the beginning of CHAL/UNICEF collaboration, 40 schools with at least 50,000 students run Student Palaver Management Centres and have at least seven thousand students as Palaver Managers and Interveners. (*SPM Handbook*, 1998, p. 5)

The *SPM Handbook for Interveners and Managers* opens with the following touching prayer.

> Oh God, help me to face conflicts in my relationships both in school and my community. Give me courage that I might, by careful labour and loving encounter move beyond disagreements to find true reconciliation. Encourage me to keep my own struggles and needs in focus, so that I do not over power others with my disappointments and my hurt. Enable me to do careful listening that give understanding. Let me set aside my own needs long enough to respond to the needs of others. Save me from the preoccupation and business that cost me to lose touch with others. Help me to follow others' lives so that I can support when there is a failure and celebrate when there is success.
>
> Help me to celebrate the uniqueness of each person and to see the differences among us as sources of strength and vitality. When there are dark moments in my relationships and the relationships of others, teach me to recognize the pathway that you light for us all. Let me see the peace making opportunities you create and help to reach out to others, to speak the loving word, and to do justice to all. (*SPM Handbook*, 1998, pp. 1–2)

7.7.3 Student palaver management at Anabela High School

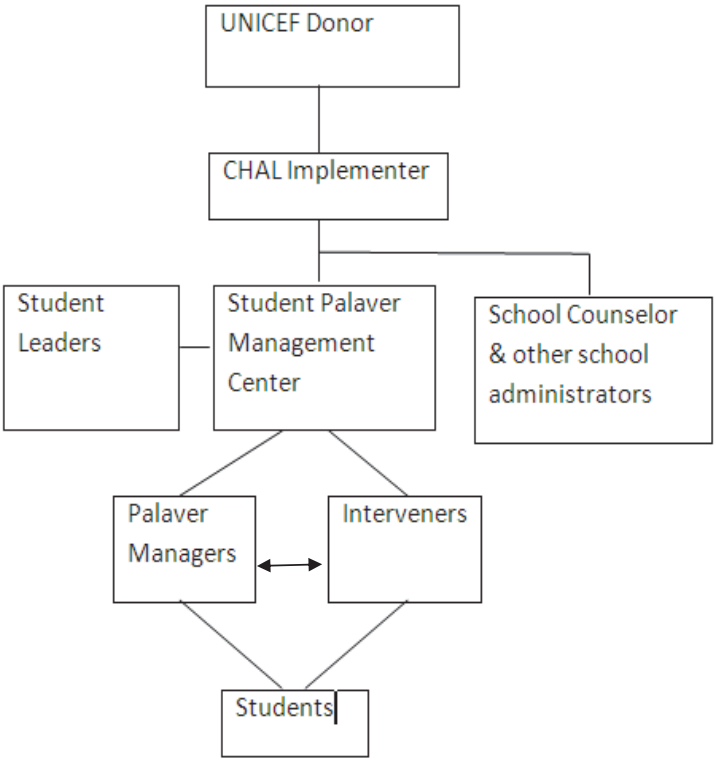

FIGURE 17 The structure of the Student Palaver Management Team.
Source: *SPM Handbook* (1998, p. 40).

As can be seen from the SPM structure (figure 17) above, at the top is UNICEF – the donor financing the program. Then we have CHAL, which is responsible for implementing the program. At the school level, there is the SPMC, and it is supported by the school counsellor and other school administrators and collaborates with the student leaders. This centre's main base in Anabela High School is the vice-principal's office. The vice-principal is the CHAL SPM implementer in the region. He has got six other schools where he trains managers and interveners. Under the SPM, we have interveners and managers, who work as a team to settle problems and at the bottom are the students.

The SPM is made up of a team of managers and interveners. Managers are trained for about forty hours and interveners for about ten hours. This team handles all types of conflicts in the schools and they are closely supported by the school administration. Interveners investigate and bring various parties involved in conflict to the managers and the managers settle the conflict. According to the SPM at Anabela High School, they "do not judge to see who is right or wrong". They "present the case from both viewpoints and allow both

parties to see the need for peace". The SPMT explained that their job is very challenging and that usually they seek help from the administration when it comes to difficult cases. They have settled many cases and, recently, they settled a case between two students who had not been talking to each other for two months. They also explained that there was another challenging case under investigation brought to them by the school queen concerning "name calling".

They explained that the school counsellor usually helped them with challenging cases. According to them, the SPM at Anabela High School was very effective and they "have stopped the chaos that used to reign" in their school. The SPM would like an office that could be used for the settlement of conflicts, more books on conflict management so that they can read up on the subject and they also need more guidance.

7.8 The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at Anabela High School

The PTA consists of parents, guardians and teachers who are interested in and committed to improving the education at Anabela High School, as explained by the PTA chairman. According to him, "the PTA is made up mostly by parents and collaborates with the school administration". The PTA works together with the school administration for better student development. After the civil war, "this was very important to mold the student behaviour because most students had become parents with behaviour problems". The PTA worked in collaboration with the school to solve problems. "When there is a serious problem like misbehaviour by the students that requires serious punishment, the PTA is consulted before punishment is given to the students". The PTA chairman explained that there are five executive members in the PTA and these members are "the chairman, vice-chairman, the secretary, treasurer and chaplain". The *PTA Handbook* of the school guides them in decision making. The executive "members do not receive any pay but there are some benefits". For example, the chairman has three children at Anabela High School, but one attends with free tuition. The PTA visits the school from time to time to see how teaching is done. They visit all classes. There is a PTA meeting at the end of every marking period to see the progress of the students. There are no sub committees at Anabela High School.

7.8.1 Major problems encountered by the PTA

The PTA chairman explained that after the war "many students had become parents and some were married to their 'boy/girl friends'". They did not want to take orders in school. Other problems included alcohol and drug use by the students. The PTA chairman said that there was a case where a student took a knife to stab a teacher because he gave the student's name up to be punished. The PTA chairman explained that much counselling was done and the situation

was currently much better. Anabela High School is a Christian school. It was planned that each Sunday a class would go to church (both Christian and non-Christian students) and pray. It was another means to preach to the students on the importance of good behaviour. Due to the fact that it is part of the school handbook, the students had to obey it. Students have finally understood that the essence of them being in school is to learn. The PTA promoted girls' education after the war. There were a series of meetings outside the school. "The President of Liberia got involved and many crash programs were opened for many girls who had become pregnant during the war and they were unwilling to go back to regular school". Many were trained freely to work in places such as hotels and the cost was covered by the President.

According to the PTA chairman and secretary, each child pays the PTA 25 Liberian dollars during registration each year and that amount is placed in the PTA coffers. This money is given back to hard-working students in the form of a scholarship (for example) to the best students in the school. The money is deposited in the PTA bank account and the chairman, secretary and treasurer are signatories to the account. They must all sign before any money can be taken out of the account.

As explained by the PTA chairman, after the war, there was a major problem in various schools in Liberia including Anabela High School; there were men, women and children in the same class. Some of the men and women did not feel at ease with the children in the same classroom. Some went to night schools and others did not like the night schools and remained in the same mixed classes. Many were determined to succeed and eventually topped their various classes. This was very encouraging for the PTA. However, most of the boys were troublesome. Some of these boys had been "Generals" during the war and they brought back the same attitude into the classrooms. "Some were even expelled from the campus and others changed and became well-behaved students". The PTA contributed to fencing the school. They are still working on the strategy of having a library and a computer lab. There was a computer lab before, but many students were not attending those classes. While some students stayed in school the whole day because of the classes, others simply went away and the teacher had to wait for them while no one came. Eventually, the school decided to scrap the program. The PTA knows that this is a problem because the children need those skills. According to the PTA chairman, "With our children we need to keep talking" before they can get it.

Another problem was that some children behaved differently at home and in school. There was one problem where a parent stood up for their child, questioning why the child should be punished. In the end, the child had to do the punishment because she had gone against the schools rules. Before, there were men and women at Anabela High School, but now the school only has children and things are much better. "A problem we had with our PTA meetings before was that some students were also parents. They attended PTA meetings as parents. As a result, some of the things which were supposed to be discussed in the PTA meetings were only discussed in the school board

meetings". According to the PTA chairman, during such board meetings, the priest and PTA chairman attended the meetings.

7.8.2 Feeding program after the war

The PTA chairman explained that after the war, the United Nations (UN) decided to give free food to all schools in Liberia. This helped bring many students back to school. When things improved, especially in private schools, this privilege was taken away and only continued in government and community schools. He explained that currently, only community and government schools were benefiting from the program. The program is controlled by the government. The whole feeding program was good; however, not all the students liked it. "Some did not eat the food while it was a daily meal for others".

According to the PTA chairman, "the shifting of the feeding program to government and community schools was a good idea because it is where most students from the low income families are. Most students in private schools are from well-to-do families". The PTA chairman explained that "the PTA is currently planning to open a canteen in the campus" so that the food sold to the students "can be monitored by the PTA and the school administration".

7.9 Government education policies that helped in shaping Anabela High School

The major education objective of the GoL is to make education more relevant for the socio-economic development of the country. The government aims to provide basic education (formal and informal) to all citizens, strengthen national unification and integration, and ensure equitable geographic distribution of education opportunities and also ensure access and quality education to all citizens (UNESCO, 2010).

Article 6 of the Constitution of Liberia of 6 January 1986 stipulates that "The Republic shall, because of the vital role assigned to individual citizens under this constitution for the social, economic and political wellbeing of Liberia, provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities to the extent of available resources" (UNESCO, 2010, p. 2). While the Education Law of 1973 recognizes the right of all Liberian children to education, the Education Law of 2001 and 2002 made education compulsory and free for all children between the ages of 6 and 16 (UNESCO, 2010; Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

This section briefly examines major documents and partners that have helped to shape education, and the government's education policies and plans for pre-primary schools, primary schools, secondary schools, TVET, teacher education and higher education.

7.9.1 Major documents and partners shaping education in Liberia

The major documents that have impacted education in Liberia include the Liberia Education Sector Master Plan 2000–2010 with 2015 as its major deadline, and the Education Sector Review of 2000 volume 11, both of which are seen as the foundation of current Liberian education policies (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010). Other main documents include the millennium development goals (MDGs), poverty reduction strategy (PRS), Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child, labour laws and health policy. The MDGs are derived from the Education for All (EfA) goals (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010). While 2015 is a targeted date where all children should be able to complete primary education, 2005 was a targeted date to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary schools and 2015 in all education levels. The EfA goals include an improvement in early childhood care and development, ensures that by 2015 all children have free compulsory primary education, meeting the needs of young people through appropriate learning and life skills programs, and that each country achieves total adult literacy by 2015. The PRS of 2008 was built on security, economic reconstruction, governance and the rule of law, and infrastructure and basic services (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

Education partners in Liberia have been at the forefront in shaping education. The partners and their activities include UNICEF, and they are involved in an accelerated learning program (ALP), instructional materials and furniture. UNESCO is involved in national curriculum development and literacy programs. The European Union's (EU) areas of involvement include school reconstruction and financial management. The World Bank is involved in capacity building and early childhood development (ECD) (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010, p. 19). The World Fund Project (WFP) is involved in school feeding for primary schools. The UNHCR is involved in repatriation and resettlement of teachers and human rights education. Countries such as China, Egypt, Russia and Morocco give scholarships among others to Liberian students. It is also important to note here that only a few partners have been mentioned and only some of their major activities have been outlined (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010, p. 20).

7.9.2 Pre-primary education

The MOE places great emphasis on ECD and the establishment of ECE in Liberia. Its major goals include the reconstruction, development and recovery from war due to the fact that poor, vulnerable families and communities are not able to meet the development needs of their children without government support. The LEL of 2001 defines ECE as education provided to children between the ages of 2 and 6 years. ECDs are structures, programs and institutions created in various communities to provide services to young children. These institutions include public, private, missionary and community ventures. These institutions have various names: day care centres, nurseries or

kindergartens. Those who work with children such as parents, teachers and caregivers are also targeted in this sector (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

Context of the sector

The Liberian civil war devastated the entire society, including the family, and it has contributed to a failed attempt to provide food and nutrition to all children in Liberia because of damaged infrastructure and limited organizational skills. Various ministries involved in ECD programs include education, health and social welfare, gender and development and justice (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010). The MOE is supposed to monitor and coordinate all the ministries. Children were seen as a vulnerable group with needs that must be met in order to address the long-term needs of the whole country. Three major areas are important and include a critical stage for human growth and development, the benefits for future development and lifelong learning and the social economic benefits. The government was committed to the provision of ECD to all children, worked with partners to make various programs sustainable and standardized and provided programs for full child development. The government also has to work with parents and communities, and lead and monitor all ECD providers (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

TABLE 1 Pre-primary Enrolment: 1984, 2005/06 and 2007/08

Type/ Proprietor	1984 Enrolment	2005/06 Enrolment	2007/08 Enrolment
Public	49,588	198,689	305,985
Mission	35,143	47,724	39,474
Others	12,082	111,797	146,105
All	96,813	358,210	491,564

Source: MOE – 1988 Liberia Education and Human Resources Sector Assessment, 2005/06 School Census and 2008 National School Census Report (as cited in Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010, p. 32).

As shown on table 1 above, the enrolment in pre-primary public schools increased drastically between 1984 and 2008 – from 49,588 to 305,985. While the enrolment in pre-primary mission schools had a significant increase from 35,143 in 1984 to 39,474 in 2008, enrolment in other pre-primary schools also registered a drastic increase within the same period from 12,084 to 146,105. While the total enrolment in pre-primary education between 1984 and 2005/06 was 261,347, in 2006/07 and 2007/08 the increase was 133,354. In these two years, enrolment was slightly more than half of the total increase between 1984 and 2005/06. A majority of this enrolment in 2006/07 and 2007/08 was registered in public

schools – 107,296. Reasons for this increase in public enrolment in pre-primary schools may be because of the improve education policies brought by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf after being inaugurated as president in 2006.

TABLE 2 Improvements in Pre-primary Gender Enrolment: 1981 and 2007/08

	1981	2007/08
Male	34,481	251,049
Females	25,978	240,515
GPI	0.75	0.96

Source: MOE Final Report of the 1984 national policy conference on education and training and 2007/08 National School Census Report in Liberia Education Sector Plan (2010, p. 33).

Table 2 above shows pre-primary gender enrolment in 1981 and 2007/08. While males had a majority in enrolment in 1981 and 2007/08, (8503 and 10534 respectively), the actual difference in 2007/08 had only increased by 2031 students. This seems to justify why President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf embacked on reforms to improve female education enrolment.

As indicated in the Liberia Education Sector Plan (2010, p. 33), "Only 4% of children under the age of 5 have birth certificates/registration". The PTA suggest that the free food in the pre-primary stage and the fact that many primary schools require entrants to grade one to pass an examination in reading, writing and arithmetic account for a large number of overage children in the pre-primary sector (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

Pre-primary teachers

According to the 2007/08 census report, 11,778 teachers (with only 44% females) were teaching in pre-primary schools in Liberia in 2007/08 and "71% were untrained compared to 60% in primary schools" (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010, p. 33). There are also disadvantages for children in rural areas and for women traders/market women, as the facilities do not exist or there is no time to make use of such facilities. Some parents were also unwilling to take their 2 or 3 year old to school rather than spending more time with him/her at home. The government needs to develop a more flexible model that will cater for the needs of the parents (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

Challenges to ECD in Liberia

The challenges that need to be addressed in this sector include improvement in parental education, the establishment of community-based early childhood stimulating programs, government support in the establishment of inclusive

pre-primary institutions across the whole of Liberia, and ensuring that the needs of all children, including the poor and vulnerable, are met. For these challenges to be met, the government needs to develop various strategies for improving ECD services. These will include interjectory strategies that will meet, or assist in meeting the needs and rights of young children, that will handle social issues on post-war effects on children, provide guidance and legislation on rendering ECD services, develop qualification training and career paths for ECD workers, develop the curriculum for ECD and put in place a mechanism for monitoring ECD activities in Liberia (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

The government must ensure that all children under that age of five achieve their full potential and are ready for primary school education after the age of five. Various steps have been earmarked, such as the identification of strategies for expanding and improving the quality of ECD services. The main ECD goals and objectives aim at improving quality, increasing accessibility, supporting greater family and community involvement and ensuring "Greater collaboration and coordination between ministries, agencies, and communities in order to maximize the impact and effectiveness of ECD programs" (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010, p. 36). To achieve the above specific objectives, the government further analysed the specific objectives, identifying various ECD critical issues and strategies to achieve those objectives (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010). According to Arnott, Diara and Bailey (2012), it is the duty of every government to lay the foundations for the effective implementation of its policies. "Without political will to develop, implement and drive policy for effective response to education in recovery efforts, up scale the mobilization of resources, and coordinate various responses, so as to maximize impact" major improvement in education reforms will not be achieved (Arnott, Diara and Bailey, 2012, p. 19).

7.9.3 Primary schools

The Liberian government regards primary education as the foundation on which education is built because it is the beginning of compulsory education. According to the LEL of 2001, the age for primary school children should range from 6 to 11. Compulsory education was implemented in Liberia only in 2005. However, some rural communities today still have no primary schools established and some lack enough room to accommodate all of the students. Primary education forms an integral part of basic education in Liberia and, according to the Education Law, it is free up to the 9th grade (Junior Secondary School [JSS]) (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

TABLE 3 Primary School Enrolment: 1984, 2005/06 and 2007/08

Type/ Proprietor	1984	2005/06	2007/08
	Primary	Primary	Primary
Public	91,597	260,499	308,748
Mission	26,902	80,168	62,316
Others	27,977	147,771	168, 823
All	146,476	488,438	539,887

Source: MOE – 1988 Liberia Education and Human Resources Sector Assessment, 2005/06 School Census and 2008 National School Census Report. In Liberia Education Sector Plan (2010, p. 49).

Table three above shows the primary school enrolment in 1984, 2005/06 and 2007/08. The majority of children enrolled in public primary schools. While the enrolment in public, mission and other institutions increased between 1984 and 2005/06, in 2007/08 the enrolment in mission schools actually dropped by a significant margin (that is from 80,168 in 2005/06 academic year to 62,316 in 2007/08). I do not know the reasons for this fall in enrolment in mission schools, but it may be suggested that after 2006, many organisations came in aiding free education and most of the aid were directed to public and community schools. A good example will be the World Fund Project (WFP) that was responsible for giving free food to public and community primary schools. Another reason may have been due to an improvement in public and community schools. This improvement lured away children from mission schools and accounted for the fall in enrolment. While the total enrolment was 146,476 in 1984, the number had more than tripled to 539,884 in 2007/08.

The MOE's main goal is to ensure that all children in Liberia, with no discrimination, at the age of six and above receive free education. Their specific objectives include children starting at the right age and completing primary education, that no child is denied primary education because of age, ensuring greater efficiency and cost effectiveness, and ensuring that the school environment is clean, safe and conducive for learning for all children (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

7.9.4 Secondary level education

The Education Law of 2001 states that "Secondary level education shall include three years of Junior High School (JSS) and shall encompass 1 to 3 years vocational technical secondary schools and institutions" (Liberia Education

Sector Plan, 2010, p. 78). According to the Law, all Liberian citizens are to have free basic education as a human right up to grade 9 (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

TABLE 4 Junior High School Enrolment

1984	2005/06	2007/08
40,307	98,448	102,642

Source: World Bank/MOE Census 2009. In Liberia Education Sector Plan (2010, p. 79).

Table 4 above shows the enrolment in Junior High School (JHS) in 1984, 2005/06 and 2007/08. While the enrolment in 1984 was 40,307, by 2005/06 academic year the enrolment number had more than doubled and by 2007/08 this increase continued to 102,642.

TABLE 5 Total Senior High School Enrolment

1984	2005/06	2007/08
25,359	33,776	55,600

Source: World Bank/MOE Census 2009. In Liberia Education Sector Plan (2010, p. 82).

Table 5 above shows the total enrolment in Senior High School (SHS) in 1984, 2005/06 and 2007/08. While the total enrolment was just 25,359, it increased to 33,776 in 2005/06 and in 2007/08 academic year, it was 55,600. This enrolment was generally low compared with the enrolment in the Junior High School in the same period.

