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A Critical Realist Study of Learning Rounds:
Inside the black box

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1.1 Declaration

This thesis represents research that has been carried out with the considered approval of the University of Stirling's former School of Education Ethics Committee. I declare this work to be entirely my own and submit it for examination for the degree of PhD in accordance with the University of Stirling regulations.

Catriona Oates

1.2 Acknowledgements

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?

Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day?

From morn to night, my friend.

Christina Rossetti

It is a strange and unsettling feeling that accompanies this final act of submission; an event that has increasingly inspired dread and longing in equal measure as time wore on. In many ways, I am surprised to have stayed the 'day's journey' and, without the help, support and encouragement of the following people, things might have been otherwise, so thanks are due.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of my late brother, Brian. The pain of his passing was part of this PhD journey and it tested me, and all of us who loved him, more than anything we have ever known. Our world changed forever, and I miss him terribly.
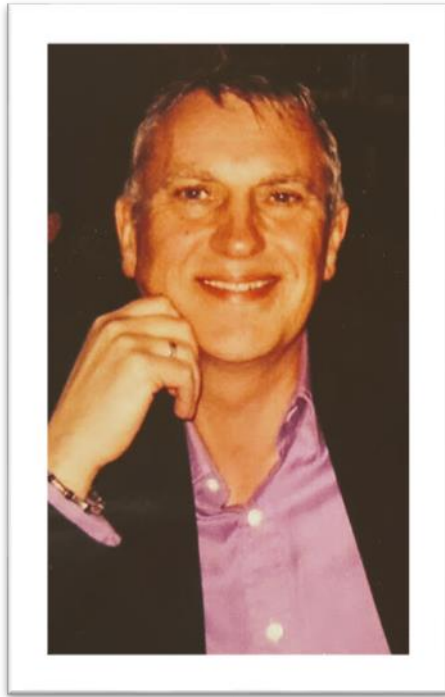
For Brian

1.3   Abstract

This research study explores a version of professional learning communities (PLCs) in the context of Scottish education. The rise in popularity of PLCs as a means of collaborative, situated professional learning for teachers, in recent years, has led to the growth of several variations on this phenomenon, and a particular version of them, the Learning Round, is the focus of this study. They are considered in relation to the importance of their role in the wider context of teacher professional learning in Scotland. The study seeks to shine a light inside the PLC to investigate the so far under-researched internal processes, interactions and emergent practices. The study is framed by a Critical Realist (CR) approach, as a qualitative case study, using semi-structured interviews in two school settings where LR and other forms of PLC have taken place. CR provides a depth ontology that has been adopted as it allows for the examination of mechanisms that explain how structural, cultural and agential factors have influenced the internal workings of the PLCs in question. Findings suggest the PLC is presented as a structure to enable the collaborative improvement of practice but, in the absence of mutual accountability, the achievement of individual improvement is prioritized for most participants. For participants, support to enable congenial relationships to develop more collegially is essential, in order to achieve critical engagement and mobilise the PLC as a site for the creation of shared work supported by mutual accountability, as opposed to the sharing of practice for individual improvement. For school leaders, some tensions are identified in balancing horizontal and vertical leadership and in calculating how far to step in or step back from the PLC. In stepping out entirely they forgo the opportunity to bring system-level perspective and make an epistemic contribution to the PLC. Finally, implications for practice, policy and research are explored, considering how PLCs might be re-articulated in the light of these findings.

Table of acronyms

CAT	Collegiate Activity Time	*HT*	*Head Teacher*	PL	Professional Learning
CfE	*Curriculum for Excellence*	INSET	In-service Training	*PLC*	*Professional Learning Community*
CLPL	Career-long Professional Learning	*ITE*	*Initial Teacher Education*		
CoP	*Communities of Practice*	LTWG	Learning and Teaching Working Group	PRD	Professional Review and Development
COSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities	*M/M*	*Morphogenesis/ Morphostasis*	PU	Professional Update
CPD	*Continuing/Continuous Professional Development*	NCITT	National Committee for Initial Teacher Training	*RIC*	*Regional Improvement Collaborative*
CPL	Continuous/Continuing Professional Learning	*NIB*	*National Improvement Board*	RRS	Rights Respecting Schools
CR	*Critical Realism*	NIF	National Improvement Framework	*SCEL*	*Scottish College for Educational Leadership*
CT	Chartered Teacher				
DL	Distributed Leadership	*NQT*	*Newly Qualified Teacher*	SFR	Standard for Registration
DHT	*Deputy head Teacher*				
FTE	Full-time Equivalent	OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	*SQA*	*Scottish Qualifications Authority*
GERM	*Global Education Reform Movement*				
GTCS	General Teaching Council for Scotland			TaLIS	Teaching and Learning International Study
HF	*Hierarchical Focusing*	*PIRLS*	*Progress in International Reading Literacy Study*		
HMIE	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education	PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment	*TIMSS*	*Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*
				TSF	Teaching Scotland's Future
				WTA	*Working Time Agreement*

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2 Introduction

This research study explores Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and their role in teacher professional learning in Scotland. More specifically, Learning Rounds (LR) represent a particular Scottish variety of the PLC, and as such are the focus of this study. Therefore, it seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the relationships and processes involved in LR as a variant of PLCs, and their emergent agentic effects.

2.1 Rationale

Since the millennial years the focus for system-wide educational improvement in western countries has increasingly been linked with teachers' knowledge, capacity and practice (Barber and Mourshed, 2007; Borko, 2004; Donaldson, 2010; Lee and Louis 2019, Brodie 2019). The status and importance of teachers' beginning and on-going professional development has grown. An alternative perspective might suggest that the onus of teachers to carry the burden of responsibility for this wholescale improvement is disproportionate to what they can realistically achieve (Coffield, 2012). However, the maxim that, 'the quality of a system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' (Barber and Mourshed, 2007, p16) has taken hold and has been widely adopted by governments and policymakers in Scotland (Donaldson 2010), and elsewhere. This maintains an emphasis on teachers' professional learning as a significant and catalysing factor within education systems that shows no signs of diminishing.

The importance of locating teacher professional learning in classroom practice and linking this with school improvement is not new. As far back as 1990, Fullan detailed an 'action framework for better schools;' a model of 'sustained professional development' based on 'the assumption that classroom improvement, teacher development and school improvement must be systematically linked if substantial progress is to be achieved' (Fullan 1990, p13). Situated, school based professional learning for teachers has increasingly been presented in educational literature as the preferred model for supporting improvement, both nationally and internationally (e.g. Donaldson, 2010; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 2011; Margolis et. al, 2017; Mansfield and Thompson, 2017). Further to this, curriculum reform in Scotland sought to reposition the teacher as a creative, reflective

decision making (Scottish Executive 2006) 'agent of change' (Priestley Biesta and Robinson 2015, p11). PLCs, are frequently presented as a mechanism for change through enhancing professional knowledge and capacity in teachers. Significant research evidence has been generated to support this view (see for example: Cordingley et al. 2005; Stoll et al. 2006, 2007; Harris, Jones and Huffmann 2017). Collaborative observational practices such as Learning Rounds, Triads or Walks, have been advocated in education and other professions as a means of supporting home-grown professional learning situated in the workplace. However, there are conflicting arguments in this debate (Stickney 2015, Hairon and Dimmock 2012, Servage 2008, 2009, Fendler 2006) and further empirical knowledge is required to inform practice in this area and generate deeper, more granular understanding of the mechanisms and processes involved in PLCs, and their emergent agentic effects. This study aims to address this gap. It is theoretically framed in Critical Realism as a qualitative case study across two schools. Critical Realism promotes a depth ontology: that is, an understanding of the social world that accounts for hidden structural and cultural mechanisms that shape our experiences. Therefore, one of the aims of this study is to uncover any potentially hidden structural and cultural factors, and their emergent effects that might shape participants' experiences in PLCs. It is guided by the following questions:

- In what ways are PLCs understood and valued as a professional learning activity?

- What cultural factors are at play within PLCs an in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

- What structural factors are at play within PLCs an in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

- What individual factors are at play within PLCs an in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

- What outcomes can be identified through this process (for example changes in individual attitudes, or changes to school structures and culture)?