The MOE's main goal is to make sure that resources are available so that all students enrol and complete their JHS with a good quality education and are given the ability to continue with their education at the next level and contribute to the development of Liberia (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010). The MOE's specific objectives target increased access and transition rates from primary to JHS and from JHS to Senior High School, to limit dropouts and to increase completion rates in secondary schools, to increase quality and to ensure that the school environment is clean, safe and conducive for study (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

7.9.5 Technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

Liberia is aware of the fact that because of the war many Liberians missed formal education and many received low quality education. The Education Law of 2001 chapter 2, section 2.4 states that "All citizens shall have the right to basic education as a human right, and it shall entail all education up to the 9th grade (JSS) as well as adult education to include literacy, numeracy and skill acquisition among other aspects, taking into account both formal and non-formal education programs" (Education Sector Plan, 2010, p.103). It should also be noted that even though the MOE in 1999 set as a goal reducing illiteracy to below 35 per cent, this goal is still to be achieved because the literacy unit at the MOE does not have the resources to implement the above goals. Reports by NGOs carrying out illiteracy programs are not sent to the MOE. Most of the known programs are in English (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

The Education Law of 2002 requires the government to support vocational and technical education, establish and conduct career education and vocational guidance and rehabilitate existing and vocational schools and facilities. The role of the MOE in TVET is weak and it is not a signatory to the UN joint program for employment and empowerment of young women and men. It does not play a greater part in TVET programs. According to the report by the UN Head of Agencies in Liberia, the Liberian TVET sector remains very weak (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) Tracer study conducted in 2008 noted the following problems: enrolment of poorly uneducated youths, uncoordinated and unregulated delivery system, inadequate financing and poor management, weak monitoring mechanisms, obsolete equipment, outdated curriculum and low quality training programs, dilapidated structures and weak staffing, thus breeding a system that has produced unskilled graduates who are mainly unemployed. The study recommended an improvement in funding for TVET, for private providers to provide training within the national vocation training and qualification system, improvement in the quality of TVET training and an introduction of entrepreneurship training (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

It is also important to note that the Bureau of Vocation and Technical Education at the MOE supervises the TVET in the private sector, and its main objectives include equipping students who have completed basic education with TVET skills that are relevant to the job market. The Bureau has also advocated the transformation of the education system from that which has focused more on producing students for university education, to one that is more balanced and takes into consideration the need for technological education in Liberia (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

TABLE 6 TVET Institutions and Enrolment

Year	No.	Enrolment
1982	47	6,698
2006	110	18.030

Source: MOE – 1984 National Policy Conference on Education and Training and Situational Analysis of the Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) System in Liberia 2006. In Liberia Education Sector Plan (2010, p. 108).

Table 6 above shows the number of Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) institutions in Liberia and their total enrolment in 1982 and 2006. In 1982, there were only 47 TVET institutions in Liberia with only 6,698 students enrolled. By 2006, even though the number of TVET institutions had increased to 110, the total number of students enrolled remained low at 18,030. This number is too small considering that fact that TVET graduates are supposed to be the backbone of the economic development in the country. However, this seems to be the trend in the region at the time (for example in Ghana) where only students who were not good in general education were sent to TVET institutions.

Teachers play a key role in preparing the next generation of leaders. The expanding education system means the need for more teachers. Forty-six per cent of government expenditure at the primary level is on teachers and they constitute 1/3 of civil servants nationally. The government has increased the number of training institutions to train quality and more teachers to meet with the increasing demand. The Education Law of 2002 gives more priority to primary education, followed by junior and senior high schools. The Liberian PRS estimates that Liberia needs to train 1000 teachers a year to meet up with the increased enrolment in primary schools (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

TABLE 7 Basic Teacher Salaries

Academic year	Approximate monthly salary
2005	20 USD
2006	30 USD
2007	55 USD
2008	75 USD
2009	100 USD

Liberia Education Sector Plan (2010, p. 126)

Table 7 above shows the basic teacher salaries from 2005 to 2009. According to the Liberia Education Art, full time teachers work between 5 to 9 hours a day and no teacher could hold more than one full time job. In December 2008, the government required all the teachers to have a minimum of a grade "C" certificate. This was the requirement to be added to the government payroll. Teachers' data base was also to be developed not only to help remove "ghost teachers" from the system but also to monitor teachers' placements, qualification and among others throughout the whole country. (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010)

7.9.6 Teacher training and certification

Between 1986 and 2009, no pre-service teachers graduated from the Teacher Training Institute and, as a result, about 60 per cent of primary school teachers remained untrained and unqualified. A survey reveals that only half of lower secondary school teachers are trained and most of them have a "C" certificate instead of a "B", as required. During the civil war and immediately afterwards, many donor partners established short-term training programs, especially for "C" certificate teachers in primary schools. Teacher training institutions in Liberia include the Kakata Rural Teacher Training Institute (KRTTI) and the Zorzor Rural Teacher Training Institute (ZRTTI) and another in Webbo County became operational in 2011. All these institutions grant a "C" certificate for primary school teachers. The MOE is strengthening the granting of "B" and "A" certificates and degree-granting in both colleges and universities. While teachers with level "C" certificates are trained to teach in the primary school, those with level "B" are supposed to teach in lower secondary, and those with level "A" in upper secondary. However, this has not been respected as teachers with "C" certificates have been employed to teach different levels they were not trained for. The government intends to establish a well-coordinated system where teachers of a particular category can be further trained to achieve a higher qualification (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

The MOE estimates that about 200 to 300 teachers ought to be trained to meet the demand in upper secondary school level "A" certificates/diploma in education. It is mandatory for every teacher to have in-service training once every three years. The National Association of Liberian School Principals (NASP), the National Teachers Association of Liberia (NTAL) and other subjects associations are encouraged to conduct workshops for teacher improvement (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

Challenges

Gender imbalance is a major challenge in the teaching sector. The Education Management and Information Services (EMIS) data indicates that only 21 per cent of teachers are female. At the primary level, this number is 22 per cent. This seems to be very different with other countries like Cameroon. It may be suggested that this is another aspect of a post-conflict environment that deserved more investigation. The government is working to improve gender

balance and developing strategies that would attract and retain females in the teaching field. Age is another problem. Less than 3 per cent of teachers are below 30 years and 38 per cent are above 50 years (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010). Teacher training institutions are still not equipping their teachers to handle physical and learning disabilities in schools, and subject teachers such as those handling mathematics and science are in constant shortage, especially in rural areas (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

December 2012 announcement on improving teachers' conditions by the Minister of Education

In December 2011, the Minister of Education and the Deputy Minister for Secondary Education announced the latest improvement in teachers' salaries aimed at improving education in Liberia. Teachers with an MA were to earn 500 USD, while those with BA or BSc would earn 350 USD. This is far better than the teachers' salaries in 2009 as shown on table 7. Improvements in sciences were also announced. The ministers explained that the science laboratories would be improved and that agreements had been signed with different countries such as Nigeria and the United States to send science teachers to Liberia to teach. Addressing the lack of teachers in rural areas, the ministers explained that incentives would be given to teachers who accepted work in rural areas. The Minister of Education and the Deputy Minister for Secondary Education also announced that teachers' education at the University of Liberia would be free and each student would henceforth receive 30 USD as an allowance. Another major section of the announcement focused on the improvement of capacity building for the Rural Teacher Training Institutions in Kakata, Zorzor and Webbo. This announcement marked a major shift in government teachers' salaries and a warning for private institutions to follow suit and improve their teachers' salaries or face the consequences, as most teachers may prefer to be retrained as government teachers or apply to work in government and community schools.

7.9.7 Higher education

According to the 2002 Education Law, higher education constitutes all educational programs above the senior secondary level. The National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) was established in 2000 to take care of quality assurance and accreditation of certificates and degrees at the higher level. The twenty-six institutions approved by the NCHE in Liberia include universities, junior colleges, community colleges, theological seminaries and polytechnics. The MOE has approved the establishment of five new community colleges, which will later be transformed to fully fledged universities in five counties (Lofa, Nimba, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh and Bomi). The Liberian government is equally expanding the facilities of the University of Liberia and that of William VS Tubman College of Technology (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

Building a strong system of democratic and accountable government is really essential for the development of the country and for the implementation of the PRS. The fourteen-year civil war greatly damaged the accountability system in Liberia and many reforms are needed, beginning with the civil service. The structure of the MOE has not facilitated the flow of information down to districts in the community. Even where those channels exist, they are not given the resources required to facilitate their work (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

The Education Law of 2001 placed the responsibilities of monitoring schools in the hands of the CEO and the district education officer (DEO) and, given the vastness of some of these counties such as Lofa, and its inaccessibility by road, especially in the rainy season, their jobs have been really difficult and sometimes ineffective. The PTA has the responsibility of monitoring and maintaining school assets, but some schools do not have a PTA and some which have, are not effective (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

8 HOW AND WHAT CORE COMPONENTS ARE USED IN BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY IN A SCHOOL IN A CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT

8.1 An introduction

Due to the fact that no researcher has come up with the core components or attributes of building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments to the best of the author's knowledge, I went back to my data and identified these major components: shared supportive leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, shared personal practice, overcoming psychological challenges, physical components, the international community and other NGOs, and the Liberian government's education policies. Each of them has been examined in detail.

8.2 The component of shared supportive leadership led by the principal

As can be seen from figure 14 below, the leadership in Anabela High School is not only shared or distributed, but it is also really supportive. Power is distributed among thirteen different major "players", including the principal, for the better functioning of the school. These major players include the LSB, the principal, vice-principal, registrar, cashier, secretary, department heads, various departments, the PTA, student leadership and the SPM.

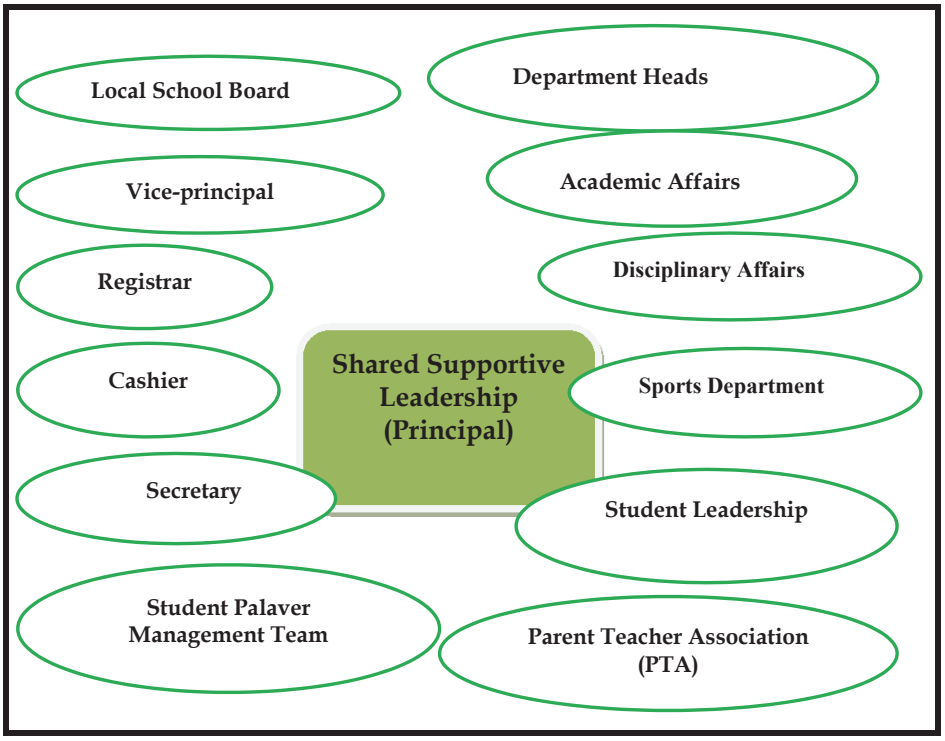

FIGURE 18 Shared supportive leadership (Principal) disciplinary

At the centre of this school leadership is a dedicated principal, and many teachers agreed that their relations with him were very cordial. According to them, the principal was "quite open, and when there is a problem, he discusses it directly with the person concerned". The principal "trusts and respects decisions taken by committees, and does not interfere in them". The registrar explained that the principal supports her greatly in her job. When she has a problem with her work, she usually asks for his help. Teachers are supported by the principal making sure that all their teaching materials are available. He makes sure that "teachers are paid on time" and many teachers are "really grateful for these types of support". It is said that he understands the teachers' problems. Payment dates are followed strictly. Each teacher at Anabela High School is given the privilege of being able to bring one student free of charge to the school. This is an encouragement to all the teachers and teachers agreed that this was a good motivation – an incentive for them in Anabela High School. Teachers agreed that their working relations with the principal were cordial and they appreciated the principal's suggestions on how to help each other in time of need. According to many interviewees, the principal also "encourages teachers to give their views, especially when it comes to school improvement strategies". The cordial relationship between the principal and the staff is in accordance with the views of Hord (2003), Joyce (2004) and Olivier et al. (2009) that if the principal establishes a good relationship between the staff and

himself, and works with teachers as a peer and colleague, and treats them with respect, they will view themselves as playing on the same team and working towards the same goal.

As reported by various teachers, the principal "handles the day to day functioning of the whole school and supervises the staff, both teaching and administrative. He is the paymaster. He oversees the various activities of the students, even though this function is given to various committees". Those committees report to the principal. He sees to it that plans are worked out, such as the curriculum implementation. He reports to the LSB and the church. He is the overall supervisor of the school. "He sees to it that teachers do their work and students behave in accordance with the rules and regulations of the school". He makes sure that those activities that have been planned and agreed on are implemented strictly to the norms of the institution, upholding the rules and regulations of the institution and making sure that the school functions smoothly.

8.2.1 The principal, local school board and vice-principal

In the local community where the school operates, there is a church and an LSB to help implement the diocesan school policies. As explained by the principal and other informants, "the local school board consists of nine members; the chairperson is the junior warden of the church and the principal is the secretary of the board". The LSB develops strategies for funding, and sees to it that the school vision is achieved. The LSB meets twice a year. The members are not "regularly paid, but at times they receive small stipends". The LSB oversees the general functioning of the school. It approves teacher employment. Since the beginning of the year, teachers have not met with the LSB. Teachers' requests and feedback have been through the principal.

The LSB also "influences how the school functions by directing the principal on how to govern, and having a say on major decisions concerning the school before they are implemented. It makes decisions on employment and helps the principal in running the school. It approves contracts before the principal employs teachers". When the principal finds out that there is a vacancy, he informs the school board and the board will give the go ahead to the principal for hiring another teacher. After applications are collected, the principal takes those he recommends back to the board and they approve the applicants before the contract is signed.

> The principal makes sure that those activities that have been planned and agreed upon by the board be implemented strictly to the norms of the institution. (Vice Principal)

The junior warden, principal and priest are signatories to the bank account. The school board approves all expenditures for the school. Some readers may question the duties of the local school board in directing the principal. They may see this as a setback for the principal to freely perform his duties, but this may not be totally true in Anabela High School. Due to the complicated nature

of the Liberian post-conflict environment, the LSB works as a team with the principal. The procedures are a formality and the principal is in constant dialogue with the LSB and they trust each other. I was told that the LSB has never refused for the example to employ the teacher that the principal has suggested to the board.

It is said that the position of the vice-principal was only introduced in Anabela High School in 2005. Before the arrival of the current principal, this position was called "an administrative assistant and was merely ceremonial". According to one teacher, "all decisions used to come from the principal. The vice-principal position was always administered by the principal". During that period, the principal concentrated all the powers in his hands and genuine shared leadership never existed in practice. Various department heads report to the principal through the vice-principal. He supervises the teachers, and teachers who are absent from school notify him in advance. He only assists the principal and "he may not sign all documents in the absence of the principal". He receives guests when the principal is not there and runs school errands. He reports to the principal in relation to school activities.

8.2.2 The part played by the registrar, cashier and secretary

"The registrar is the sole custodian of the school documents", for example, student and teacher records, enrolments and grading, and sees that students receive their progress report cards as scheduled. In the absence of the principal and vice-principal, the registrar will act in their place. "She is the third person in command". She keeps all records of the institution, especially academic records. She keeps the student register. She is the sole custodian of all school documents, especially academic documents. The cashier collects money. However, for tuition and fees, she only prepares documents and payments are done at the bank. According to the principal, "she handles petty cash only". Tuition, school fees and other amounts are paid directly to the bank. In the past, there have always been some students who came to school and did not pay their money on time. The cashier from time to time visits various classes to remind students who have not paid their fees to do so. "The cashier keeps all records and makes sure that all students pay their school fees, and keeps a record of students who owe fees in the school". She is responsible for "all financial transactions and sometimes works with the principal to make sure the teachers are paid on time. She handles tuition matters, and keeps all accounts ready, at any time that financial documents are requested". The secretary works with the principal, types' test papers and prepares registration papers. "She is the chief clerk. She receives and keeps all the items, especially test documents". The secretary also types examination papers for various subjects and documents requested by the principal. "She does all the writing at the request of the principal".

8.2.3 Various departments

The visionary principal (Bezzina, 2006) divided the school into three departments and each of them is under a department head. The department heads and others in various departments are teachers who have been appointed to various positions. In the teachers' contracts, "it is stated that they will do extra-curricular activities". The department head is in charge of each department and in academic affairs, for example, he is in charge of all subjects. According to one informant, the department head "plans the schedule for various teachers and teachers submit their lesson plans to him every week. He handles problems between students and teachers concerning exams and grades".

In the academic affairs department, each subject has a head and there is an overall academic head. Teachers explained that "academic affairs check on teachers that they follow the curriculum, check lesson plans, and also the tests which have been administrated as related to evaluation requests". Teachers in this department review the teachers' test scripts before deadlines and forward them to the registrar and secretary of the school for typing and documentation. If there is an incorrect grading issue, "the academic committee will handle it". They also handle other problems such as student cheating and they must review test questions before they are administrated.

Many teachers consider the disciplinary department to be the most active in the school, and according to them, this department "makes sure that the school rules and regulations are respected". They determine "the punishment for those students who go against the school rules and regulations and the punishment usually ranges from picking papers to hard labour". However, "when it comes to suspension, the matter is referred to the principal". The department sees to it that the students adhere to the school dress code and they also monitor school devotions. One informant put it as follows:

> The disciplinary committee implements the school rules and regulations. This department is the most critical part of the school. It is about everybody monitoring the system from the elementary to the high school.

According to many interviewees, teachers are appointed to this position, and they have the right to punish and recommend different cases to the principal. This committee implements the rules and regulations of the school, makes sure that students come to school on time and they are responsible for maintaining the morale of the school. As explained by one teacher, the post-war era came with many challenges such as student misbehaviour. According to him, in order to better handle it, "every teacher monitors the system from the elementary to the high school and can refer a student to the discipline department if caught going against the school rules and regulations". There were also other problems such as the brain drain and trauma after the war.

The sports department ensures that students take part in sports activities. They equally arrange for inter-school competitions. According to what I was

told, and also what I observed, there is a football field and other infrastructure such as the basketball court at Anabela High School. It was said that the department also has the responsibility for arranging other social activities in the school and they work together with the student council. They take care of the sports department. One of the teachers explained that the department had really improved. "Sports bring unity among students. It also relieves the mind from many things". They usually come up with a budget for each activity and, at the end of the day; they work out the balance sheet and report to the principal. They also give scholarships to the most active students in sports. Inter-school games currently function quite well. One teacher complained that there were not many social activities apart from the queen contest, gala night and graduation day. "The sports department also takes care of the social activities, especially during the queen contest". The sports department has improved recently. There are four houses, and each house is represented by a queen and, during the election, the queen with highest vote becomes school queen. "Major social ceremonies include graduation, the school dance and colour days". Students do not wear uniforms during these social activities. There is the end of year ceremony, where each house in the school prepares food and all the staff and students jointly celebrate.

Sporting activities are organized to exhibit the students' talents in various areas. Inter-school games are organized and teachers believed that this helped to ease the troubled minds of the students. Students who perform very well are rewarded. "The sports committee recommends names of the students who perform very well to the principal and he forwards them to the school board". Sometimes, students who excel in sports are given full tuition free and sometimes fifty per cent. Any student who has been given free full tuition must perform well in his/her academic work and must be present in school. There is a register in the school, where every student receiving this type of scholarship must mark his/her name on arrival and before departure from school on a daily basis. If a student is absent, he/she must send a note to explain why. If it persists, the student must be summoned for further explanation. Student discipline is very important when it comes to sports in Anabela High School.

Due to fact that sports attract many students to Anabela High School, it is also very important to make sure that students do not forget the main reason why they are in school, and, according to some teachers, "this is why they must also focus on their academic performance". The view by many teachers is that in Liberia today, if a school does not organize sports well, many students will not be willing to enrol in that school. Additionally, "any school that performs very well in sports attracts many students". Before the war, there were sporting activities in schools, but the level was not as it is today. In some areas in Liberia in the 1980s, "some schools did not incorporate sports into their daily activities and the rate of competitiveness was not as high as it is today". People have come to learn that it is possible to make more money in sports than in other areas. Sport has developed, and it has become very important for student development.

8.2.4 Student leadership, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the student palaver management (SPM)

In Anabela High School, there are school and class prefects. While the class prefects are responsible for their individual classes (they make sure that there is order in their classrooms and the students study in a good atmosphere), the school prefects must look after the whole school. One teacher explained that before 2005, there was no democratic system of government for the students. "They were appointed based on their academic work". There are four main elected school prefects: the president, the vice-president, secretary and the chaplain. The rest of the positions are appointed. It is only recently that women have begun to gain status in Liberia, as they used to shy away from politics. In order to be a school prefect, a student must be academically fit and must be in grade 12. The vice-president comes from grade 11, the secretary from grade 10, and the chaplain and the rest of the other prefects come from any grade.

As explained by the teachers, by the student leaders and in the student essays, the leaders are elected by an Electoral College and the Electoral College is made up of ten students, each from grade 7 to 12. After the election, the winner has five days to select people to fill the rest of the appointed positions. The various positions include "the president, the vice-president, the secretary, the chaplain, the treasurer and advisor". Others ministries include education, sports, finance, public relations, labour and health. Each of these ministries has its own functions. Only the president, vice-president, secretary (speaker) and chaplain are elected; the other positions are appointed by the president once he/she has been elected. For any student to contest for the student leadership position, he/she must be of good moral conduct and also academically good. The list for the four key positions is usually screened by the discipline department before voting is undertaken.

According to one student essay, the president must be able to fulfil three key functional aspects; namely, "unity, advocacy, and adequate and responsible representation". Unity: The president of the student government must ensure that all the students are united. This is usually done through constant dialogue with the students in the school so that they can be united and help each other. Advocacy: The president must also be able to speak and engage with the school administration logically on issues that concern students most. He channels students' requests to the administration and brings feedback to them. Adequate and responsible representation: The president should also be competent at working with his/her ministries and must make sure that students respect both their leaders and the school rules and regulations.

The PTA consists of parents, guardians and teachers who are interested in and committed to improving the education at Anabela High School. It is made up mostly of parents and collaborates with the school administration. The PTA works together with the school administration for better student upbringing. The PTA chairman explained that after the civil war, this was very important for moulding the student behaviour because most students had become parents with behaviour problems. The PTA worked in collaboration with the schools to

solve problems. When there is a serious problem such as a student behaviour problem that requires serious punishment, the PTA is consulted before punishment is meted out to the students. According to the PTA chairman, there are five executive members in the PTA and they are "the chairman, vice-chairman, the secretary, treasurer and chaplain". The *PTA Handbook* of the school guides them in decision-making. The executive members do not receive any pay, but there are some benefits. For example, the chairman has three children at Anabela High School, but one has got tuition free. For the student with free tuition, "I just have to pay the registration fee", the PTA chairman said. The PTA visits the school from time to time to see how the teaching is going. They visit all classes. There is a PTA meeting at the end of every marking period to see the progress of the students. There are no sub committees at Anabela High School.

After the war, there were major problems in various schools in Liberia, including Anabela High School, and one of those problems was that "there were men, women and children in the same class". Some of the men and women did not feel at ease with the children being in the same classroom. "Some went to night schools and others did not like the night schools and remained in the same mixed classes. Many were determined to succeed and eventually topped their various classes. This was very encouraging to the Parent Teacher Association". However, most of the boys were troublesome. It is said that some of these boys had been "generals" during the war and they brought the same attitude into the classrooms. "Some were even expelled from the campus and others changed and became well-behaved students". When comparing the students in Anabela High School immediately after the war with the current students in the school, the PTA chairman said, "before we had men and women in school, but now we have children". The PTA contributed towards fencing in the school. They are still working on the strategy of having a library and a computer laboratory. There was previously a computer lab, but many students were not attending those classes. While some students stayed in school the whole day because of their classes, others simply went away and the teacher had to wait for them as no one came to class. Eventually, the school decided to scrap the program. The school knew this was a problem because the children needed those skills. According to the PTA chairman, "With our children we need to keep talking" before they can get it.

The SPM at Anabela High School is made up of a team of managers and interveners (CHAL, 1998). Managers are trained for about forty hours and interveners for about ten hours. This team handles all types of conflicts in the school and they are closely supported by the school administration. As explained by a team of interveners and managers that I interviewed, interveners investigate and bring various parties involved in conflict to the managers, and the managers settle the conflict. According to the SPM, "they do not judge to see who is right or wrong". They present the case from both viewpoints and allow both parties to see the need for peace. The SPMT explained that their job was very challenging and that, usually, they sought

help from the administration when it came to difficult cases. One student explained that "you may know somebody in person and to say the person is wrong … is very difficult". The students explained that they had settled many cases and, recently, they settled a case between two students who had not been talking to each other for two months. "This, my comrade, had a problem (while pointing at his friend) with a girl in our class … the two of them did not talk for about two months… judging the case, we did not say who was right or wrong. We judged the case and now the two of them are friends again". They also explained that there was another case under investigation that had been brought to them by the school queen concerning "name calling".

They explained that the school counsellor usually helped them with challenging cases. The SPM team also asserted that the institution gave them much support. One student explained that "on every Wednesday, we have an assembly program in our church … they give us time to explain to the students the role of the managers and interveners to the students". Another student also explained that sometimes they got cases that they were unable to handle, and the school authority would come in and counsel them and eventually they would be able to settle the cases. According to them, the SPM at Anabela High School is very effective and they have "stopped the chaos that used to reign in our school". One student explained that they had a sanitation problem in the school. They also lamented that there was no library, no computer laboratory and no lights in the classrooms. They like the fact that the school has a fence that prevents outsiders from coming into the campus. The SPM would like an office that could be used for the settlement of conflicts, more books on conflict management for them to read and they also need more guidance.

8.3 Collective creativity

When it comes to collective creativity at Anabela High School, this section of the study examines how all of the major stakeholders in the school have worked together for the benefit of the school. The various areas that we will examine include the school club before the war, "Susu", which came into existence after the war, the activities of the academic, disciplinary, and sports departments, staff professional development, the student leadership role and the collaborative relationship among all the stakeholders at Anabela High School.

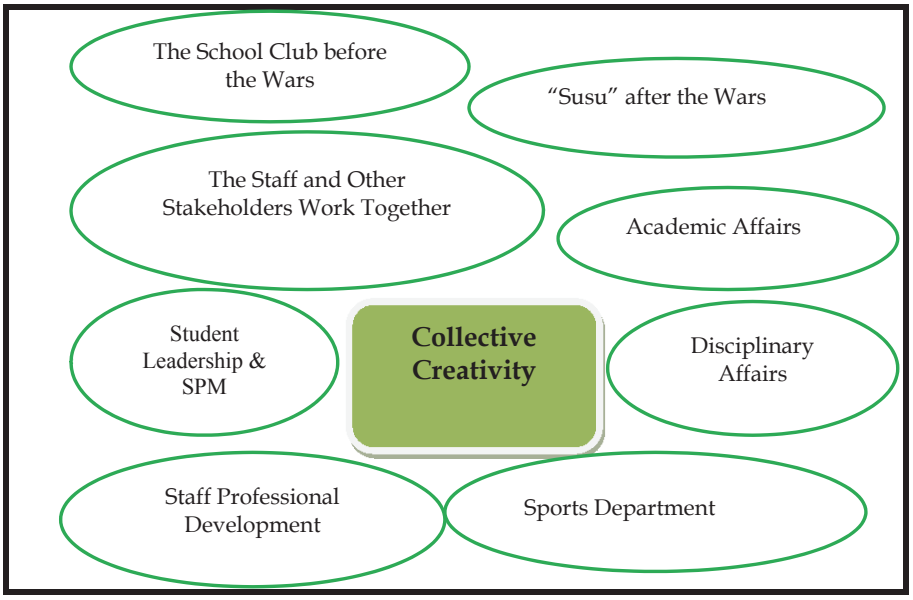

FIGURE 19 Collective creativity

Before the wars, there was a school club where teachers freely joined and put their money in. If any teacher needed money, he/she could go and borrow money from the club with a very low interest rate. At the end of the year, each teacher collected his /her share of the money that they had actually put into the fund, plus a share in the interest charges, depending on how many people had actually borrowed money from the club, and also depending on the amount that was actually put into the club by the individual. After the war, the teachers struggled to bring back the club because of so many other commitments. Currently, there is something similar going on among the teachers (Susu). "Susu" is a new club system where, at the end of each month, every teacher in the association or club contributes a certain amount and it is given to one or two teachers. The head of the various sections (primary, junior and high school) collects the money for their sections directly from the principal's office before payment is made to individual teachers. The principal is very approachable. There is a counsellor in the school. "If any teacher is going astray, he will discuss the problem with the teacher and find solutions". The club system is a new way that teachers can get access to money to carry out "small projects". The process continues until everyone in the club has received the same sum of money. The money is deducted at source right from the principal's office. The head of each section is responsible for deducting the money.

As explained by several informants, the teachers in the academic affairs department work together as a team and generally assist all the teachers when they have problems. When students are failing, they examine the reasons for that and look for solutions. "They investigate failing students, meet regularly and get access to students' academic records". Among other duties, those in this

department see students' performances in different subjects, and introduce new subjects and drop others at the beginning of each year depending on a careful evaluation based on the current and future society's needs. One teacher recounted how they used to have physical education, but it was dropped. There was RTC, but it was also dropped because of the war. The academic committee meets regularly, but there is a major meeting at the end of each year when students are promoted to the next class.

The disciplinary committee meets regularly to look for solutions to problems such as student misbehaviour, late arrival at school and problems with alcohol. The priest assists the disciplinary department. Teachers are also recommended to the principal by the school counsellor, especially in cases where the principal is part of the solution. Teachers explained that they had had a meeting three days ago and what dominated the meeting was coming up with various strategies to improve student behaviour. Teachers agreed that the disciplinary committee met quite often because of the many problems that they have to handle such as "students getting drunk, and late coming to school". "The priest is part of the disciplinary committee".

"Events and the change of time" have made teachers constantly rethink their strategies and focus; they explained that the issue of who punishes was debated and it was concluded that it should be left in the hands of the disciplinary committee. In their last meeting, it was concluded that all cases that required punishment should be forwarded to the disciplinary department. The disciplinary committee works together in solving problems almost on a daily basis. Each department works together as a team and has almost weekly meetings.

The sports department has become very important at Anabela High School. Teachers explained that the marked improvement in this department has attracted students to the school. Inter-school games have become very popular and students practice seriously before major games. Usually, parents are informed as to when the students will return when they go out for various sporting activities, especially during inter-school games. During these activities, school players are taken care of, for example, they are given free transportation, and drinking water is available to all players, and sometimes, food is even provided. The sports department has even opened its own bank account. One teacher recounted it as follows.

> Students have to practice before the game. We are with them in the field and give them water. After the match, we transport some of them back to their homes. We usually inform their parents that we have a game and the time that the child will return home. After the games, we feed the players and we make sure that everyone is fine.

The sports department motivates students using various methods. "Students who perform well in sports are given scholarships ranging from full tuition to partial tuition free, however, these students must also achieve academically". Students receiving these types of scholarships "must prove their ability through academic performance". They have separate forms they fill in each day in

school. They must mark their names in the morning when they arrive in the school compound and also before they go home on a daily basis.

The teachers are very cooperative at Anabela High School. Teachers trust each other, and always discuss both personal and school-related problems with each other and look for solutions. When a teacher is absent, he/she will talk to other teachers who will cover his/her classes. This has really been very helpful in the smooth running of the school and "students hardly go without a teacher for what so ever reason". The disciplinary and sports committees work as teams. There are two major workshops for professional development within each year, and usually trainers come from the MOE and sometimes from the teachers' college, including one of their own teachers.

Staff professional development is undertaken twice a year, usually during the first and second semesters, to sharpen the intellect of the teachers to achieve the goals of the school. "The trainers are usually from the Ministry of Education, especially from the University of Liberia". While the student leadership provides its skills in leading students, be it in sports, social activities, or student–student dialogue/counselling, the SPM concentrates on solving or settling student disputes. All these various stakeholders in the school work together, searching for better ways for teaching and solving problems collaboratively, for the general progress of all the students in Anabela High School.

8.4 Shared values and vision

Shared values and vision is another component that helped in shaping Anabela High School. Factors to be examined in this domain include Anabela High School's vision, which is "strive to achieve", and how the vision was arrived at. On the other hand, shared values found in the school will also be examined, and these include the school ode, the scorpion, the school flag and the mode of greeting, the church and prayers.

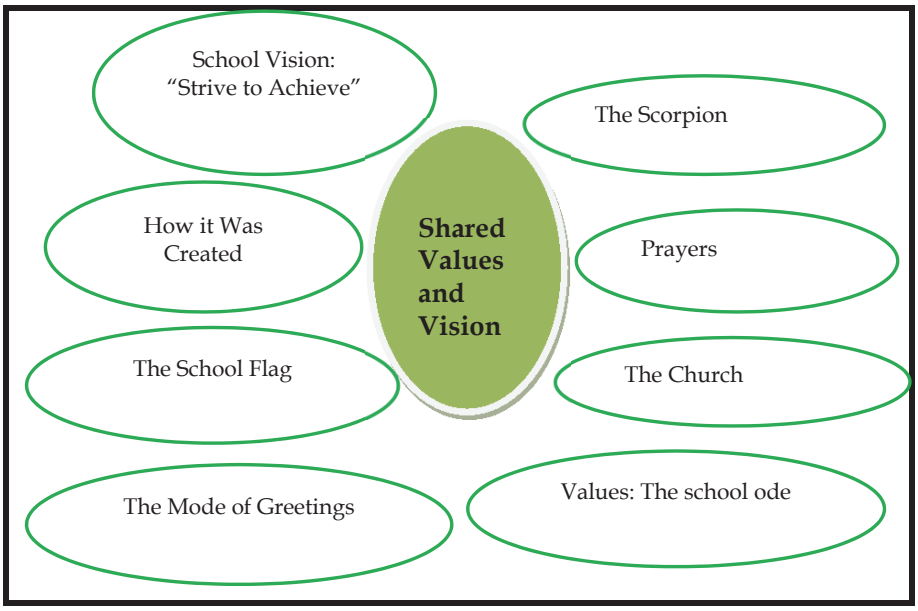

FIGURE 20 Shared values and vision

8.4.1 The school vision and how it was created

As explained earlier, the school vision of Anabela High School is "strive to achieve". As explained by the authorities of the school, the vision is to make sure that all the "students who pass through the school make a significant mark in public life, either in the public or private sector, so that they will always remember that the foundation of their lives was built" in Anabela High School. It is suggested that because the founder of the school had this vision of striving to achieve, he rose from a businessman to a priest, and established a church and school and was honoured with the title of Bishop.

As the principal and other informants explained, "the founder of the institution's main goal was to see to it that in the long run the institution became a vocational school that will train young men and women to form the middle class job population, and he believed that students would graduate with some vocational skills, mainly in the areas of science and engineering". It was from this that the school vision was founded. He believed that when students came to his school with this mindset, they would have to work hard and subsequently achieve their aims when they graduated. "The vision was founded in 1959 when the school was created". Many teachers have suggested that the school vision must not have been the idea of the founder alone, and that it must have been a church-based idea drawn from the experiences of Rev. Fr. Gooding. "The founder was a priest; it must have been team work from the church".

8.4.2 The school values at Anabela High School

The principal and other informants identified the school values in Anabela High School as including the school ode, the scorpion, the school flag, the church and prayers. Included in the school values is the school ode, which, according to the principal, primarily serves to explain the values of the school, and what the school intends to make out of the students that pass through the school. For example, when considering the first line, "Converge ye sons and daughters all" the principal explained that, it means the institution gives its students freedom and provides hope for the future to help them to see their way through the school.

Another school value is the scorpion, which symbolizes "hope, perseverance and strength". The principal explained that "The scorpion can survive in most terrains. Be it in wetland, dry land, or even in the deserts. Scorpions are active in all seasons. They survive in difficult environments". He also explained that the scorpion carries along with it the school motto. No matter the difficulties, no matter the problems, the scorpion perseveres. Relating to the students, the principal explained that when students pass through difficult situations, it only helps to mold them and prepare them for the future.

The school flag is another value. On it, there is "the school name, ink, books and a bible". From the principal's explanation, the name of the school "reminds the students, staff, parents, community and others, what the school stands for. The ink symbolizes the writing materials. The book stands for knowledge, which students will receive, and the bible stands for guidance by Christian principles".

The mode for greetings: It was said that students greeted visitors when the visitors entered the classroom by saying, for example, "Good Morning Mr Smith, how are you?" Usually, the visitors will respond by saying "I am fine". According to the principal, "This is how visitors are welcomed to our classrooms".

The church: The priest explained that the Episcopal Church is a sacramental church. He said, "We believe in the sacrament and we use the church to preach the word of Christ". The church gave birth to the school because the school was to be used for evangelization. The church symbolizes the presence of Christ.

Prayers: The priest also explained that prayers symbolize the presence of God. Students are taught how to pray and time is provided for prayers. He concluded that students at Anabela High School were not asked to change their faith, but they were asked to reflect and change their ways of behaviour to become good citizens and children of God. The students are taught various ways of praying, and this was very necessary after the civil wars, because the whole society was confronted with a variety of problems.

8.5 Supportive conditions

In Anabela High School, there were supportive conditions in place, which greatly helped to transform the school. These supportive conditions included the SPM, staff meetings with a suitable time and place, the *Student Handbook*, scholarships for students, there were also mechanisms in place for determining and rewarding both staff and students, supportive learning and staff development were available, and, of course, the school fence, free food program after the wars, and the staff being carefully divided into various departments provided an avenue for the staff to work in teams in areas where they were best suited.

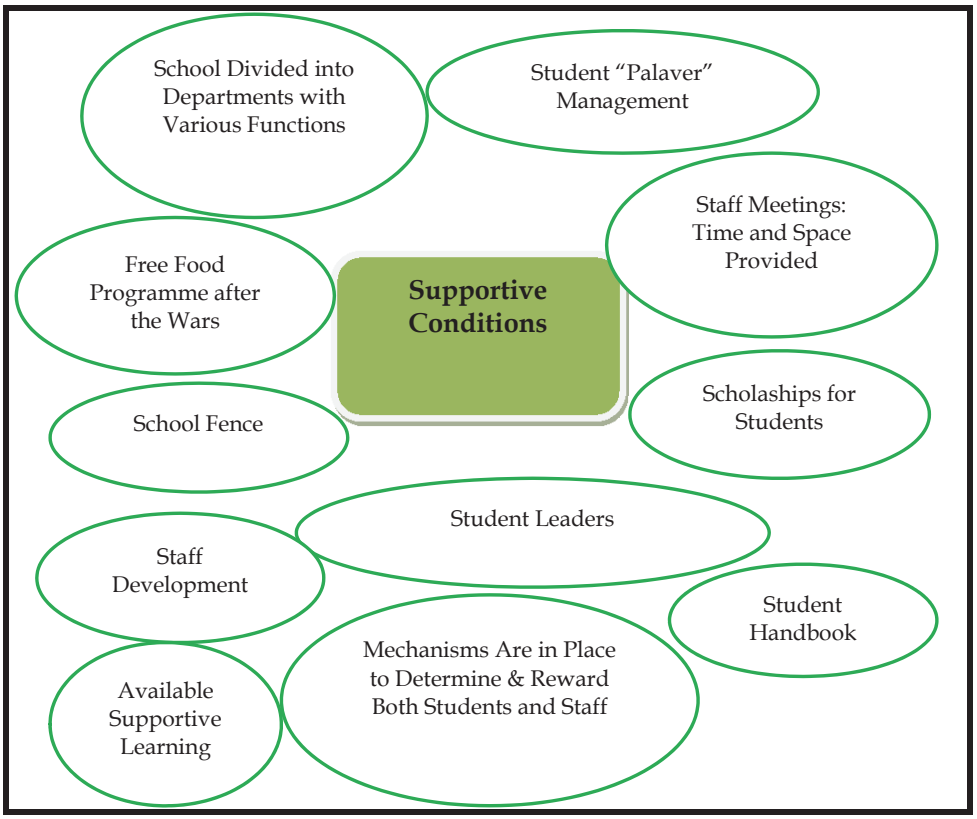

FIGURE 21 Supportive conditions

8.5.1 The school is divided into various departments: How they work together to produce the results they desire

Anabela High School was divided into three departments by the current principal with each department providing different support functions. According to various informants, the disciplinary committee has to make sure

that "students abide by the rules and regulations of the school". It meets regularly to look for solutions to problems such as student behaviour and arriving late at school. They explained that the priest assists the disciplinary department and teachers are also recommended to the principal by the school counsellor, especially for cases in which the principal is part of the solution. Teachers meet regularly in this department to come up with various strategies to improve student behaviour. "Those in this department face case by case challenges almost on a daily basis". All cases that require punishment are forwarded to the disciplinary department and they work together in solving problems. The other departments also work together and they have almost weekly meetings. They have been appreciated for gradually eradicating chaos in Anabela High School, especially after the wars.