2.2   Why this study and why now? The journey to PhD

I came to PhD study fairly late in my educator journey. Any early intentions of advance study after initially graduating seem a very distant memory and were focused on pursuing an offer that had been made to me from La Sorbonne. I came back from Paris and started my teaching career as a secondary French in a Stirlingshire school. It was not until working with the Scottish Centre for Information on Languages Teaching and Research (SCILT) as a professional development officer that I revisited the idea of Master's level study, and this study is its first generation descendant. By the dissertation stage of the programme I had moved to the National CPD team. This team was a strong one. Its work was entirely focused on teacher professional learning and I loved it. Teaching Scotland's Future (Donaldson 2010) was a big focus of our work and I realigned my dissertation focus on Learning Rounds, as part of the work of the team was supporting teachers in this practice. Difficult circumstances surrounded the final stages of my Master's study as the team was effectively disbanded. However, I completed it and an opportunity had presented itself. Continued interest in my Master's study from my then supervisor resulted in some further analysis of my data and later, a number of joint publications resulted from this work. I was beginning to think that the ideas in the study might be worth pursuing, and even if not, learning about research processes could be interesting and beneficial, and offered an opportunity to develop research skills. I had the time, I applied to join a lively cohort at Stirling and the journey had begun.

I am reflexively aware of my positioning in this study. I do not approach it as a neutral investigator. Neither am I a researcher – I am an educator with experience of teaching at every level of the system from primary school to higher education, who is developing new skills and knowledge in this process.   My personal perspective on education has been informed by a strong sense of social justice that has roots in values that were embedded by my wider family, from a very young age that opposes injustice and inequities in educational outcomes. I care deeply about teachers' work and how they are supported to perform the important roles they hold in educating all young people. My professional values for myself and the wider professional community aspire to Sachs's (2010) activist professional model, that prioritises collaboration over isolationism; participation, cooperation, activism and political awareness. I was invested in the learning rounds model prior to this study. My

positioning in this regard has changed over time but I cannot account for assumptions other might make about me or how some may position me in relation to it. This subjectivity has embedded itself throughout this thesis and I cannot, nor should I silence it – I have done my best to make it transparent.

2.3   Thesis road map

In this introductory chapter, I have presented the research problem for the study that seeks to generate deeper understanding of the relationships and processes involved in PLCs, and their emergent agentic effects for teacher professional learning. I also offer a personal rationale for pursuing the study and express my reflexive positioning within it.

In chapter three, I offer a backdrop for this study that sets the landscape against which it plays out. This involves a brief examination of dominant global ideas that are shaping educational discourse at national level. The Scottish educational context is then considered in the light of policy developments that have shaped our approaches to professional learning, and made space for collaborative practices, such as the PLC, to take root.

Chapter four considers manifestations of professionalism in relevant literature and how they shape teacher identity and the role of accountability in professional learning. In chapter five, I offer an overview of literature concerning the PLC and critically examine definitions and problematic assumptions that go some way to explaining their ubiquitous appeal. I also highlight some limitations and possibilities for agency and teacher leadership in PLCs that open a door towards the broad purpose of this study.

Chapter six begins the discussion of methodological approaches adopted for research. Epistemological and ontological orientations are explained as the foundation for Archer's morphogenetic approach (M/M), which provides the theoretical perspective for the study. The second half of this chapter introduces the participants of Eden and Monkshill schools. I experienced some methodological contortions in recruiting participants for the study and these are explained in this chapter. Discussion of approaches to interviews and the ethical dilemmas I encounter and address in my approach to research draw this chapter to a close.

Chapter seven begins the analysis of the data and offers an abductive analysis of the two case schools – a rich description that gives a detailed picture of surface level empirical data. This then progresses to more detailed 'retroductive' analysis in chapters eight, nine and ten, that explains the surface level events by looking more closely for underlying structural or cultural mechanisms. Findings that relate to, for example, school climate; teachers' engagement with research as a cultural form and some tensions in the role of school leaders regarding the PLC structure are identified in the analysis. I conclude the thesis in the final chapter with a summary of findings and implications for practitioners, policy makers and possible future directions for research.

3 The lie of the land

In this chapter, I will introduce the policy context of professional learning in Scotland because it sets the scene and sketches the backdrop for this study. It opens up the landscape of professional learning in Scotland and locates the PLC in this context. I will first briefly discussing international perspectives and the wider context for education in Scotland. Then I will consider the following landmark policy reports: A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century (Scottish Executive, 2000), Teaching Scotland's Future (Donaldson, 2010) and 'Advancing Professionalism in the 21st Century' (Scottish Government 2011). These are contours on the map of teachers' professional learning (PL) both as contractual obligation and as dominant influences on teachers' professional practice in Scotland. I will consider local and international perspectives on teacher learning and describe how the notion of the structured, collaborative professional learning community (PLC) found its way into the current professional learning policy context in Scotland. I will explore the foundations upon which this practice is based by way of a critical analysis of the development of relevant policies. I consider the ways in which these have converged and interacted over time, resulting in the positioning of collaborative professional learning as a dominant idea in professional learning discourse, and consequently, the professional learning community, as a conduit for this. In doing so, this chapter lays the ground for the first research question to be addressed in future chapters.