The academic department worked hard to improve teaching and student achievement. Teachers who were interviewed who are in this department explained that "they generally assist all the teachers when they have problems". When students are failing, they also "look for reasons and solutions". They "meet regularly and get access to students' academic records". They also "see students' performances in different subjects". It was also explained that it is the responsibility of this group to introduce new subjects and drop others at the beginning of each year depending on a careful evaluation based on the current and future society's needs. The academic committee meets regularly, but there is a major meeting at the end of each year when students are promoted to the next class.

The sports department has also been very supportive. School players are taken good care of, with the school "providing transportation, food, among other facilities". The sports department has even "opened its own bank account and also motivates students" using various methods. For example, students who perform well in sports are given scholarships ranging from full free tuition to partial free tuition. Their good performances, especially in inter-college sports, have attracted many students to their school. Their new school uniform has not only helped to distinguish Anabela High School students from other school students, but it has helped to prevent non-students from entering the campus.

8.5.2 The PTA, the free food program and staff meetings

As explained by the PTA chairman and others, the PTA also supports the teachers when it comes to discipline and the general functioning of the school. There are five executive members in the PTA and they are the "chairman, vice-chairman, the secretary, treasurer and chaplain". The *PTA Handbook* of the school guides them in decision-making. According to the PTA chairman, the PTA visits the school from time to time to see how the teaching is carried out. They visit all classes. There is a PTA meeting at the end of every marking period to see the progress of the students.

The PTA chairman explained that the free food program introduced at the end of the war brought many students to Anabela High School. According to

him, the free food program is only currently available to government and community schools. When the free food program ended, the principal arranged with outsiders to come and sell food to the students. The days, time and prices were agreed on by the principal and the food retailers. Some teachers recounted how the free food program used to help many students, especially those from poor homes.

There are regular staff meetings, especially at the beginning and at the end of the year. There are other meetings during the year. At the beginning of the year meeting, new teachers get their contracts, and teachers' handbooks and they are introduced to the school system. It was also explained that the staff usually meet in the principal's office because the staff room is small. From my observation, the vice-principal, school secretary, the registrar, cashier and sports department all have various offices. Textbooks are shared by teachers, when need be. "During meetings, teachers come together and share ideas and sometimes make recommendations to the principal". The current principal undertook a total reorganization of various departments in the school and teachers were placed in departments where they could perform better.

8.5.3 The collective responsibilities of teachers, the school fence, and rewards to both students and teachers

The collective responsibility of teachers has played a major role in changing the violent mentality of students after fourteen years of civil wars, even though not totally. According to one teacher, "At the moment, we have experienced a certain degree of discipline in the school". The function of the academic committee has helped teachers to work in accordance with the curriculum. During meetings, issues are discussed and sometimes solutions are arrived at or other meetings are planned for further discussions. There are chapel programs on Wednesdays where students exhibit their talents, for example, they practice how to speak in public, do different recitations and debate. Teachers always accompany the students.

Various informants, including the student leaders, also praised the fact that the school fence had "really helped in preventing the students from going home at will and also outsiders from coming into the campus". A few informants specifically mentioned that parents were really happy with the fence because they could monitor their children – knowing exactly when they would leave school and when to expect them home. It was also mentioned that, as part of the social events in the school, there was a Christmas party for all the staff, and the event is used to reward the staff members who have been outstanding in their duties. The rewards take the form of "cash, certificates and clothes among others". Teachers and students who have done extremely well in various areas are equally rewarded on this occasion. There are various scholarships for students: some come from the PTA, some from the sports department and the rest from other sources. The student leadership and the SPMT have provided enormous support for the whole system to function well.

The SPM has been credited for playing an important role in "stopping the chaos that used to happen" in their school.

8.6 Shared personal practice

Shared personal practice was also a key component available in Anabela High School. Here, the class "pass" system, shared teaching methods, peer support and mentoring, and continuous inquiry have played an important part in the success of Anabela High School.

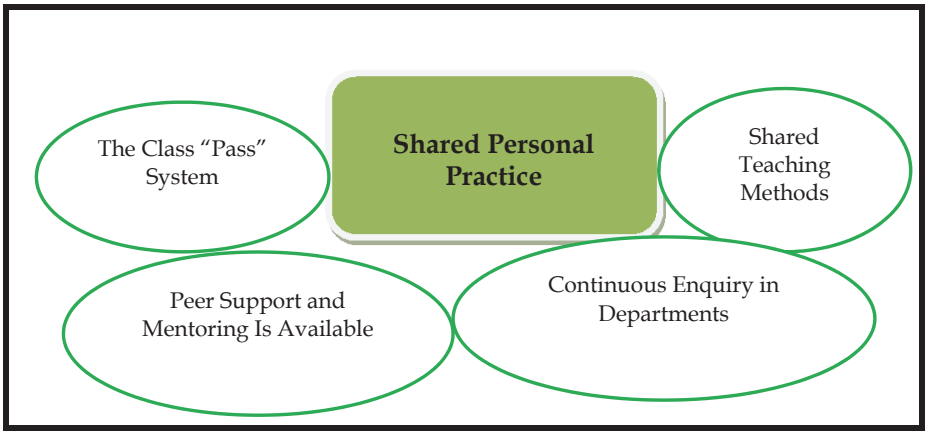

FIGURE 22 Shared personal practice

Teachers explained how they share good classroom practices with their colleagues. One teacher recounted that when he was teaching at the primary, his friends admired his methods (incorporating teaching with drawings in history topics) and he shared it with his friends. He also taught them the school ode and songs. Teachers explained that when the head teacher visits a classroom, he offers advice and support to other teachers when need be. Another teacher also recounted how students used to stand outside his classroom every morning until the student "pass" system was introduced. When the teacher first implemented it in his class, it was effective, and then he shared it with other teachers. Currently, the "pass" system has been implemented throughout the school. The head of academic affairs, together with other subject head teachers, provides constant peer and mentoring support to all teachers.

Continuous enquiry plays a major part in providing good practices in Anabela High School. According to many teachers who were interviewed, while the disciplinary affairs department continuously look for various ways to improve student behaviour, the academic affairs department continuously seeks for better ways to improve teaching and student learning, and the sports

department is continuously seeking better ways to improve sports in the school; students are motivated through the award of scholarships, and high performance, especially in inter-college sports, has attracted many students into the school. Peer support and mentoring is available and, according to one teacher, "it keeps everyone progressing and reduces the stress level that would have resulted to isolation".

8.7 Overcoming the psychological challenges

Under the psychological factors, the ills of war, the trauma from war, constant reminders from the mass grave in the campus and other factors all worked together to remind both students and teachers in Anabela High School of what went wrong. The church in the campus provided a solution – a place where they could all open up and share their sorrows. The school counsellor was there to help counsel both students and teachers, and the SPMT helped to settle problems between students.

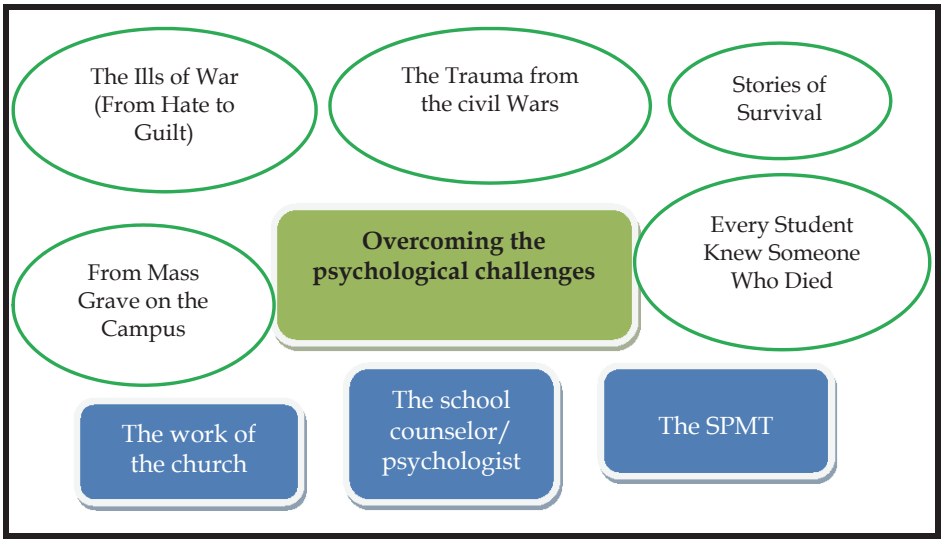

FIGURE 23 Overcoming the psychological challenges

The way that the psychological effects of the civil wars were overcame, played a part in building Anabela High School. After the wars, the first and noticeable repercussion was hate, especially ethnic or tribal-related hatred. With more counselling, peacebuilding teaching and the work of the SPM group, the hate gradually turned into guilt, as both students and teachers realized how much harm they had inflicted on innocent people and the extent to which everyone was suffering. Another psychological torture came from what they had gone through during the war. While for some, the scenes of dead bodies could not

escape from their minds, others had "visions of suffering" and "living in fear"; and for some, it was the constant "dreaming of people chasing to kill" them that kept them awake at night sometimes.

Stories of survival were among the psychological tortures from the war. One informant recounted how food was so scarce that they used to "travel the whole night to other nearby regions which had farms with ready food". According to the narrator, it was a common role that "you had to fetch some food too for the gangs that you will meet on your way back". If this was not done, your own food could be taken away. If it was risky to leave your community, then it was even more risky to travel to unknown places in search of food at night. According to the vice-principal, "some people went and never returned". Another informant explained how "many people survived during the war by feeding on fish from the sea". According to him, the fish was so abundant that it was very easy to catch with a fishing hook. However, as he further explained, during the war, "so many people died and there was no time to bury the dead and most of them were simply dumped at sea" and the fish were feeding on those dead bodies. After getting this insight from the informant, the link between the dead bodies and the fish remained in my mind, especially when I was eating.

The vice-principal also explained that research conducted in the school to examine the extent of trauma caused by the war on students revealed that "at least every student knew of someone who died during the war". There is a mass grave in the campus, and those who try to forget the past are constantly reminded psychologically when they see the mass grave. The above challenges were overcome using the church, the school counsellor and others like the SPMT. While the church provided a healing program where both teachers and students could open up and discuss what they were going through, the school counsellor/psychologist helped in counselling both teachers and students, and the student palaver management team took care of settling disputes between students.

8.8 Physical factors: a reminder and/or solution

According to my observations, the physical factors played a key role in reminding the people what went wrong and also showing them the way to move forward. These physical factors as it can be seen from figure 24 below, included the signboards in the community, the church, the mass grave in the campus, a disfigured population, the *Student Handbook* and other signs such as the remains of destroyed buildings. These factors were a reminder of what went wrong, and some provided a solution.

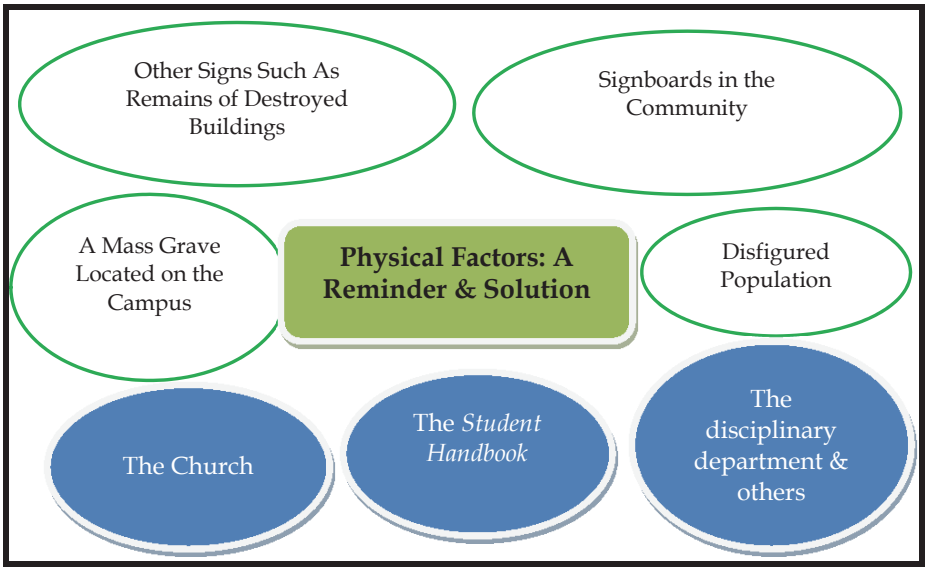

FIGURE 24 Physical factors: a reminder and solution

FIGURE 25 Signboard in the community

As can be seen from figure 25 above, on the signboard from right to left it says violence should be stopped for a better Liberia to be built "Stop violence for a better Liberia". In the middle, a man raises his hand to slap a woman and two children are trying wholeheartedly to restrain the man from doing so (the fact that it is marked with a big "X" means that it is wrong), and to the left there is a couple with two children (a happy family). This thus reminds the community of the ills of torture, contrasting a violent-cantered family with one living in peace and harmony. On the signboard, people are reminded that in order to build a better Liberia, they should "Stop domestic violence and protect women and children".

FIGURE 26 Remains of destroyed buildings as a reminder of the past

Signs such as the remains of destroyed buildings, such as the one on figure 26 above, are common and are another physical reminder of the effects of the wars. Even though the above picture was not taken in Anabela High School's immediate environment, remains of destroyed buildings like this one above are, however, common in Anabela High School's environment. I saw some of the destroyed and abandoned buildings in Anabela High School's environment, but due to the fact that they were along the highway and it was dangerous to stop, I could not take photos of those abandoned buildings. In addition, the disfigured population reminded the population of what they had gone through.

FIGURE 27 The mass grave located on the campus

This mass grave on the campus starts from behind the bamboo pole supported with the blue wood and extends to the right. Following a careful examination of the area, and according to my observations, it is deserted and is yet another reminder of what went wrong.

FIGURE 28 The church located on the campus

With the combined psychological and physical factors, the church provided healing for the trauma and other challenges that they were suffering from. The healing program is structured in a way that, on Wednesdays, the teacher in charge of the week will take a class to the church and they will pray together, sing and praise God. This provides an avenue where both students and teachers (both Christians and non-Christians) could open up to each other about what they had gone through. Through these discussions, they came to understand that all of them had suffered so much during the civil wars and that it was necessary to end the hate for one another and start a new life. No one wanted to see a return to civil war.

If the church brought Christians and non-Christians together and helped to turn things around for Anabela High School, then it would be wise to re-examine it to see what other factors may have aided this process. Probably it was the *Student Handbook* and the disciplinary department that made it possible. While the disciplinary department maintained order in the school, the school handbook explains explicitly all matters concerning student school life. Clear directions are given on matters of student conduct, classroom regulations, report cards, duties of parents and guardians, and the rules and regulations are really explicit. While article 23 of the school rules and regulations made it mandatory for students from grades 5 to 12 to carry a hymnal and prayer book, attend chapel or special assemblies, it forbid students from leaving the school campus before the end of the school day. Article 26 states that every student who registers in the school agrees to the rules and regulations of the school and that the students are regarded as being on probation. The student conduct report is as follows:

1. Excellent
2. Very Good
3. Good
4. Fair
5. Poor 1st Warning
6. Very Poor 2nd Warning
7. Bad 3rd Warning
8. Automatically Dropped

Source: School archive 3, *Anabela High School Handbook*, article 28 of the school rules and regulations.

Combined physical and psychological factors not only brought students and teachers in Anabela High School together to handle their common problems, it equally gave them the opportunity to express themselves on the suffering they had gone through, and the trauma they were facing, and they found themselves in a position where they could only move forward. They agreed that war was "wicked to everyone and that no one actually gained from killing one another". With the bible classes preaching about the love of one another, it only opened

the minds of Anabela High School students and teachers to seeing the world beyond greed, hate and war – a world that is full of love and a world in which no one lives in isolation or fear.

8.9 The international community and other NGOs

As explained by the principal and other informants, the international community and other NGOs were very instrumental in helping Anabela High School to overcome its challenges. Some of these organizations that had direct effect on Anabela High School included the following and their activities: UNICEF was involved in ALPs, UNESCO was involved in curriculum development, WFP was involved in the school feeding program, the EU was involved in school reconstruction, the World Bank was involved in capacity building, UNOPS was involved in the construction of the school fence and the UNHR was involved in a general resettlement program, especially for the teachers. There were also other NGOs such as CHAL and Anabela High School Alumni Association.

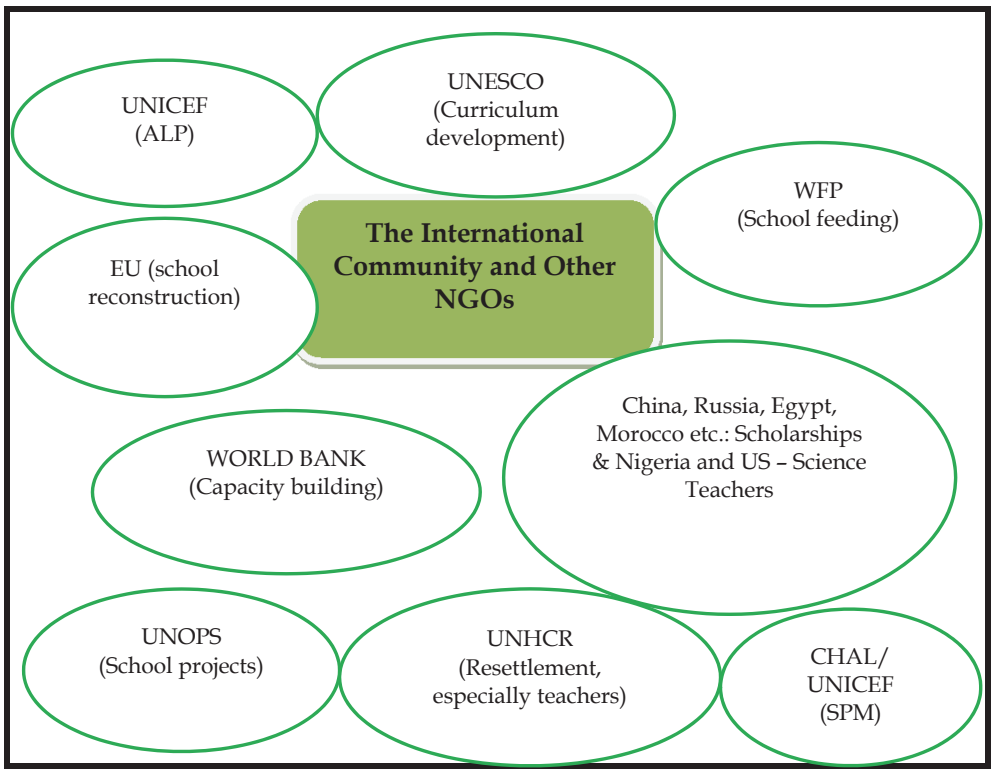

FIGURE 29 The international community and other NGOs

As stated earlier, the international community and NGOs in Liberia contributed to the development of Anabela High School after the wars. The principal recounted about how each of the above organizations like UNICEF was involved in the ALP and also in providing instructional materials, and furniture. For fourteen years, many students had had no education at all. When the wars ended, students of different age groups were in the same classrooms. In grade 3, for example, some students were 18 years old. UNICEF coordinated this program where some of the students were moved to the night school and others were fast-tracked. From various informants, and also from the Education Sector Plan (2010), it is confirmed that teachers were also rapidly trained to meet the shortages in schools.