3.1 International Perspectives

Within a global context, an ineluctable movement towards globalisation has shaped education policy developments in the millennial years. This trend is an important concern for many in the field of education, perhaps most notably policy makers (Lingard and Ozga 2007). Globalisation as a neologism can be understood differently in a multitude of contexts. Within the field of education, however, there is a convergence around the understanding of this phenomenon as representing the translation of ideologically based influences of the neo-liberal agenda into education policy reform. This has become known as GERM: the Global Education Reform Movement, an acronym attributed to Sahlberg

(2012). The term refers to observed trends in international education policy over time that include: increasing standardisation; a narrowing of the curriculum to a limited number of key subject areas; increasing use of high stakes accountability measures and the transposing of practices from corporate management to education (Fuller and Stevenson 2019). Orientation towards this agenda has been described variously as a 'ferocious global turn' (Gerrard 2015, p856), and in subtler terms by Ball (2016) as policy ratchet; reform by stealth, where a steady stream of small, incremental manoeuvres that engineer educational reform is gradually replacing larger-scale more sweeping, grand policy gestures. There is consensus across a range of scholarly literature, however, that this agenda is characterised by features including:

• the increasingly bonded nature of the link between education and the economy;

• economic competitiveness as a driver for education reform;

• repurposing of education for the development of individuals' transferable skills within a market economy

• linked to above, emphasis on lifelong learning;

• the generation and harnessing of attainment data for international comparison;

• marketisation of educational practices (such as tendering for assessment or reporting tools).

These features are orchestrated by supra-national (Lingard and Ozga 2007, p5) agencies and are shaping policy decisions at international and national level (Abernethie 2006; Ball 2005, 2012; Connell 2009; Gerrard 2015; Lingard 2007; Lingard and Ozga 2007; Ozga and Jones 2007).

The main actors in this supra-national stratum of governance are leaders of multinational companies and international organisations. In the field of education, this translates as agencies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) The OECD has wide-ranging interests, from finance to technology to agriculture, but its influence on educational policy reform is what concerns us here. This organisation processes large

amounts of quantitative data from countries at varying stages of development around the world. Its interest in education focuses mostly on national policy and performance. Much has been written critically about the effects of this organisation on homogenising national education policies and on narrowing the educational focus to an improvement agenda concerned mostly with attainment and economic competitiveness (see Abernethie 2006; Ball 2005, 2012; Connell 2009; Gerrard 2015; Lingard and Ozga 2007; Ozga and Jones 2006; Rizvi and Lingard 2009; Tatto 2007).

Education policy is clearly of major importance in the increasingly globalised world. As Arnott and Ozga (2010) contend:

> within the increasingly globalised policy field, and responding to increased competitive pressures, education offers a key policy arena for economic development. (Arnott & Ozga 2010, p344).

The role of the teacher in terms of teacher quality and accountability within the rubric of system-wide improvement and the emergence of international comparators for system quality and attainment, have all featured prominently in policy discourse at international level over the last decade. Kennedy describes sees this as a move towards a homogeneity of systems, characteristic of globalisation, which is being driven by 'increasing competitiveness as nation states seek to improve their own economies by improving the educational attainment of their citizens' (Kennedy 2013, p927).

According to Tatto (2007), placing teachers at the centre of this is not to be entirely welcomed; as giving them and their role attention may be overdue, but it may also leave them vulnerable to further criticism, especially if any emergent policies are 'drawn from insufficient empirical data and decontextualized conclusions' (Tatto 2007, p7).

The empirical data referred to here are generated by trans-national agencies such as the OECD, its associated Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and studies such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Programme for International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). All of these have produced data that are considered 'indicators of the success of nation states' school systems' (Kennedy, 2013, p927). The influence of these studies is far reaching, as they create the opportunity for comparison across countries using their instruments as benchmarks of performance.

Obviously, in tabulating these data, some states will emerge as high performing under these criteria, and conditions are thereby created where all others are driven in policy directions that will attempt to emulate them. This results in an increasing tendency towards:

> emerging regulatory mechanisms which hold education institutions accountable to international standards, the effectiveness of …[which] is still to be proven (Tatto 2007, p13).

The influence of these studies is significant, not only on policy but also on public opinion as often the publicity they generate has popular appeal and can easily command media attention. Beyond mainstream media, the deficiencies referred to above by Tatto (2007) are also beginning to attract more critical attention. Professor Stephen Heppell, formerly of Bournemouth University started gathering and sharing literature on an area of his website as early as 2011 under a 'Worried about PISA?' banner which gives a rare critique of the system that is aimed at a mainstream audience. Similarly, William Stewart writing in the Times Educational Supplement on 26th July 2013 questions 'Is PISA fundamentally flawed?' In this article, the author raises fundamental questions about the scope of the studies carry out suggesting they are snapshots of experience, and not longitudinal in nature. The inconsistencies in the tests themselves are discussed, along with Stewart's suggestion that a bias in the methodology towards countries within the sample where certain unspecified languages are spoken is unacknowledged. This along with a reported reluctance in the OECD to explain or answer questions led the author to the conclusion that what is happening with PISA is inside a black box, and leaves too many claims unanswered or insufficiently substantiated for the data to be considered sound. The academic community also has not been slow to offer its critique and analysis (see Zhao 2020, Priestley and Shapira 2019).

Whatever the interest in this critique it is unlikely, at the moment, to challenge the power and influence on national and global educational policy. There is no sign of any such influence diminishing, and in spite of an increased focus on the teacher as the most important factor in the education process (Barber and Mourshed 2007; Hargreaves and Fullan 2015) their capacity to change will be limited by narrow views of purposes of education these …. 'large scale measurement systems such as PISA [produce, as they] continue to focus on academic achievement in a small and selective number of domains and subject areas' (Biesta 2015, p75).

There are further tools that are deployed by the OECD to wield influence on many aspects of education policy and manoeuvred to gain 'normative control' (Berkovich and Benoliel 2020, p498) of discourses around teacher quality. The most relevant of these in the context of this study is TaLIS, the Teaching and Learning International Survey. TaLIS aims to enhance understanding of how national education policies might support and develop teacher quality (Schleicher 2015). This aspect of educational improvement that focuses on teacher quality as a major factor in improving educational outcomes is worthy of further discussion. International summits on the teaching profession have been organised on an annual basis from 2011 (see Schleicher 2011, 2014, 2015, 2016). The summits provided a platform for the dissemination of survey results from PISA, TaLIS and a number of other reports that are detailed in the forewords of the foregoing publications. In the publications resulting from these summits, Schleicher (2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016), considers every aspect of the role of the teacher from recruitment through to induction, evaluation and appraisal. In the latest of this series of publications, a strong emphasis on teacher quality and professional learning is evident. It is here where the supposed benefits of collaborative professional learning come into focus: claims are made relating 'teacher efficacy' with participation in collaborative professional learning (Schleicher 2016, p55). These claims are further supported by an accompanying series of OECD publications entitled 'Teaching in Focus.' This series also provides a vehicle for TaLIS data, offering a commentary on wide-ranging matters for a diverse audience. Within this range of publications, the OECD uses evidence from the TaLIS survey to promote the value of fostering learning communities among teachers (2013) in the form of classroom–embedded professional learning (OECD 2015) and professional collaboration as a key support for professional learning (OECD 2020). According to Berkovich and Benoliel (2020), OECD recommendations move to control discourses around teacher quality by normatively shaping it, using its survey data to fashion remedies for teachers who are framed as in deficit. These three threads indicated above clearly support the idea that a professional learning practice such as the PLC is a 'good thing.' Furthermore, it is positioned as a 'remedy' (Berkovich and Benoliel 2020, p507) for improvement in teacher quality, based on international evidence, however problematic that might be. This may be difficult to resist, given the OECD's manoeuvres 'to construct teachers as problematic professionals and the OECD as being in a position of authority' (Berkovich and Benoliel 2020, p507), to remedy the deficit. It may also go some way to explaining why

interest in the PLC and its various iterations might have gained such traction in the school improvement agenda since the early years of this century.

Education policy in Scotland concerning teacher quality, recruitment, assessment, teachers' practices and professional learning, clearly does not exist in a vacuum. Dominant global influences bear down on national and local sites of policy to shape discourses and practices at multiple levels of the system. I will now consider the more local context for education policy in Scotland, setting out firstly, its historic origins generally, then considering more closely the development of professional learning within this.