UNESCO was involved in the national curriculum development and literacy programs. The EU areas of involvement included school reconstruction and financial management. UNOPS was also involved in school reconstruction. The World Bank was involved in capacity building and ECD (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010, p. 19). The WFP was involved in school feeding for primary schools. The UNHCR was involved in repatriation and the resettlement of teachers and human rights education. Countries such as China, Egypt, Russia and Morocco give scholarships, among others, to Liberian students. It is also important to note here that only a few partners have been mentioned and only some of their major activities have been outlined (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010, p. 20). There are other NGOs such as CHAL and the Anabela High School Alumni Association that also helped.

8.10 The government education policies

The government plays a central role in the success of Anabela High School. It draws up and implements government educational policies and reforms that guide all the schools in Liberia. It takes care of teacher training, both government and private. It is responsible for the improvement in gender imbalance, especially in schools, addresses the challenges facing the educational sector in the country, coordinates the international partners, set goals for the sector and it is also responsible for shaping education in Liberia, including that in Anabela High School.

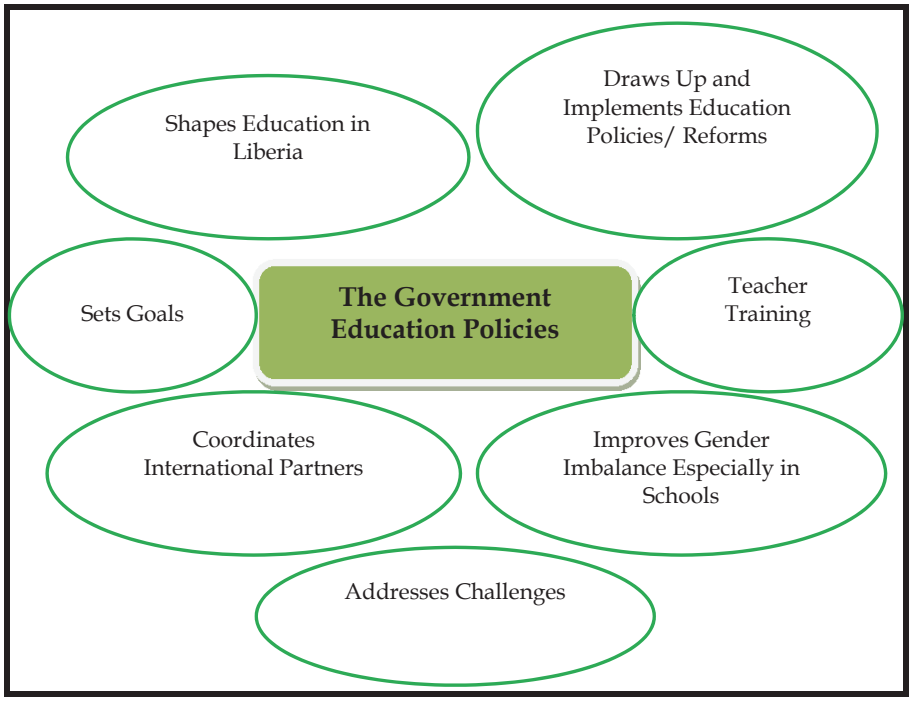

FIGURE 30 The government education policies

The major education objective of the GoL is to make education more relevant for the socio-economic development of the country. The government's main aim is to provide basic education (formal and informal) to all citizens, strengthen national unification and integration, and also ensure the equitable geographic distribution of education opportunities and access to and quality education for all citizens (UNESCO, 2010).

Article 6 of the Constitution of Liberia of 6 January 1986 stipulates that "The Republic shall, because of the vital role assigned to individual citizens under this constitution for the social, economic, and political wellbeing of Liberia, provide equal access to educational opportunities and facilities to the extent of available resources" (UNESCO, 2010, p. 2). While the Education Law of 1973 recognizes the right of all Liberian children to education, the Education Law of 2001 and 2002 made education compulsory and free for all children between the ages of 6 and 16 (UNESCO, 2010; Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

To shape education in Liberia, the government set targets in the education domain and shapes them with its major education policies and reforms. Some of these documents that have impacted education in Liberia include the Liberia Education Sector Master Plan 2000–2010 with 2015 as its major deadline and the Education Sector Review of 2000 volume 11 are seen as the foundation of current Liberian education policies (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010). Other main documents include the MDGs, PRS, the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child, labour laws and health policy. The MDGs are derived from the EfA goals (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010). While 2015 is a targeted date where all children should be able to complete primary education, 2005 was a targeted date to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary schools, and 2015 for all education levels. The EfA goals include an improvement in early childhood care and development, and will ensure that by 2015 all children have free compulsory primary education, meeting the needs of young people through appropriate learning and life skills programs, and that Liberia will achieve total adult literacy by 2015. The PRS of 2008 was built on security, economic reconstruction, governance and the rule of law, and infrastructure and basic services (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

The new Education Law of 2011, which is just another milestone, is a law through which the government is determined to shape its education system. The Law and the LEAMP (2011) are carefully drafted and touch upon minute but vital areas such as service learning – a teaching and learning system that requires the students to develop and apply knowledge and skills through good projects that meet the needs of the community. This is an area that requires the combined efforts of vocational, secondary education and higher education institutions. What is also extremely vital is the incorporation of social and emotional learning (a process where both children and adults learn how to recognize and manage their emotions in a positive, responsible and constructive way) into the law. The LEAR volume four (2011) also integrates sports, athletics and physical education into the curriculum, and stresses other vital areas such as staff development, teacher education and a policy of zero tolerance of violence in schools (Liberia Education Law, 2011).

The GoL is aware of the role its teachers play in the success of the education sector in the country. The expanding education system means the need for more teachers. Forty-six per cent of government expenditure at the primary level is on teachers and they constitute one-third of civil servants nationally. The government has increased the number of training institutions to train quality teachers and more teachers to meet with the increasing demand. The Liberian PRS estimates that Liberia needs to train 1000 teachers a year to meet with the increased enrolment in primary schools (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

Teacher training institutions in Liberia include the KRTTI and ZRTTI and another in Webbo County became operational in 2011. All these institutions grant "C" certificates for primary school teachers. The MOE is strengthening the granting of "B" and "A" certificates and degree-granting in both colleges and universities. Teachers with "B" and "A" certificates are supposed to teach in lower and upper secondary schools. The government intends to establish a well-coordinated system where teachers of a particular category can be further trained to achieve a higher qualification (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010). The MOE estimates that about 200 to 300 teachers ought to be trained to meet with the demand in upper secondary school level "A" certificates/diplomas in

education. It is mandatory for every teacher to have in-service training once every three years. The NASP, the NTAL and other subject associations are encouraged to conduct workshops for teacher improvement (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

Gender imbalance is a major challenge in schools and in the teaching sector. The EMIS data indicates that only 21 per cent of teachers are female. At the primary level, this number is 22 per cent. The government is working to improve the gender balance and is developing strategies to attract and retain females in the teaching field. Age is another problem. Less than 3 per cent of teachers are below 30 years and 38 per cent are above 50 years (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010). Teacher training institutions are still not equipping their teachers to handle physical and learning disabilities in schools and subject teachers, such as mathematics and science teachers, are in constant shortage, especially in rural areas (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010).

The government has been at the centre of educational transformation in Liberia, forming partnerships with international donors. These partners and their activities include UNICEF being involved in the ALP, and in providing instructional materials and furniture. UNESCO has been involved in the national curriculum development and literacy programs. The EU areas of involvement include school reconstruction and financial management. The World Bank is involved in capacity building and ECD (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010, p. 19). The WFP was involved in school feeding for primary schools. The UNHCR was involved in repatriation and the resettlement of teachers and human rights education. Countries such as China and Egypt give scholarships, among others, to Liberian students. It is also important to note here that only a few partners have been mentioned and only some of their major activities have been outlined (Liberia Education Sector Plan, 2010, p. 20).

The announcement in December 2011 by the Minister of Education and the Deputy Minister for Secondary Education on the latest improvements in teachers' salaries aimed at handling some of the challenges in the sector and, thus, improving education in Liberia. According to this announcement, teachers with an MA were to earn 500 USD, while those with a BA or BSc would earn 350 USD. The ministers also explained that the science laboratories would be improved and that agreements had been signed with different countries such as Nigeria and the United States to send science teachers to Liberia to help meet the shortage. Addressing the lack of teachers in rural areas, the ministers explained that incentives would be given to teachers who accepted work in rural areas. The Minister of Education and the Deputy Minister for Secondary Education also announced that teachers´ education at the University of Liberia would be free and each student would henceforth receive 30 USD as an allowance. Another major section of the announcement focused on the improvement of capacity building for the Rural Teacher Training Institutions in Kakata, Zorzor and Webbo.

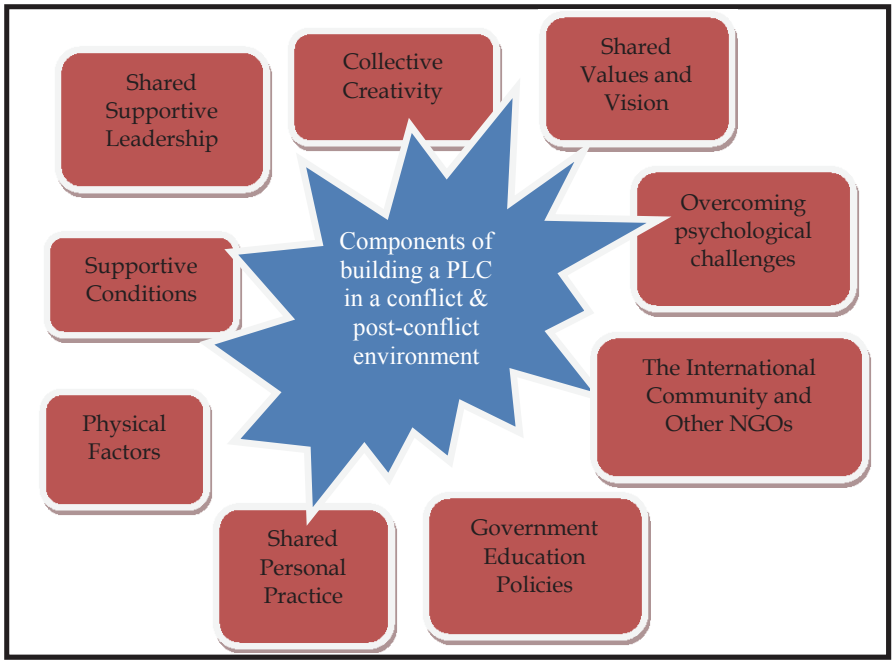

FIGURE 31 The core components of building a PLC in a conflict and post-conflict environment

Figure 31 above is a summary of the core components of building a PLC in a school in a conflict and post-conflict environment. These components include shared supportive leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, shared personal practice, the international community and other NGOs, physical factors, overcoming psychological challenges and government educational policies. All these components have been explained in section 8.

9 DISCUSSION/SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The study begins with a brief introduction acknowledging the fact that even though researchers such as Hord, (2003), Bullough (2007) and Stoll et al. (2006) have written much on PLCs, none has focused on building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments. PLCs are defined and the literature dwells on the frameworks or core components of PLCs, which include shared supportive leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions and shared personal practice. While using the change process, steps/practices that support the building of PLCs are also explained and the section ends with the challenges in building PLCs, especially in high schools.

Conflict and post-conflict environments have been defined and I suggest that in order to make our societies safer and eliminate war conflicts, the international community should work together with every nation to prevent conflict – something that the United States and the EU are currently doing, for example, with the work of the Rapid Reaction Force and AFRICOM. As suggested by Rustad and Biningsbo (2012), if natural resources did indeed play a key role in the civil wars, at the end of the conflict, a peace settlement should really incorporate the distribution mechanism in order to come up with a lasting peace. There should also be peace keeping in post-conflict environments, similar to what is currently going on in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Collier, 2009).

Collier (2009) has also suggested that the UN Security Council could commit additional security forces to those states. In the states where there is limited accountability by those elected to power, those in power should be forced to implement real accountability methods, including a check and balance system (Collier, 2009). Small states can also reap large-scale economies by forming regional economic integration alliances. The problems of ethnic diversity and resource curses should be addressed and basic services should be provided to all citizens (Collier, 2009).

For us to better understand a conflict and post-conflict environment, I have explained the characteristics of conflict and post-conflict environments, including the unpredictability of life, increased rates of crimes, death and injury, the massive displacement of people, hunger and starvation, unresolved

political and ethnic conflicts, and widespread destruction of infrastructure and property. By looking at the conflict in Rwanda and Sierra Leone, problems that education, especially schools, faces during conflicts are explained. Some of these problems include the lack of teachers, especially in post-conflict scenarios. In Sierra Leone, the shortage was due to the fact that thousands of teachers were killed, maimed or displaced during the civil war. In Rwanda, especially at the National University of Rwanda, many of their teachers went into exile during the war and never returned, some were in prison serving time for crimes they committed during the war, and others, including professors and researchers, were killed during the war. As a result, the university had to depend on foreigners and foreign lecturers.

For the reader to better understand Liberia as a conflict environment, I have examined the country under its pre-conflict era from 1822 to 1980, its conflict era from 1980 to 2005, and its post-conflict era from 2005 to the present, and the education system in Liberia is also explained. The political, economic and social factors are examined in each of the three eras above. In pre-conflict Liberia, the political set up of the country was problematic, with two distinct classes – the Americo-Liberians (the ruling class) and the indigenes living in undeveloped countryside, and, for over a century, with no voting rights. From 1847, when Liberia got its independence, to 1980, no indigene has served as the president. In this era, the Liberian government gave very little support to education, and it was left mostly in the hands of missionaries and concentrated mostly in Monrovia. The apprenticeship system was not a success, unemployment was rampant and many indigenes depended on contract labour.

The conflict era of 1980 to 2005 witnessed death, genocide and widespread destruction of schools, leaving almost a whole generation of Liberians with little or no education. The President Samuel Doe era was followed by fourteen years of civil wars, which brought grave consequences to the nation, including many dead, and the destruction of schools, which led to fourteen years of no education for many Liberian children. Both teachers and students had been killed during the civil wars. While some of the children served as child soldiers during the war, some became refugees in other countries and many were displaced in the country.

In post-conflict Liberia, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected as president of Liberia in 2005. With the destruction of almost all the sectors in the country, reconstruction of post-conflict Liberia has not been easy. With the work of the Peace and Reconciliation Commission, the UN peacekeeping force, and the peaceful environment in Liberia since 2005, many Liberians have returned to the country and the education sector has been reformed. Many education institutions that were destroyed during the war have been reconstructed and many teachers are being trained to meet with the shortage of teachers.

9.1 Research process and methods

The main aim of this research was to find out how a PLC is built in a conflict and post-conflict environment and the major research questions were as follows:

- How is a professional learning community built in a school in a conflict and post-conflict environment?
- How and what core components should be used in building a professional learning community in a school in a conflict and post-conflict environment?

Other research sub questions were aimed at finding out what core components of PLCs existed in the case school, what challenges the school faced in its development process and how those challenges were handled, what other challenges are still being faced by the school and how the school is handling them or how it intends to tackle them, and what other factors contributed to the development of the case school.

A qualitative research method was used to gather data because the main aim of the research was to find out how a PLC is built in a conflict and post-conflict environment. The best way to collect the data, therefore, was to interview the teachers and other stakeholders who have been at the centre of Anabela High School's transformation, to observe practices in the school, and to review the available documents to understand the policies and other factors that have helped to shape Anabela High School's transformation. Anabela High School as a case was selected using certain characteristics of a good school and expert testimony. The qualitative research method, description of the qualitative method, rationale for selecting the qualitative method, how Anabela High School was selected and a brief history of Anabela High School, the data-collection sources, interview design and the procedures for analysing the data were explained.

9.2 Findings/Results

To answer the first research question, "How is a PLC built in a school in a conflict and post-conflict environment", thematic analysis was used and data was transcribed, coded and analysed. The themes came from the text and some from the research sub questions. These themes are now briefly explained.

Shared Supportive Leadership: The principal, like in previous research (Hord, 2003; Oliver et al, 2009), for better administration and leadership, shares his power with twelve other persons or departments, and they include the LSB, the vice-principal, registrar, cashier and secretary, department heads and their various departments, the student leaders, the PTA and the SPMT. Many teachers and administrative staff who were interviewed said that the principal had really been supportive in their work. Just like in Cottonwood Creek School

(Hord and Rutherford, 1998) where teachers attended meetings at various levels, at AHS teachers attended meetings and participated in the selection of those teachers and students who receive awards for hard work. The views of Morrow (2010) that "The administrator plays the role of facilitator and demonstrates an ability to create a structure that promotes participatory decision making among all represented groups within the organization" (Morrow, 2010, p. 37) are really true in AHS. All the stakeholders play an active role in the running of the school. Some stakeholders like teachers and the PTA chairperson are rewarded by allowing them to bring one student - tuition free to the school.

Collective Creativity: Collective creativity which is another core component of a PLC was identified at AHS. How the school club, which existed before the war, was used to collectively improve the lives of teachers is explained, and the new club (Susu) that has replaced the previous one with similar functions is presented. These activities show how collective creativity can be practice beyond the classroom and school to benefit the teachers. The school counsellor helps both students and teachers. Teachers in Anabela High School are divided into three departments, and in each of them, teachers work together as a team to collectively seek solutions to their challenges and build Anabela High School. This is in view of Dufour (2004, p. 1) definition of collective creativity as a "systematic process in which teachers work together to analyse and improve their classroom practice". According to him, teachers work in teams, engage in an on-going cycle of questions or inquiry that promote deep team learning and this has been linked to student achievement. Collective creativity is done in AHS in meetings and various departments.

Shared Values and Vision: Anabela High School's vision is "strive to achieve" and it was established in 1959 when the school was founded. The principal and some other teachers have suggested that the school vision must not have been the idea of the founder alone; it must have been a church-based concept drawn from the experiences of the Rev. Fr. Gooding. "The founder was a priest; it must have been team work from the church". This vision has a broad appeal and gives the students faith and hope in their lives and studies (Hunter, 2013). The school values include the school ode, the scorpion, the school flag, the church and prayers. While Andrews and Lewis (2007) see shared vision as crucial for the success of any PLC, Stoll et al. (2006) conclude that a shared value base in all PLCs would provide a framework for shared, collective and ethical decision making.

Supportive Conditions: For a PLC to grow and sustain, there must be supportive conditions available. In AHS the PTA has a supporting role. The PTA executive works closely with the school administration and the PTA chairman is a LSB board member. How the free food program helped to bring students back to school after the war is explained and the various departments play different supportive roles. While the disciplinary department helps to maintain order in school and improve students' conduct/behaviour, the academic department is involved in improving teaching and learning, and the

sports department improves students' sporting skills and promotes the good name of the school through sports. Other supporting factors include the school fence and staff meetings. In AHS other available supportive conditions include physical conditions – time and where to meet and people's capacities - the willingness to receive feedback and work towards improvement (Hord, 1997).

Shared Personal Practice: Staff share good classroom practices such as the use of the "pass" system, share their teaching methods, partake in continuous enquiry in their departments, and peer support and mentoring are also employed. Bezzina (2006) has pointed out that schools provide opportunities for teachers' personal learning and development mainly through seminars and staff development meetings. Shared personal practice as a component of PLCs has been echoed by Oliver et al (2009), Morrow (2010), Hord and Rutherford (1998).

The Major Barriers the School Faced: It is said that the new principal who studied in Ghana during the Liberian conflict and the general search for school-improvement strategies after the war were the main motivating factors behind the school transformation. The major barriers the school faced, especially immediately after the wars, included insecurity and hate, drug use, lack of funding and qualified teachers, low salaries, bringing students back to school and school repairs. Education no doubt has suffered during the Liberian civil wars due to the physical destruction of the infrastructure. However, unlike Liberia, education in BiH further suffered from political, ideological and nationalist views that have continued to divide the country even after the war (Pasalic-Kreso, 1999). In the National University of Rwanda, like in AHS, there are still problems. Ibuka (2011) has elaborated on many effects of the Rwanda Civil War like the shortage of lecturers and trauma as other major consequences of the war which are still very visible today.