3.2   The Historical Context: education policy in Scotland

Education in Scotland is commonly portrayed as a 'vital component of Scottish identity' (Humes 2013, p98); a core value which is regarded as important for individuals and society, even although experiences and perceptions of it are varied and these beliefs may be held less confidently now than before (Bryce and Humes 2003). It is often seen as a 'public good' (Humes, et al. 2013, p1061) and although questions will persist for a long time to come over whether these aspirations may or may not (ever) be achieved, it also carries the weighty responsibility of being 'an honourable tradition….as a means of promoting equality of opportunity' (Humes et al. 2013, p1061).

 References to a democratic ideal and more specifically the idea of the 'democratic intellect' as proposed by Davie (Humes 2018) are relevant when considering education in the Scottish context. This proposes that values of a broad intellectual tradition in Scottish education is philosophically grounded. Ideas of a 'good society' (Humes 2018, p81) are not uncommon in discourse concerning the Scottish system. Ozga (2010) expands on these authors' ideas in referring to the 'collective narrative of Scotland' (Ozga 2010, p212) as…'the common good' (ibid). Ozga evokes a sense of purpose linked to national identity and a democratic commitment to public life, where a sense of 'perceived egalitarianism' (O'Brien 2011, p777) supports the belief that education is universally available and everyone can participate in and benefit from education in Scotland.

Further to this, Kerevan identifies the 'social democratic ethos that infuses the new sense of Scottish national identity' (Kerevan 2013, p272) as something that may be perceived as underpinning the growing policy divergences, which are becoming more apparent at many levels across the neighbouring education systems of Scotland and England (Menter, Mahony and Hextall 2004).

This distinctiveness is both a historical and a very contemporary reality for Scotland. Four aspects of civic life have always enjoyed a distinct status in Scotland within the Union of the United Kingdom; these are the law, the Church (Church of Scotland), the financial system and of course, education. It is not my intention to explore the reasons or background to this here. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that the current uncertain political environment we inhabit, a space where constitutional instability seems to have amplified a 'stronger sense of nationhood' (Humes et al. 2018, p977), highlights a tension where the distinctiveness of our system is expressed with a 'more confident national voice' (ibid). However, it is simultaneously being pulled in the direction of the homogenising, international influences as described in chapter 3.1:

> English is no longer regarded as the sole medium of instruction. Scotland's two other languages, Gaelic and Scots, are valued and celebrated as part of the nation's cultural heritage. But these developments, which seem to point towards greater divergence with England, coexist alongside a set of international pressures which tend in the direction of uniformity (ibid).

The dangers of further politicisation of education here are visible; as Gillies (2018) points out, education is inherently political. The role of the state within education, in this context of highly prized distinctiveness was apparent, for example, in the midst of the polemically charged independence debate leading up to the 2014 referendum and the European referendum of 2016. Bryce et al (2013) identified that such circumstances shift focus from children's school experience to contested matters of national identity and governance (ibid). Developments since then have reinforced this message, as discussed above. More recent policy developments in Scotland such as the National Improvement Framework (NIF) indicate a clear intent on the part of the present government to improve attainment data through standardised testing, despite some resistance from the profession, betraying a desire to compete at the leading end of the OECD rankings.

There are global and local (glocal) connections to be made here: having provided a landscape view of the environment in which this study is carried out I will now consider the specific issue of teacher professional learning within the policy context in Scotland.

3.3 Teacher Professional Learning in Scotland

I should begin by explaining terminology. The current term for activities undertaken by teachers and educators to enhance their practice is 'professional learning.' This is the term used by official agencies involved in policy development at the present time, namely, Education Scotland, The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and Scottish Government. It has previously been known as continuous (or sometimes continuing) professional development (CPD), sometimes contracted to professional development (PD) or earlier still, as in-service training (INSET). Kennedy (2013) sees this as a potentially helpful shift in focus from something that is provided to something that is more actively owned and directed by the teacher. In as far as learning can only exist as a subjective property, this is perhaps helpful but as Humes (2014) points out, the shift still signals a less robust semiotic manoeuvre than that provoked by the Warnock report of 1978, that significantly and permanently changed the positioning of children in relation to their learning needs. Watson and Michael (2016) trace the shifting of this term over recent times and identify the beginning of the move towards 'professional learning' with publication of the Government response (Scottish Government 2012) to the influential review of teacher education in Scotland, Teaching Scotland's Future (Donaldson 2010). Although the term CPD was still more frequently used in the review itself, by the time the response to it was issued in 2012 (Scottish Government 2012), the balance of frequency of terms had switched to favour 'professional learning.' This was reinforced with the term CPD being expunged completely from the newly re-constructed set of professional standards for teachers managed by the GTCS (GTCS, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Curiously, there was a simultaneous purge of the term on the national Education Scotland website (Watson and Michael 2016). Thus, the move to describing learning activities to develop practice for teachers as professional learning was confirmed. Others have analysed the linguistic significance of this, notably Watson and Michael (2016), Kennedy and Docherty (2013). For the purposes of

contextualising this study and to maintain consistency with current usage, I shall use the term 'professional learning' (PL). This term may be qualified with reference to 'the teacher' at times, as this will be of relevance later.

3.4   An overview of how PL has developed

O'Brien (2011) offers an interesting historical overview of teacher PL, tracing the origins back to 1906 INSET courses offered by the then colleges of education as a statutory obligation. These were award-bearing courses that would lead to additional specialist qualifications. From this, O'Brien (2011) argues, the conceptualisation of learning opportunity as course was born. Later, from the 1960s onwards, as local authorities developed advisory capacity, short courses burgeoned. These were offered in parallel with some new national courses on themes of national importance, such as implementation of new national qualifications, for example (O'Brien, 2011). Kennedy (2014) classifies these examples as transmissive models of CPD. The idea of teacher PL as being something that came under central control was evident in these early days, with the establishment in 1979 of the National Committee for the In-service Training of Teachers (NCITT). This was a centrally funded body whose purpose was to support policy development by stakeholders such as local authorities and colleges of education (O'Brien, 2011). O'Brien suggests this committee and others produced reports detailing some questions that gave rise to early signs of tensions, some of which are still recognisable today, namely: who is in control of PL? Whose needs are being met by PL- those of the individual or the organisation? What is 'the nature and purpose' of PL (O'Brien, 2011, p780)?

The late 1980s were characterised in Scotland generally by turbulence as a result of the party-political tensions which corresponded to north-south lines of divide. Additionally, there was industrial action as a result of the new standard grade curriculum in secondary schools. In this way, interruptions and resistance to the implementation of the new curriculum and any INSET (as it would have been termed in those days) associated with it were commonplace. The introduction of a new curriculum naturally generated a great need for PL, as would the introduction of the 5-14 curriculum some years later, but at this stage the nature of the PL when it happened in both instances was either in the form of INSET

courses or the discredited 'cascade' model (O'Brien 2011, p781). The balance of power in both these models lay clearly with the centre, not with the educator, and the tendency towards a 'tightly controlled, centrally driven approach, tied to government priorities' (Humes 2001, p10) was evident at this time. It reinforced the understanding of PL as a deficit model; something free of debate or negotiation; something that was 'delivered' to teachers by someone else who 'knew,' in order to fulfil governmental or policy demands.

In 1999 a national framework for CPD was announced (Humes 2001, Purdon, 2003, O'Brien, 2011) which finally emerged in 2003 and is clearly identifiable with what are now known as the suite of Professional Standards. These were updated in 2012 to include the new Standard for Career Long Professional Learning, (CLPL) (GTCS 2012a, GTCS 2012b, GTCS2012c), and further redrafted in 2020 for a re-release in 2021 (GTCS 2020). These operate under the stewardship of the General Teaching Council for Scotland, giving rise, in some perspectives, to arguments and tensions around ownership, purpose and control of PL. Purdon (2003), in her early analysis of the divergent consultation processes for the Standard for Full Registration (SFR: necessary for entry into the profession), and the Standard for Chartered Teacher (SCT: optional until 2012) highlighted some inherent contradictions in the original notion of professional standards. Purdon raised an argument early on that is revisited many times in subsequent years; that there is a contradiction in creating a standard that is effectively compulsory for teacher to attain (the SFR) as a passport into the profession, while also claiming to provide a structure for their on-going professional learning. She interrogates the SFR as something to attain once or something to constantly maintain questioning how can it be both? A similar analysis applies to all of the standards: Watson and Michael (2016) refer to the more recent standard for Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) as a standard that is curiously impossible to achieve for similar reasons. However they are understood, the Standards in Scotland sit uncomfortably in this contradiction. They are both a must-have badge of honour to be won at a moment in time - either the point of entry to professional practice, or as a regularly checked audit throughout a teachers' career - and simultaneously as something that is aiming to support PL in a continuous way. This is akin to attempting to ride one horse with the intention of arriving simultaneously at two different destinations.