Steps Taken to Overcome the Barriers: The problem of low salaries was handled by increasing the salaries of teachers and also giving teachers extra paid classes. Those who could not get extra classes were allowed to take on part-time teaching in other schools in the community. With the new school uniform, students could easily be identified and it also improved students' morale. While the school fence stopped students from leaving the school campus at will, the free food program reduced hunger and improved students' learning ability and nutritional intake.

Current Problems: The current problems in Anabela High School include the school curriculum, limited reference materials, no science laboratory, no computer laboratory, no library and low salaries. These are common in post conflict environments. What makes PLCs outstanding is their ability to constantly handle their challenges. It is my wish that AHS will critically reflect on its current problems especially how to raise additional finance as I have suggested in section 7.6.

CHAL has also played a major role in reshaping Anabela High School. The association was formed in 1975 with the main aim of providing basic services such as drugs and medical supplies, primary health care, water and

sanitation, family life education, health information and community-directed treatment to the people of Liberia. When the first civil war broke out in 1989, CHAL services expanded to include reconciliation and healing to victims of the war. In 1994, CHAL established the SPMCs in schools and also entered into an agreement with UNICEF, whereby UNICEF was to support peacebuilding in schools through the SPM. The SPM has "helped to stop the chaos that used to go on in Anabela High School" (Peacebuilding Portal, 2012; CHAL, 1998).

The PTA has also played a major role in reshaping Anabela High School. It is made up mostly of parents and collaborates with the school administration. The PTA works together with the school administration for better student upbringing. After the war, the PTA worked with the school to handle a series of problems such as student behaviour that the school was facing. They currently give scholarships to students for good academic work and behaviour.

Government Education Policies no doubt have played a key role in directing education in Liberia and Anabela High School has been part of it. Its major role has been in leading the education sector. As such, it draws up and implements the education policies, trains teachers to meet the shortages, improves the gender imbalance in schools, addresses educational challenges, coordinates international donor partners and sets goals for the education sector in the country.

To answer the second main research question, "How and what core components are used in building a PLC in a school in a conflict and post-conflict environment? I went back to my data for research question one (Section 7), and identified the following core components, which are represented in the diagram (figure 32) below. These components have been fully explained in section 8.

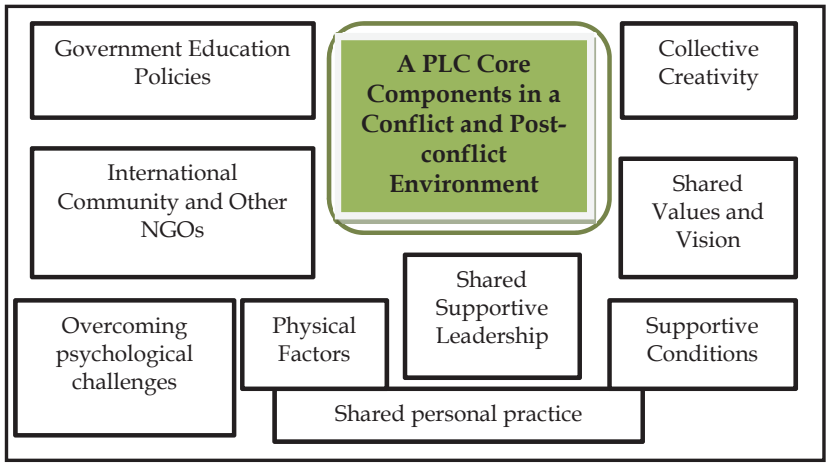

FIGURE 32 A summary of the core components of building a PLC in a conflict and post-conflict environment

Figure 32 above shows the core components of building a professional learning community in a school in a conflict and post conflict environment. As explained

in section 8, these core components as identified in this study include: collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, shared personal practice, shared supportive leadership, physical factors, overcoming psychological challenges, the international community and other NGOs, and government education policies.

9.3 Why PLCs should be built in schools in conflict and post-conflict environments

In many conflict and post-conflict societies, the progress in education has been measured by the number of schools that have been constructed, total enrolment, books provided and the number of teachers hired. This is a very narrow way of looking at success in these types of societies. Of course, every education institution must be safe, and conflict-prevention strategies must be in place for both children and adults. We must also be careful with the type of education that we are giving our children because it can become a major source of conflict generation.

Using classrooms to poison young minds with prejudice, intolerance and stereotypes of "the other" can reinforce social division. The challenge in countries where education systems have helped create the conditions for violent conflict is to "build back better". That means recognizing from the outset that education policy has implications for peace building. (EfA, 2011, p. 127)

Peacebuilding strategies in conflict and post-conflict societies must address underlying social tensions and the curriculum can play a crucial role. What children are taught, the language used, the approach to religious education and others all play a vital role in terms of the attitudes that children will carry into their adulthood, and they are the people who will make future policies and lead our nation. I think we have failed here, and the violent conflicts have returned with a ripple effect, and are destroying not just our schools and infrastructure, but also hopes and ambitions, which are key foundations in nation building (EfA, 2011).

Again, we therefore do not have to be content with assessing educational progress in conflict and post-conflict societies by only looking the gross enrolment and the number of schools constructed or using other weak mechanisms, it is time we started looking at the strategies for turning these schools into PLCs. It is in these types of schools that there will be love, no hate or discrimination, trust among all the stakeholders, and available, qualified and duty-conscious teachers guided with a curriculum that meets the aspirations of the children and that is constantly reformed to meet the demands of society.

In PLCs, greed (the cankerworm eating at the fabric of our societies) will be addressed, beginning with the principal, who will genuinely share power with all the stakeholders in his educational institution. In such a system, teachers will respect and see each other as colleagues, and thus this will create a collegial

atmosphere that will lead to more awareness of working as a team to solve school-wide problems and will lead to improvements in teaching methodology for the benefit of all the students. In such a community, teachers will genuinely play their role as leaders. Shared leadership gives teachers leadership responsibilities that they use to make meaningful and lasting changes in their schools. In such a PLC, teachers focus on learning from each other, thus creating a community of learners where they see each other as belonging to the same team, guided by the same vision, which aims at improving students' achievement. In such a system, teachers share their teaching strategies and planning for instruction, and teachers and parents collaborate and genuinely work together. In some countries, these duties are in the hands of the PTA executive, who work very closely with the teachers and other stakeholders, and then report back to the rest of the parents (Roberts and Pruitt, 2003).

With shared and supportive leadership, and with teachers empowered to take up leadership positions, the stakeholders collaboratively work together in creating the results that they desire. With supportive conditions available, teachers do not have to work in isolation. They share their teaching strategies and learn from each other, thus creating a genuine relationship among the stakeholders guided by genuine collaboration and accountability. In such a system, there are supportive conditions, networks (both national and international) and the use of ICT all help in developing and establishing such schools as real PLCs. Continuous enquiry among the teachers and other stakeholders helps in solving challenging problems and in shaping the school in the way in which they desire, and it is aided by genuine trust among colleagues and guided with a purpose and focused vision.

Harris and Jones (2010) have explained that in schools where PLCs work best, absenteeism among teachers is reduced and embraced collaborative network help in school improvement. Harris and Jones (2010, p. 179) have concluded that PLCs bring certain aspects and values into schools and these include:

Trust and respect among colleagues at the school and network level, possession of an appropriate cognitive and skill base that enable effective pedagogy, supportive leadership from those in key roles and shared leadership practices, the norms of continuous critical enquiry and continuous improvement, a wide shared vision or sense of purpose, a norm of involvement in decision making, collegial relationship among teachers, and a focus upon impact and outcomes for learners (Harris and Jones, 2010, p. 179).

If these aspects are well implemented in schools in conflict and post-conflict environments, schools will be able to move away from the silent vicious circle of violence, poverty and educational disadvantage and build norms that put them in the right path to becoming real PLCs.

10 CONCLUSION

Due to the fact that many researchers such as Hord (2003), Stoll et al., (2006) and Bullough (2007) have only written on building PLCs, and others, such as Davies (2011), on education in conflict environments, no researcher has written on how PLCs can be built in conflict and post-conflict environments to the best of the author's knowledge. This study is aimed at filling this vacuum in the research. Due to this lack of literature on how educational institutions are built in conflict and post-conflict environments, many schools have continued to struggle, overwhelmed by a series of problems in conflict and post-conflict environments. With many of these institutions caught up in the vicious circle of violence, poverty and educational disadvantage, they are unable to find a way out of it.

As a consequence of the above lapses, many politicians and even educationalists have measured educational success in a very narrow way in conflict and post-conflict environments, such as through the number of schools rebuilt, gross enrolment in schools and the number of teachers hired. We therefore do not have to be content with measuring educational progress in conflict and post-conflict societies by only looking at gross enrolment and the number of schools constructed or using other weak mechanisms. This study offers new components or tools for turning these schools into PLCs – a way forward in handling this twenty-first century predicament. The study has also provided the core components for measuring PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments.

The research findings have supported previous researchers such as Hord (1997), Stoll and Louis (2007), Wells and Feun (2007, p. 147) and Bullough (2007) in affirming that shared supportive leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions and shared personal practice are the core components of PLCs. In building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments, other additional key components identified in this research include the international community and other NGOs, physical factors, overcoming psychological challenges and government education policies. In building a PLC in a school in a conflict and post-conflict environment, the core components, as identified in this research, are shared supportive leadership,

collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, shared personal practice, the international community and other NGOs, physical factors, overcoming psychological challenges and government educational policies. All these components have been fully explained in section 8. What we have learned from this study is that, the core components of building PLCs in ordinary environments are also vital in building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments.

This study is not about Anabela High School; it is about how PLCs are built in conflict and post-conflict environments, and the case of Anabela High School is brought in to show how one school has succeeded in developing in this type of environment. The study has succeeded in presenting the core components of PLCs that exist in Anabela High School and how they developed, the challenges Anabela High School faced in its development process and how those challenges were handled, other challenges Anabela High School is currently facing and how the school is handling them, and other factors that contributed to the development of Anabela High School, such as the government education policies and the international community's input, have been clearly explained.

Even though Anabela High School is outstanding in its community, it has not grown into a full PLC, but it is on the way to becoming one. PLCs are categorized into three stages: those in the early stage of development **(early starters)**, those that have gone further along the development process **(developers)** and those that are fully established **(mature)** (Stoll et al., 2006). Wesley, Lieberman and McDonald (2006, p. 30–35) called these stages of PLC development in schools the **novice stage, intermediate stage and advanced stage**. Anabela High School still has a series of problems to overcome. The school has no library, no internet facilities for students and teachers, and the classrooms have no air-conditioning; as a consequence, students have to write their examinations outside because it gets very hot in December.

FIGURE 33 Students writing their first-term examination

My evaluation of Anabela High School is that the school is at the "early starter" or "novice stage" (Stoll et al., 2006; Wesley, Lieberman & McDonald, 2006), and moving to the developer stage. How long will Anabela High School remain in this stage? I do not know, but my prediction is that in a few years, the school will fully settle in the developer stage. There are so many factors that determine the duration that any PLC can spend in each stage. While some progress very fast, others may remain in the same stage for decades, some may retreat and even fall back into the vicious circle of violence, poverty and educational disadvantage. Bolam et al. (2005) have reaffirmed that PLCs are not fixed; they are fluid and evolve with experience.

Even though Anabela High School still has much to do, it nevertheless presents a case with certain aspects that can be emulated to an extent. Anabela High School is a success story in terms of how PLCs can be built in conflict and post-conflict environments. A story whereby an inclusive system of education has been established in the school (bringing an end to the war era characterized by fear, hate and crime), supported by multiple factors and bringing Christians and non-Christians together – a system that builds trust, and improves student–teacher relationships and, subsequently, student learning. This study is very important because it has presented us with a new framework for building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments.

The study is important for Anabela High School, the MOE in Liberia, the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) group, and other NGOs and governmental organizations involved in educational reconstruction in conflict and post-conflict environments, other educational institutions in Liberia, and those in conflict and post-conflict environments in general, the international community and for all those who are involved or interested in education in nation building.

10.1 Generalizability, validity and ethical considerations of the study

10.1.1 Generalizability

Generalizability, according to Polit and Hungler (1991), may be defined as the degree of generalization of the findings from a study sample to the entire population. It is simply the extent to which the findings of a piece of research can be applied to other groups, settings or even situations – what Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) called measures of external reliability. This issue of generalizability in qualitative studies has raised much criticism, and I do support the view of Myers (2000) and Thomson (2011) that qualitative research cannot be generalized in the traditional sense of the word, but there are other features that make it highly valuable in the educational environment. It should, however, be noted that partial generalizations may be possible for similar populations, but that they ought to be used with much caution (Nkengbeza, 2009). Transferability on the other hand does not involve broad claims but rather invite readers of research to make connections between elements of the study and their own experience. Transferability allows the reader to apply the result to outside context. Case studies findings are instructive and not generalizable and Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested that the reader should be the one to determine if the findings can be applicable in his/her own setting.

In this research transferability is very vital and my ultimate aim has been to show how PLCs can be built in conflict and post-conflict societies. It is my vision that the readers will be able to identify some of the solutions educational leaders, teachers, communities, superintendents and other educators can adopt to make their schools more productive. I also think that this study challenges educators and other nation builders to examine their educational institutions and to see what aspects of this model could be applicable in their societies or communities.

10.1.2 Research validity

Research has been used in education to shape both theory and practice. Any research in order to be successful in education must be "believed and trusted" by the "readers, educators and other researchers" (Merriam, 1988, p. 164). According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, pp. 105–106), there are "several different kinds of validity" and some of the examples that I have used in this research include content validity, internal validity, descriptive validity and theoretical validity. Internal validity, for example, looks at how the findings match reality. As Ratcliffe (1983) rightly explained, "data do not speak by themselves; there is always an interpreter" (Merriam, 1988, p. 167). Throughout this research, validity was ensured. The right school was selected using valid criteria, the research data was documented using the correct

instruments such as voice recorders, and valid research questions were formulated and the right interviewees were selected to answer those research questions. All these therefore explain why the findings of the research have given us an insight into what is going on in Anabela High School and how the school got there.

While descriptive validity was used in presenting the data I collected from the field, interviews were recorded, which is an aspect of internal validity, and theoretical validity was used when selecting the right framework for the study and also when using it in the analysis section. It should be noted that validity is a matter of degree. In this study, I used different strategies to enhance the validity of the data I gathered from the field. These strategies included multi-method information gathering; interviews, for example, were recorded and transcribed. The descriptive data is separated from the analysis of the data, as stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2006).

Throughout the research, I have attempted to remain neutral and objective, especially in reporting only what I was told, what I observed or read. Apart from recording the information, notes were also taken throughout the interviews, but I must admit that these are my views and interpretations which are on own subjective. After all the interviews in Liberia, I gave a series of presentations at the University of Jyväskylä and at an international conference – the ENIRDELM Conference in Antalya, Turkey (September 27–29, 2012). In addition, validity in this study is seen on the one hand from the depth, richness and scope of the data that was collected from the field, and on the other hand, by using multi-methods of observation, interviews and document reviews, the researcher gained the ability to triangulate and present only the right data to the reader. As explained by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 105), there are several different types of validity, and in this study, I have only mentioned those I have used.

Thomson (2011) has concluded that both qualitative and quantitative research approaches are valid and that each of them has a unique characteristic of uncovering data.

> Human beings are indeed a complex system and when coupled with the complexities of business organizations the task of understanding how they interact is a daunting task.... Only by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods may researcher be able to uncover, test and verify further variables. However this will mean that the research community put aside the debate on the validity of either paradigm and accept that there are different ways to gain the truth. Different ways that include the use different sample sizes, but still insist on accurate and meaningful findings that must pass measures of validity. (Thomson, 2011, p. 80/81)

10.1.3 Ethical considerations of the study

Every real piece of qualitative research has a series of ethical and moral issues to ponder on, not just at the beginning of the research, but also throughout the research. As Miles and Huberman (1994) have rightly said, these dilemmas include:

> Is my project really worth doing? Do people really understand what they are getting into? Am I exploiting people with my "innocent" questions? What about their privacy? Do respondents have a right to see my report? What good is anonymity if people and their colleagues can easily recognize themselves in the case study? When they do, might it hurt or damage them in some way? What do I do if I observe harmful behavior in my cases? Who will benefit and who will lose as a result of my study? (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 288)

Of course, we do not have to be naive about these problems, because to be "naive (about ethics) itself is unethical" (Mirvis and Seashore, 1982, p. 100). The problems are real, and we qualitative researchers all face them. With the above and other ethical issues in mind, the participants were clearly informed that they would not be at risk of harm as a result of their participation. As a main concern to the participants' privacy, I guaranteed their confidentiality (they were assured that identifying information would not be made available to anyone who was not directly involved in the study). The principle of anonymity was used, which means that the participants remained anonymous throughout the study (Trochim, 2006). In a discussion with all participants, ethical issues of a person's right to remain unknown were deeply discussed **(**Trochim, 2006; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). However, in order to concretely report my data and to make it look real, I have revealed certain aspects of some interviewees personality for example, the principal, vice principal and the PTA chairman.

Schools names and all the names of the people involved in the research have been changed to assure the anonymity of individuals and the institution. Generally, ethics plays an important part in research as it involves "Norms for conduct that distinguish between … acceptable and unacceptable behaviour" (Resnik, 2011, p. 1). Some people have viewed ethics or morality as mere common sense, yet many ethical disputes continue to exist in our society. As suggested by Resnik (2011), one explanation for this can be that many people recognize certain common ethical norms; however, they interpret, apply and/or balance these norms differently based on their own values and experiences. The community was quite aware of my research and all the research participants were of my research topic.

In this research, I have maintained Resnik's (2011, p. 1) core principles of ethics. I have strived for honesty in reporting data and the methods used in collecting the data. Falsifying or misrepresenting data was avoided. I also strived to maintain objectivity and avoid bias in all its forms, such as in the data analysis and data interpretation. Integrity is another core principle in ethics that I maintained in this research. Any good researcher must be sincere and consistent in both their thoughts and actions. As a researcher, I was careful with my work throughout the study, avoiding negligence, and I examined my own work critically and kept a good record of my research activities. I have equally paid due respect to intellectual property rights. Permission was sought for unpublished works of other researchers used in this research and proper credit has also been given to all published and unpublished works used in this research.

One can therefore conclude here that ethics has been at the forefront of this research right from the way the topic was worded. Clear official channels were used in data gathering and permission was obtained from all the interviewees. In a letter to the MOE, the purpose of the study and the research design were clearly explained. The way the study was designed also took into consideration ethical issues. Anonymity and confidentiality issues were clearly explained to all who were involved in the research. The analysis of the research and the dissemination of the findings have been done with "relative openness, sensitivity, honesty, and scientific impartiality" (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000, p. 56).

10.2 Limitations of the study and proposals for further studies

The characteristics of the design or methodology that impacted or influenced the application or interpretation of the results of my study include time, design, funding and access. Due to the fact that it is impossible to design a study that was able to examine all the PLCs (schools) in Liberia because of the time factor, the study was narrowed down to one school. It would be worthwhile repeating the same study but with many schools as the case study and to verify if the findings are similar. In addition, within the school, interviews were limited to selected high school teachers, other staff such as the school registrar, and those who coordinated some major school activities such as sports who were present and willing to take part in the interviews, and the principal and vice-principal of Anabela High School.

Time was another major limitation. There was no time for a longitudinal study. I spent less than a month in Anabela High School doing observations and gathering data. Due to the time factor, I was unable to really interview members from the community to get an outsider's view on why Anabela High School has succeeded more than other institutions. If more time had been spent doing observations and other research tasks, it may have been the case that more problems the school was facing could have been identified, and that would have been helpful when writing the recommendation section. My suggestion would be to repeat the same study but use a longitudinal study to observe the school actually going through the transformation process. Access to documents was limited to those I was given at Anabela High School, at the Department of Education and at the MOE. The archive in Monrovia had not been fully reopened and it was not possible to get access to other documents. Funding for the study in general was also limited. Apart from the financial support that was rendered from my teaching at the Institute of Educational Leadership, my PhD student position, and the support from the Faculty of Education, there was no continuous funding for more than three months.

The government has done much in formulating and shaping government educational policies in Liberia. The way this study was designed, government policies were found to be a single component that helped in transforming

Anabela High School into a PLC. Another study in this area could be designed to find out how government educational policies promote the development of PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments.

I will also suggest that in subsequent studies, the selection of the final school should be in two stages. First, an expert testimony and my characteristics of a very good school should be used to select a few schools. Then, in the second stage, the questionnaire used in evaluating PLCs (Olivier, Hipp, and Huffman, 2008; Olivier, Antine, Cormier, Lewis, and Minckler, 2009) should be used to select the final best school(s). This is because relying on someone to use such broad characteristics to select a final school may sometimes, especially in conflict and post-conflict environments, be misleading, especially if the person doing the selection has other unknown factors influencing his/her final selection. In conflict and post-conflict environments, there are so many unknowns. I still believe that only an educational expert can ride above these unknowns. I was lucky and fortunate that the professor who did the selection was aware of the implications and did just the right thing by selecting only the best school.

The overall findings of this research have pointed to the view that even though building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments has many implications, it has nevertheless provided nation builders with a whole new way of reconstructing educational institutions in these environments. DuFour (2007, p. 7) has stated that

> The professional leaning community concept … does provide a powerful, proven conceptual framework for transforming schools at all levels, but alas, even the grandest design eventually degenerates into hard work. A school's staff must focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively on matters related to learning, and hold itself accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement. (DuFour, 2007, p. 7)

Suggestions/conclusion

In this study, I have argued that the current measurements of educational success in conflict and post-conflict environments are inadequate and suggest that the core components of building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments should instead be used. I have not by any means suggested that PLCs are the only solutions to educational problems in conflict and post-conflict environments. My view however is that in the absence of concrete education measurement systems and ways to rebuild our educational institutions in this era, building professional learning communities in schools is a powerful way of reconstructing our educational institutions in conflict and post-conflict environments. While researchers, educational leaders and other nation builders continue to search for better ways of building schools in conflict and post-conflict environments, I have suggested a shift in paradigm for schools reconstruction in conflict and post-conflict environments.

I have explained the importance of peacebuilding education, and by using the violence, poverty and education disadvantage vicious circle, the effects of civil wars are seen, and it is suggested that peacebuilding education should be

taught in all societies, including pre-conflict societies, in order to avoid war conflicts. The importance of education, especially inclusive education, is explained, and educational leaders and other stakeholders in nation building are encouraged to have the moral responsibility for every student and treat them equally for inclusion to be effective. Suggestions are given to Anabela High School, the GoL/the MOE and other institutions in Liberia. Suggestions are also given to Finland and other educational institutions in conflict and post-conflict environments, the international community and all those who are involved in nation building.

11 SUGGESTIONS

A brief introduction

This section begins by showing how war hinders education and development, and the violence, poverty, and educational disadvantage vicious circle is used to show how many environments in conflict and post-conflict situations are destroyed and remain underdeveloped. I have argued that the current measurements of educational success in conflict and post-conflict environments are inadequate and my suggestion is that the core components of building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments should instead be used. In this section, I have explained the importance of peacebuilding education and suggest that peacebuilding education should begin in all societies, including in pre-conflict societies. The section ends with suggestions to all the stakeholders who will read this research, such as Anabela High School and other institutions, especially those in conflict and post-conflict environments.

11.1 War retards education and development

How often do you remember the saying that "war brings development in reverse"? This has been used to explain how even short episodes of war conflicts have destroyed what had been built up over generations. We do not have to look far before we can see what conflict has done/is doing to our societies and mankind in general. It brings with it injury, untold suffering, insecurity, psychological trauma, dislocation of families, little or no economic growth/development and limited or no employment and we could continue to list the deleterious effects of conflict. All these deprive both the youths and adults of education that would have changed their lives (EfA, 2011).

The international focus, especially during conflicts and in post-conflict environments, is usually concentrated on the immediate needs of the affected population and not much focus is on education. Armed conflicts in many countries have "destroyed the hopes and ambitions of a whole generation"

(EfA, 2011, p. 131). Many nations that have been affected by conflict, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, always appear at the bottom of the list when evaluating progress in education. Many of these countries are in a silent vicious circle of violence, poverty and educational disadvantage (EfA, 2011).

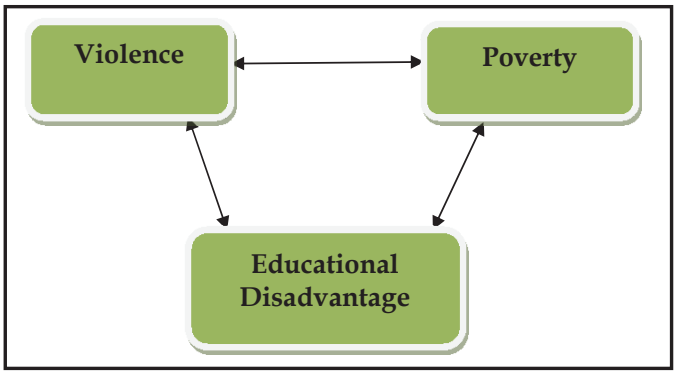

FIGURE 34 Violence, poverty and educational disadvantage: A vicious circle

In most conflict societies, especially those witnessing civil wars, one ethnic group, tribe, region or religious (as was the case in Bosnia and in North and South Sudan) group is pitted against the other. This type of inter-group fighting is associated with the doctrine of revenge and usually witness to ethnic cleansing and genocide, as was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). These types of dysfunctional or failed states are further complicated by criminal actors seeking illegal profits. This environment is usually characterized by fragmented violence led by militias and other groups seeking control to take over the failed state.

The circle directly affects poverty within the state. The poverty gap is usually widened as finances are controlled by armed groups and gangs. With no jobs and limited investments, there is usually robbery, starvation and malnutrition because insecurity makes it impossible to work on farms. Women and children usually suffer most in this circle of poverty. Educational institutions are not usually spared by violence during civil wars. In Liberia, for example, during the civil wars from 1989 to 2003, schools were destroyed and Anabela High School was not an exception. The mass grave in the school campus is a justification of this view. With violence and insecurity, schools are usually closed or it may not be safe for children to go to school. With limited finances concentrated in the hands of gangs and militias, education is not usually in their list of priorities. According to the EfA (2011, p. 134), in Eastern Shan State in Myanmar, the level of "extreme education poverty" is about seven times higher than in other regions because of constant military operations that have displaced most of the inhabitants. About 90 per cent of young adults aged 17 to 22 in this region have less than two years of education (EfA, 2011, p. 134).

This vicious cycle is a challenge that is still to be overcome in the early twenty-first century. Many of the poor countries in this vicious circle have knowingly or unknowingly chosen to remain in it by using their limited resources for purchasing military arms instead of investing in education, infrastructure and other sectors that could bring development and alleviate poverty. It is from this perspective that the EfA Report (2011, p. 132) has argued that "The hidden crisis in education has suffered not just from neglect and indifference, but from institutionalized failures in conflict prevention and post conflict reconstruction" (EfA, 2011, p. 132).

It is time that those in leadership positions in both national and international communities started focusing more on conflict prevention strategies in pre-conflict societies. Conflict prevention could also become a subject for study in primary and secondary schools. People need to fully understand what conflict and, specifically, war conflict will bring to their lives and societies. It is positive that the Education Law (2011) and the LEAMP volumes four and five (2011) have dwelled on many aspects, including the incorporation of social and emotional learning (a process where both children and adults learn how to recognize and manage their emotions in a positive, responsible and constructive way) into the Law. Even though this may be slightly late for Liberia, it is, however, really needed in post-conflict Liberia and it will become a tool for future conflict prevention.

11.1.1 The importance of education in conflict prevention

Education plays a very important part not only in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict nation building situations, but also in conflict prevention. For this to be effective, we must note that education is a prerequisite for an inclusive peacebuilding and social development initiative (Hanemann, 2005). Conflict has become a fundamental obstacle to education (Kotite, 2012). In as much as we agree that education is a human rights issue, we also agree that education plays a fundamental role in peacebuilding (Bird, 2000; Smith and Vaux, 2003). Successful peacebuilding involves transformative processes that sometimes may take generations to build. Educational planners must be aware of their role in planning and maintaining peace through continuous peacebuilding education (Kotite, 2012).

Education, among other factors, provides the younger generation with the capacity to take control of the country's affairs, and in writing a good constitution that addresses injustices in the society and checks to make sure that it is respected by all (Kotite, 2012). As summarized by UNICEF (2002), "The research commission by the development committee of the organization for economic cooperation and development shows that well-managed, high-quality education systems can help prevent civil unrest and encourage conflict resolution, tolerance and reconciliation. They can also reduce both poverty and inequality, and lay the foundations for good governance and effective institutions" (UNICEF, 2002, p. 5). Therefore, turning the educational institutions in conflict and post-conflict environments into real learning

communities will give the younger generation the ample tools that they need for reshaping their various countries and Finland has the capacity to help them achieve these goals.

Education is currently facing a series of challenges, and they include a lack of educational opportunities, unemployment and unmet expectations – many youths continue to be educated in fields with no job opportunities (Barakat and Urdal, 2009, p. 2). There is also the inequitable distribution of educational resources, a perception of inequality, and limited or no access to quality education because of religion, location or identity. For peacebuilding education to be successful, educational planners must include content that promotes positive values and they need to eliminate inflammatory content; independent classroom monitoring will eliminate biased versions of history, intolerance and violence (Kotite, 2012).

As explained in the UNESCO 2011 Report, success in education can help to maintain peace, build government legitimacy and set the society on course for a more peaceful future. As stated by Rose Ramos Horda (the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize winner), education should therefore be given a more central role in post-conflict reconstruction agendas. Education is the essential tool that should be used for preventing conflicts, reconstructing countries after conflicts and building peace (UNESCO Report, 2011).

In conflict-affected countries such as Liberia, educational planning must continue to address the educational issues affecting the country, address conflict-related issues impacting education or those impacted by education, address social, political and economic challenges and put in place a plan for an unpredictable future (Kotite, 2012). All is not lost, as many nations have become aware of peacebuilding in conflict prevention.

> Some countries have begun the process of analysing the risk of conflict in the education sector. The government of the state of the Republic of South Sudan, for example is including peace building in their national development plan as well as in all their sector plans. The ministries of education in Burkina Faso and Chad have also begun to address the risk of conflict and develop strategies for conflict prevention. Nepal has also started to include disaster risk education in their education planning processes. (Kotite, 2012, p. 22)

In terms of capacity development, for any successful peacebuilding initiative, capacity building is a key component. Individual potentials should be developed in societies that provide equal opportunities for all citizens. Parallel structures must be eliminated in peacebuilding planning in order to ensure effectiveness, and educational planners and managers ought to work collaboratively (Kotite, 2012).

Peacebuilding education should be structured differently depending on the society – that is for pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict environments. According to Sinclair (2004), peace education should deal with changing people's mind-set, to promote understanding, respect and tolerance. While some societies will require the acquisition of more non-violent and conflict-resolution skills, others may need more human rights promotion (Kotite, 2012).

As rightly put forward by the UN Under Secretary General – the Ambassador of Bangladesh (Anwaral C.):

> Today's youth deserve a radically different education – one that does not glorify war but educates for peace, nonviolence and international cooperation. Peace education does not simply mean learning about conflicts and how to resolve them peacefully. It should also involve the participation of young people in expressing their own ideas and cooperating with each other in order to eliminate violence in our individual lives, in our community and in our society. (Kotite, 2012, p. 24)

He continues by arguing that we should teach the children the value of tolerance, understanding and respect for diversity, and that children's views on how to eliminate violence in our societies should be taken into account (Kotite, 2012).

11.1.2 Inclusive education should also be practiced

Inclusion can be seen as a means to attain school integration for all students (UNESCO, 2008). For this to be possible, inclusion ought to focus on the extent to which different schools have the moral responsibility for every student and a responsibility to treat them equally, and for inclusion to be effective, other core issues such as poor school attendance, repetition, dropouts and low learning outcomes should be addressed. There should be an appropriate learning environment and diverse learning opportunities for all students so as to provide them with unique, effective and rewarding educational opportunities. According to UNESCO (2008), for inclusion to be achieved, certain prerequisites need to be attained. These prerequisites include "a pertinent and relevant curriculum with a vision to facilitate dialogue among various actors, a vast repertoire of diverse and complementary pedagogical strategies, available physical facilities and equipment aligned with the design of the curriculum, and strong teacher support – seeing the teacher as a co-developer of the curriculum" (UNESCO, 2008, p. 9).

Inclusive education has also been a tool for fostering educational and social change. An effective inclusive education would not only seek to address the traditional and structural problem of poverty, but it would also address social and cultural integration and the growing diversity in our societies. Inclusive education should aim at promoting respect and human dignity among all the students regardless of their background (intellectual, physical, economic or social). In every society, there should be more awareness of social tolerance and all forms of segregation should be eliminated. Advocates of inclusive education should be aware that it is not enough for the society to know about the existence of inclusion, but advocates should aim at changing the attitude and behaviour of all of the individuals to become more tolerant (UNESCO, 2008).

11.1.3 Suggestions to all readers

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding should be permanently structured for immediate and long-term planning. At every system level in every society, educational planners should be able to fully understand the conflicts in their society in order to come up with sensitive programs to address them. Let education institutions, governmental bodies and civil societies all be involved in peacebuilding. For long-term planning and effectiveness, there should be teacher training courses, in-service courses, training for administrators and education planners at all levels (Kotite, 2012).

Peacebuilding efforts should not be limited to the MOE. There should be an inter-ministerial task force to coordinate the various ministries and train them in peacebuilding mechanisms. It will really be necessary for every nation to cooperate with various UN agencies such as UNESCO and the UNDP to build inclusive, lasting and peaceful societies. At the national or regional level, there should be the involvement of major and minor stakeholders such as parliamentarians and local or traditional leaders. Other strategic partners such as the national and local media will be needed to disseminate the information to the public. At the community level, the youths should play an active part in conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Kotite, 2012).

Ajakaiye and Ali (2009, p. 19) have suggested that in post-conflict environments, the focus should be on "the reduction of the risk of further conflict". For this to be successful, they argue that policies aimed at, for example, reducing the unemployment of the youth and downsizing the military in a reasonable manner will be helpful. According to them, "an effective deployment of peacekeeping forces would also reduce the risks involved", but that this should be left in the hands of the international organization. Ajakaiye and Ali (2009, p. 19) have also argued that there are "Four aspects of the real economy that make post-conflict policy design distinctive. These include the reconstruction of infrastructure; the management of capital flight and repatriation; the management of commodity booms and the management of construction booms". They have also explained that due to the fact that post-conflict countries face distinctive problems related to how revenue is raised and how expenditures are implemented, in order to transit from recovery to sustainable development, these countries need a long-term planning framework that also targets poverty reduction (Ajakaiye and Ali, 2009, p. 10).

11.1.4 How Finland can benefit from this research

I hope that this research will be used by the Finnish Foreign Ministry and other Finnish institutions when designing various strategies for developing education in conflict and post-conflict environments. It may also be a good idea for the CMI group – a Finnish NGO – to incorporate the study into its activities and expand into educational reconstruction in crisis or conflict and post-conflict environments. This research – a new model for building professional learning communities in schools in conflict and post-conflict environments is very

important and I hope Finland will continue to expand its cooperation with Liberia.

11.2 Suggestion for Liberia

Liberia has done much in formulating educational policies, especially when we consider what the country went through during the civil wars and how it has started from afresh after the wars. Despite these achievements, much still needs to be done. Any learning organization capable of solving its own critical educational issues must build trust, establish a system for checks and balances and stress accountability at all levels (Association for the Development of Education in Africa [ADEA] Liberia, 2011). The problem with the Liberian educational system is not a lack of policies; it is a lack of an implementation system that actually works. The Educational Law of 2011 and other related regulations, for example, are positive on paper and much would be achieved if these policies were actually fully implemented in the field.

Any time when policies are being enacted for nation building, it should always be remembered that the major root causes of the Liberian civil wars were attributed to "poverty, greed, corruption, limited access to education; economic, social, civil, and political inequalities; identity conflict, land tenure, and distribution" (IIEP/INEE, 2011, p. 32). These problems are real and they have not been totally solved. The government should continue to tackle these problems through rigorous reforms and let the reforms be accompanied by transparency and accountability. When this happens, the citizens will be assured that the leadership is out to redress their grievances. It is also important to note that education is fundamental for the development of every nation. A good educational system recognizes its problems and builds capacity to solve those problems. Education is the tool that we should use to build an inclusive society and to address the nation's problems (IIEP/INEE, 2011).

While addressing the educational needs of Liberians, quality should be taken care of, and the disparity in the system should be eliminated, as outlined in the Education Sector Plan (2010) and the Education Law of 2011. It is recommended that the Liberian government should use technology, increase support and work more closely with all of the CEOs around the country to have an overview on how well the educational policies are being implemented. With the use of good technology, the government would be able to double-check the information it gathers from all the sub sectors, including the presence of "ghost" workers, who are present in the system. For an efficient system to be realized, the government must put in place a system that rewards those who work hard and retrain those who are failing (IIEP/INEE, 2011).

In addition, good curriculum reconstruction seeks feedback from practitioners in the field – teachers. When their opinions are not solicited or heard, they feel left out and, subsequently, demoralized. A census could be used to solicit their ideas and to double-check if those ideas are real. Teachers

are those actually implementing the curriculum and they are quite aware of its shortcomings. Teachers should also be motivated to implement the curriculum and their feedback should be taken into consideration.

While learning from the lesson learned in Afghanistan, it is important for the GoL to continue building a trust partnership within and between various ministries and also with the foreign donors. To realize this, there should be high-level political backing and it is what will help to build a system that will outlive generations. The foreign donors' coordinators should continue to request long-term and flexible commitment and a bottom-up participatory project design. This may help to understand the program and the working capacity better, thus giving the donors and coordinators the ability to reshape or redesign their projects for better implementation. The solution to educational problems should be both pragmatic and basic. The MOE announcement in December 2011 regarding an increase in the salaries of teachers is a good beginning. When more resources become available in the future, the government should offer support to all private educational institutions in Liberia. They are part of the system for a better Liberia, and the government's financial support is needed in order for them to provide an inclusive quality education (Sigsgaard, 2011).

The government should also continue to improve on the gender-disparity issue. I know much has been done since President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took office, but at the institutional level, the female students are still shying away from positions such as in student leadership, which is the foundation for future leadership. The nation building educational strategy should be based on the needs of Liberians and it should not be an ideological education. Formulating policies and strategies is just a starting point, and fully implementing those strategies in the field is most important – what use is a policy that only exists in theory or on paper? (Sigsgaard, 2011)

11.3 Suggestion for Anabela High School

11.3.1 Anabela High School's current problems

Concerning the curriculum, teachers expressed their disapproval regarding certain issues in it, and explained that their grievances had been taken to the principal, and channelled to the right department, but that they had not been listened to and no action had been taken. According to one teacher, the curriculum was created without taking the beneficiaries into consideration. The teachers agreed that it was not only a major problem in Anabela High School; it was a nationwide post-conflict problem. Their complaints included the fact that issues in one region, for example, the southern region, in the curriculum, were treated as if all the students and teachers were from that region.

Additionally, the limited reference material is another major problem. Teachers also complained that 85 per cent to 90 per cent of schools in Liberia

did not have libraries. Every subject should have available books, but that is not the case at Anabela High School. Most teachers have to buy their own books because the books provided by the school are not adequate. Teachers questioned how a child could actually learn in the twenty-first century without reference materials and how teachers could teach effectively with limited resources. The limited reference material is further complicated by the fact that there is no computer laboratory in the school. Teachers agreed that if there was an Internet connection in the school, things would be better. According to them, the problems are not only limited to Anabela High School, they extend right up to the university level.

Another problem is that the WAEC syllabus and school curriculum are not identical. According to the teachers, the national curriculum has been imposed on various schools without taking into consideration the level of the students. For geography and physics, the subject teachers complained that it was impossible to complete the curriculum within the given period of time. One of them complained that the curriculum was bulky and some critics have argued that the curriculum is not healthy for the growth and development of the education system of Liberia. According to them, the developers should have considered the level of the students, the society and the learning atmosphere where it is being delivered. In addition, the curriculum was not distributed to various schools in booklet form. It was distributed on CDs, and not all schools have computer facilities to read from, or the finance to pay for the printing cost because it was too bulky. Another teacher also complained that in geography, the main textbook they were using was outdated. It was written by a German geographer in the 1970s. No Liberian has written on that subject. Teachers suggested that it would be appreciated if the international body sponsoring curriculum development in Liberia went to various schools and talked with teachers who were actually implementing the curriculum.

Finance is another major problem facing the school. The teachers are badly paid and they would like their salaries to be improved. According to them, an increase in salaries would also increase their motivation in the school. The current school infrastructures are inadequate and it is the school vision to bring the school to the pre-war level, but without the necessary finances, it is impossible. In 2013, the nature of examinations in sciences will be changed. Sections involving the use of a science laboratory would be included, and this would only be possible for students if there was an actual science laboratory. Most schools currently do not have a laboratory. To build a science laboratory is very costly and even the maintenance is difficult. Other problems included female student empowerment to take up key positions in the student leadership and the continuation of peace education in the school. To conclude, Anabela High School's current major problems include curriculum reform, disparity between the WAEC syllabus and the school curriculum, limited reference materials, no library, outdated text books, no computer laboratory, limited female student empowerment, no peace education, no science laboratory and limited general school finances for the improvement of teachers' salaries.

11.3.2 Possible solutions

Beginning with the curriculum and the disparity between the WAEC syllabus and school curriculum, it is suggested that the MOE and the curriculum developers should sample the opinions of the teachers to see how real these teachers' grievances are and to what extent the grievances can be addressed. Teachers have the classroom experience, and they are the ones to really give feedback on the curriculum regarding what works and what does not on the ground. The partnership between the MOE and teachers should be developed, and the lines of communication should be improved and opened up. Anabela High School should also consult the Revised Curriculum of June 2011 (Grades 1–12) to see if some of their concerns have been addressed. After examining the June 2011 Revised Curriculum, I would agree that it is bulky, and this may have been due to the fact that the developers were aware of the level of the teachers in the field and wanted to provide as much detail as possible.

It should be noted that the curriculum is also good; however, actually delivering it to the students may be a problem, as some teachers rightly complained, because of the level of the students. It is also positive that the target has been set high, and I am certain that the level of the students will continue to improve. Continuous professional development for teachers on the implementation of the curriculum will help considerably. The disparity between the WAEC syllabus and the school curriculum could be addressed at the level of the school. The Department of Education in Anabela High School should take up the issue and discuss it with the principal and the school board. It would also be good if the curriculum for each class was accompanied by a teacher's book. If this is done, issues such as the culture in the south would be explained in detail in the teacher's manual, and every teacher in Liberia would be aware of it and be able to deliver a much better lesson on it. Another route could be to incorporate those vital issues into the teacher training curriculum. Letting every county develop its own curriculum is not a good choice for Liberia. It may help to divide the nation, rather than unite. Please read section 11.4.1 on the lesson from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

To solve the problem of limited reference materials, no libraries and outdated textbooks, Anabela High School should establish a computer laboratory with fast Internet connections. This would help the teachers and students to get additional books and other materials online. A computer laboratory would also be required for Anabela High School to network nationally and internationally. Network learning in the twenty-first century is quite important for all PLCs. Jackson and Temperley (2007, p. 45) and Bolam et al. (2005) have argued that the school as a unit has become too small and isolated to meet the challenges of PLCs in "a knowledge-rich and network world" Jackson and Temperley (2007, p. 45). According to them, an expansion of learning through networking (external learning) with other schools and through the public knowledge base is crucial for real organizational learning.

> Networking between educators enables them to share and tease out principles of good practice, engage in in-depth dialogue across schools, create knowledge to respond to particular challenges that any one school might find hard to resolve, observe colleagues elsewhere, experience fresh perspectives, reduce isolation and see their own school through a different lens. (Stoll, Robertson, Kisber, Sklar, and Whittingham, 2007, p. 63)

If Anabela High School networks with other PLCs in Liberia and especially with those internationally, they would have the opportunity to link up with various online libraries equipped with free books and additional materials for both teachers and students. Joining this network would contribute tremendously to the development of each school in the network, as the various schools would learn from each other. In addition, a network would link Anabela High School with other external agents of change such as universities and make it possible to gain external knowledge. Network learning will not only foster collaborative learning, but it will also have, as its major aim, improving teaching practice, and as a key outcome, raising students' achievement (Stoll et al., 2007).

Mullen and Kochan (2000) have supported the view that teacher networks do play a significant role in enhancing the continuous professional development of teachers. Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) and Mullen and Kochan (2000) have identified the features shared by successful teacher networks. Such networks tend to provide a clear focus combined with a common purpose and identity. They include activities that function as opportunities for self-direction, involve interdependent communities where teachers solve problems together, and create opportunities for leadership both within the network and through transference to other domains, with a focus on schools.

In a study by Nkengbeza (2009), it was found that at Mountain High School in Cameroon, the student government comprises of the following posts: senior prefects (boy and girl), study prefect (boy or girl), sanitation prefects (boy and girl), labour prefect (boy or girl), punishment prefect (boy or girl), social prefects (boy and girl) and sports prefects (boy and girl). This means that, through design, there are bound to be a minimum of four female students in the student leadership. To further empower the female students into leadership positions in Anabela High School, the school should follow the examples of Mountain High School and establish the positions of senior prefects, sanitation prefects, social prefects, and sports prefects for both boys and girls. It may be a good idea for Anabela High School to modify this and institute the positions of president, vice, secretary and chaplain for both boys and girls. This means that each of the above positions should have a boy and a girl. When this is done, more female students will feel empowered, and it will become a good foundation for the younger female students to learn from. It will also be a good idea for every class to have a girl and boy prefects.

The teaching of peacebuilding education was stopped in Anabela High School a few years after the war ended. It would be worthwhile continuing the teaching of peace education in the post-conflict era in the school. I do agree with

Sinclair (2004) that peace education should deal with changing the student's mind-set; thus, promoting understanding, respect and tolerance among fellow students. This may require the acquisition of more non-violent and conflict-resolution skills. To build a generation that do not see war as a means of settling conflict, peace-education teaching must continue in all schools in Liberia – be they government, community or private schools. When this is done, combined with the work of the SPM and other teachings and guidance, students' moral intellectual infrastructure will be reshaped.

11.3.3 Raising additional finances

Getting funding to finance the equipment for science laboratories and to improve the limited general school finances for the improvement of teachers' salaries may be a tough and delicate area to venture into, but it may not be impossible. As there are other factors we have to consider before raising school fees, I will leave that option open. Anabela High School can get additional finances to fund the above project by forming partnerships with churches and businesses so that they can donate at least once a year to the school. The church should be a major source of finance. Anabela High School could get the contact details of its faith-based churches abroad and apply to them for funding. Most of those churches have charitable organizations that they support and Anabela High School may be referred to or funded directly by them. Another major source of funding could be to apply nationally and internationally to other governments and NGOs that are currently funding education worldwide, especially those organizations funding education in post-conflict environments, for which the school could qualify. If there are organizations funding government and community schools, the school should remember them and search for those funding faith-based and/or private institutions. Many of them can be reached through the internet.

Anabela High School could start by forming a "Funding Development Group". This body would be given the right to contact donors both in Liberia and abroad. They could contact influential businesses and other wealthy people, churches and companies. They could request annual or one-off financial contributions (Padover and Elder, 2007). The Alumni Association would also be a fertile place from which to request additional funding. Since Anabela High School has graduated about 2,500 students, all Alumni Association members, wealthy ex-students, friends of Anabela High School and other individuals should be contacted for annual or one-off financial contributions. Another source of revenue could be through foundations both at home and abroad. There are international foundations that are willing to fund education in conflict and post-conflict environments. Contacting these foundations may result in a sizable donation. Alumni associations and other wealthy people may link the school up with their friends and the donor list would continue to grow year after year. Many institutions have succeeded through this method and Anabela High School can too.

As I stated earlier from my observation, the traditional method of writing notes on the board using chalk is still being used in AHS. It is my view that once the additional finance has been raised, technology should be integrated into the classrooms. Projectors could be used beginning with grade 11 and 12. Once this is done, most of the notes will be photo copied for the students or by the students. Students who cannot afford to photo copy the notes can copy them at home or during their free time. Once this is done, the teachers will not spend most of their time writing notes on the board and consequently the syllabus will be covered.

11.4 Suggestions for institutions, especially those in conflict and post-conflict societies

I believe that not all schools, even in Liberia, have been able to develop and transform the way Anabela High School has. I hope this study will give them the opportunity to reflect on the process of transformation currently taking place in their schools, where they may have gone wrong or how things could be done better in terms of the process order. This will give other schools in Liberia the chance to copy from Anabela High School and learn from both their successes and failures. On a wider scope, this study has provided educators, politicians and other nation builders with the core components of PLCs, and a model for rebuilding education institutions in conflict and post-conflict environments – a prevalent challenge in the twenty-first century.

11.4.1 A lesson from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

BiH was exposed to a devastating war from 1992 to 1995, which brought material and human destruction such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, mass casualties, migration and starvation for three and a half years. Education, such as during the Liberian civil wars, suffered due to the physical destruction of the infrastructure. However, unlike Liberia, education in BiH further suffered from political, ideological and nationalist views that have continued to divide the country even after the war. BiH has three distinct groups: Bosniaks (Muslims), Serbs (orthodox Christians) and Croats (Catholics).

The Dayton Agreement (Ohio, 1995) "left a chaotic legacy for education" development (Magill, 2010, p. 29) that has continued to divide the country to the present day. Dayton decentralized the education to the extent that it has made reforms in the sector almost impossible (Pasalic-Kreso, 1999). By decentralizing education in a politically divided nation, the Dayton Agreement gave the politicians and nationalists the freedom to pursue their interests. Each group has its own political party promoting its ideology: Bosniaks (Muslims) are represented by the Stranka Demokrastke Akcije (SDA), Serbs (orthodox Christians) by the Srpska Demokratska Stranka (SDS) and Croats (Catholics) by the Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica (HDZ). The Dayton Agreement created a

single country with different entities. On the one hand, is the Federation of BiH with a majority of the population as Bosniaks and Croats, and, on the other hand, is the Republika Srpska (RS), with its population as almost entirely Serbian (Pasalic-Kreso, 1999). Education is highly decentralized (at the Federation, canton, municipality, and school levels) in the BiH Federation and is centralized in the RS (Pasalic-Kreso, 1999). The dilemma facing education planners in the BiH Federation, for example, is how to organize public education. Schools have become highly politicized and students are separated based on their religion, ethnicity and language (Pasalic-Kreso, 1999). The World Bank Report in 2006 doubted if it would ever be possible to implement educational reforms in such a fragmented educational system and requested political leaders to really think about it. Education has continued to divide the people, because each group has continued to use education to promote its own ideology and political goals (Magill, 2010; Pasalic-Kreso, 1999).

Liberia should learn from the mistakes in BiH. Using education for ideological and political gains is divisive, and it should be thought about deeply; building an inclusive educational system is the way forward. As Pasalic-Kreso (1999) rightly puts it, a school, as well as society, "Cannot stay neutral and ignore ethnic, cultural, as well as social, gender, health, and other student differences, which reflect the diversity of a society itself" (Pasalic-Kreso, 1999, p. 4). The country needs to rethink how the education system can build an inclusive system that is appropriate for BiH, what values should be promoted in such a system, what curricula and textbooks are acceptable and the kind of teachers needed in such a system.

Meaningful educational reforms are needed and, for this to happen, there ought to be a promotion of a vision of a democratic country where everyone, regardless of religion, ethnic or cultural identity has an equal chance to succeed in the society. Multiculturalism should not be seen as an obstacle; it is the richness of a society. It should not be eliminated; it should be nurtured and developed. For an inclusive educational system to succeed in BiH, textbooks should be rewritten to remove abusive and divisive languages, there should be a review of the way history is told, and teachers' professional development should be promoted to ensure quality, unity and a single educational vision for the sector and country. Anabela High School could reflect on this, as it helps to highlight the consequences of poor policies and their consequences.

11.4.2 Lessons from Finland

It would also be worthwhile not to focus all our attention only on conflict and post-conflict environments, but also to look at how educational institutions have been reconstructed in non-conflict environments. In this section, we will examine how Finland has developed its educational system into a productive and equitable system; a system that is "working in concert around a thoughtful, high-quality curriculum and supported by appropriate materials and assessments ... a system that helps students, teachers, and leaders continue to learn and improve" (Hammond, 2012, p. 2). As Hammond (2012) and Sahlberg

(2009) explain, Finland has been able to build a model system of education since the 1970s; a system that is publicly financed, of high quality and which has high participation rates. According to Hammond (2012), 99 per cent of students, complete compulsory basic education and about 90 per cent complete upper secondary school.

As Hammond (2012) rightly explains, for about three decades, Finland has systematically developed an educational system that is inclusive with well-qualified teachers in all classrooms, a system that allocates resources to those who need them most, a system with a high standard of support for special needs, a system with a decentralized evaluation system and one which balances general decentralization and centralization. While focusing on the above areas, Finland has gradually developed a system that takes care of all its population, a system that is based on "trust and respect" within the education sector. Finland has built an overall system that cares for and works for the benefit of all the students from all backgrounds, and for all the regions in the country. Finnish teachers' preparation consists of extensive course work, research-based practice and one year of teaching practice in a school attached to the university. Most teachers hold a master's degree and they are versed in creating a challenging curriculum. Time is provided for collaboration among teachers and an entire collaborative system has been systematically fashioned (Hammond, 2012).

The Finns have developed a system of education based on teaching and learning that meets the demands of their contemporary, changing society; a system that is socially fair and inclusive with low performance variation between schools. In this system, special educational needs students are well taken care of. Special needs students are not only included in regular classrooms, but they have adjusted the individual curriculum to meet everyone's needs, and there are also special institutions for special needs students (Sahlberg, 2011). The system has well-trained teachers in five main areas – the kindergarten and pre-school teachers, primary school grades 1 to 9 teachers, subject teachers in grades 7 to 9, special education teachers and vocational education teachers. In this system, teachers are also researchers who are supported by good professional development with more emphasis on pedagogical reflection (Sahlberg, 2011). The system is well managed, and provides free and inclusive education for all. In 2007, it spent 5.6 per cent of its GDP on education, which is not just lower than that spent by the United States and Canada – 7.6% and 6.1% respectively – but it is lower than the 5.7% average spent by the OECD countries (Sahlberg, 2011, p. 57).

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Archival materials

School archive 1: A brief history of Anabela High School
School archive 2: The school ode of Anabela High School
School archive 3: The *Student Handbook* of Anabela High School

APPENDIX

Definition of key terms

Professional learning communities

According to Stoll et al. (2006), Mitchell and Sackney (2000) and Toole and Louis (2002), PLCs are institutions or a group of people sharing and questioning their practice in an on-going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented and growth-promoting way.

2. Conflict environment

A conflict environment is the actual environment where conflict takes place. In the context of Liberia, it is the country – Liberia itself.

3. Core components

These are the conceptual frameworks used in determining or measuring PLCs. Other researchers such as Hord (2003), Morrow (2010) and Olivier, Antoine, Cormier, Lewis, Minckler and Stadalis, (2009) have all agreed that these components are shared supportive leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions and shared personal practice. When it comes to the core components used in building PLCs in conflict and post-conflict environments, as found in this study, these components will include shared supportive leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, shared personal practice, psychological factors, physical factors, the international community and other NGOs and government education policies.

4. Collective creativity

This represents collegial learning among the professional staff of a PLC. The staffs learn from each other and also learn to learn together, and this is done through continuous inquiry. Dufour (2004) concludes that collective creativity "Is a systematic process in which teachers" and other stakeholders in a school "work together to analyze and improve their ... practice" (Dufour, 2004, p. 1).

5. Shared values and vision

Values are beliefs or ideas shared by members of an organization or group and vision is a mental picture of what the organization wants to achieve over time. While Andrews and Lewis (2007) have argued that shared values and vision are at the center for the success of any learning community, Louis and Kruse (1995) and Stoll et al. (2006) have concluded that a shared value base in any PLC would provide a framework for shared, collective and ethical decision making.

6. Supportive conditions

This includes the relationship and structural elements. According to Oliver et al (2009), there should be a caring relationship among the staff and students that will promote the building of trust and respect. Achievement is rewarded and change is part of the school culture. The structural elements include a time and place for meetings. It also includes personal and professional characteristics such as staff development supported with available funding (Hord and Rutherford, 1998) and the staff are supported with appropriate technology and teaching materials (Olover et al, 2009).

7. Shared personal practice

This is what Louis, Kruse and Bryk (1995) called "de-privatization of practice" and it includes visiting each other's classes and sharing good classroom practices, giving constructive feedback, and coaching and mentoring (Hord and Rutherford, 1998 & Olover et al, 2009).

Interview Questions

Section 1: The core components of professional learning communities in Anabela high School and how they developed

A. Shared and supportive leadership
1. Sketch the power distribution structure in Anabela High School. FQ: What are the functions of those in each structure?
2. How is your working relation with the principal? Does he support you in any way?

B. Collective creativity
1. Could you tell me how teachers work together in your school? (e.g. in solving problems, developing additional materials etc?)

C. Shared values and vision
1. Does your school have a vision or motto?
2. How was it created?
3. What values do you have in your school?

D. Supportive conditions
1. What supportive conditions do you have in Anabela High School?
2. I would also like to know when, where, and how the staff usually meet as a team to learn or do other creative work.

E. Shared personal practice
1. Do you share good (classroom) practices with your colleagues? If yes tell me instances and how it is done

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F.
1.How have these characteristics been at work in transforming your school into a professional learning community?
2.What motivated your school to embark on the development process after the war?
3. A) What barriers did you face during this process of transformation?
B) What steps did you take to overcome those barriers and transform your school into a professional learning community?
C) What other problems are you still facing at the moment?
D) How are you handling those problems or how do you intend to handle those problems?

G.
1. Teachers, students, school administration, parents, the department of education officials, and the society: what part did each of these groups play in the development process in your school?

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Section 2

A brief history of Anabela High School

I interviewed the principal, the chairperson of the school board and one teacher. Documents from Anabela High School archive were also reviewed to reconstruct the history of Anabela High School. The main question was: Please could you tell me the history of Anabela High School from when it was created to today?

Section 3

The Student Leadership
I asked the students in grade 12 & 11 to write essays on student leadership in Anabela High School. I then interviewed the student leaders.The questions were centered on various student leadership positions, how they are elected, and their functions etc, and what they like and dislike in their school

Section 4

The Student Palaver Management Team

Students in this team were interviewed in a focus group (both managers and interveners).

1. What are the functions of managers and interveners?
2. What type of cases do you settle? Examples?
3. What challenges do you face?

Section 5

a. The parent teacher association (PTA)

I interviewed the PTA chairperson and the secretary to find out what part the PTA played during and after the civil wars to reshape Anabela High School.

b. The society

I examined the work of the Christian Association of Liberia (CHAL). I spoke extensively with the person in charge of training students in the Student Palaver Management Teams in various schools in Anabela High School region. I interviewed the Student Palaver Management Team in Anabela High School. Due to time constrain I was unable to interview other members from the society on why Anabela High School has succeeded more than other schools.

c. The Department of Education

At the department of education in the region Anabela High School is based, I interviewed the County Education Officer (CEO) to find out what policies, memos etc helped to shape education in his region during and after the civil wars

d. The Ministry of Education

I spoke to many people including the Deputy Minister for Instruction and the Deputy Minister for Planning and Research and I was given some documents which have helped in shaping education in Liberia.

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Additional Check List

I also gave this brief questionnaire to both teachers and other staffs who were interviewed in Anabela High School

Please answer this brief questionnaire base on Anabela High School. It takes about 3 to 5 minutes. Tick the correct box. Thanks very much.

Gender: Male Female

2. Age: Less than 30 ☐ Between 30 and 55 ☐ More than 55 ☐
3. What is your highest education qualification?

(a) Certificate or Equivalent ☐
(b) Associate Degree or Equivalent ☐
(c) Undergraduate Degree ☐
(d) MA/MS/MBA ☐
(e) Others ☐

4. How long have you been working in Anabela High School?

(a) Less than 2 years ☐
(b) Between 2 to 5 years ☐
(c) More than 5 years but less than 10 years ☐
(d) More than 10 years ☐

5. Do you usually have professional development/training?

Yes ☐
No ☐

6. How often do you usually have this training?
   (a) At least twice a year ☐
   (b) Less than twice a year ☐
   (c) Not at all ☐

7. Are you currently doing some further studies? Yes ☐ No ☐

8. If yes, what is it?

……..

9. How many schools do you currently teach or work in?

(a) Only Anabela High School ☐
(b) Anabela High School and one other school ☐
(c) Anabela High School and two or more other schools ☐

10. Select your satisfaction level ranging from 1 to 5 (1: very dissatisfied and 5 very satisfied) in Anabela High School.

1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐

Thank you very much.