Having broadly discussed the national context for PL that provides the backdrop for this study, I will now consider three major policy reforms that add further granularity to its context. These are, in chronological order, The McCrone Agreement of 2000; the Donaldson Review of 2010 and The Scottish Government's 'McCormac' Review of 2011.

3.4.1   The McCrone Agreement

By far the highest profile proposal during the millennial period was the 'McCrone Report; A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century' (Scottish Executive 2001), which brought PL into sharp focus as a contractual responsibility for teachers. This specific year has been described as a watershed moment in Scotland's education history (Humes 2001) because of a combination of events, the most significant of which was determined by Humes as the publication of this report. Through the agreement issued in 2001 by the Scottish Executive, its most recognised legacy will be the radical restructuring of the profession, the introduction of a supportive induction arrangement for entrants to the profession and a significant change to teachers' terms and conditions of work (Fraser, Kennedy et al. 2007). One strand of the Scottish Executive (2001) McCrone Agreement addressed issues under the heading 'professional development.' This included the recognition of CPD (sic) as a professional entitlement and a responsibility, with 35 hours or five days of CPD per annum built into teachers' contracts. Along with this, there was an expectation that every teacher would maintain a professional development portfolio (Scottish Executive 2001). The notion of CPD as an entitlement, and part of the teachers' contractual obligation was a new concept, and heralded a new era whereby, unlike in previous times where CPD (or professional learning) did not feature as part of the contractual arrangements of teaching, the entitlement to, or responsibility for professional learning, became part of the teacher's role. Moving beyond the five statutory days INSET was perhaps the most quoted aspect on change in PL that was brought about under the terms of Scottish Executive's (2001) report. It should be noted here that issues were raised as recommendations that were to surface a decade further on in the Teaching Scotland's Future Report of 2010 (Donaldson), namely that:

> CPD can take a variety of forms, not only courses;

> it may involve ......new information and communication technology
> (Scottish Executive 2000, p9) and

> The Scottish Executive should establish a national register of approved CPD
> providers (ibid, p63).

Some of these issues remained under-explored or unresolved as their restatement in Donaldson (2010) testifies – this will be addressed in the section that follows in this chapter. Perhaps in the midst of the contractual reconfigurations, a lack of priority was accorded to PL during the millennial decade. These developments did however signal that the status of PL was changing and, because of the Scottish Executive Agreement of 2001, development of the professional standards was carried out with varying degrees of consultation (Purdon 2003, O'Brien 2011) and the stewardship of the standards was assumed by the GTCS.

As a result of the implications for PL from the Scottish Executive (2001) agreement, a national strategy was required and in 2004 a National CPD Coordinator was appointed by the Scottish Executive (O'Brien 2011). A team was subsequently created and the approach taken by the team was very consultative – closely working with local authorities, universities and other interested bodies (such as HMIE, GTCS, ADES etc.) across Scotland. A CPD Network was formed which in turn informed the work of the team. I should declare an interest at this point. I was part of this team in the turbulent times prior to its dissolution in 2012. The team operated with government funding, reporting directly to government and was hosted in an arrangement that reflected spatial convenience more than anything else, within the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) buildings in Edinburgh prior to the formation of the current executive agency for education, Education Scotland. The team was absorbed into Education Scotland in October 2011, but by March 2012 was effectively disbanded with three out of the six professional members having left due to contractual incompatibility with the new organisation. One administrative member left, leaving three professional and one further administrative member. Two out of these remaining three left in July 2012. The work of the team was absorbed into work streams within the new organisation. The work of the team prior to this was acknowledged as 'sterling' (O'Brien 2011, p786) and their efforts praised:

> especially in association with local authorities, to promote best practice,
> particularly in relation to leadership and mentoring and coaching and to

seek to achieve a national approach to CPD informed by international perspectives (O'Brien 2011, pp786-787).

Many years on from its inception, the focus of PL work within Education Scotland has been on curricular development and assessment within CfE, along with implementing the recommendations of the 'Teaching Scotland's Future' report of 2010. Anecdotally, it was felt with some regret within the CPD community that the consultative nature which defined the previous work of the National CPD team in content and approach has been lost through the abandonment of the CPD network in 2012. This has since been reconstituted as the National PL network. It is self-organising: some former members of the CPD Network initially took a rotating responsibility to organise meetings and maintain communication across local authority PL co-ordinators; Education Scotland staff, some ITE providers and other interested parties, such as Scottish Government representatives. It is positioned as one of the national platforms involved in taking forward the Teaching Scotland's Future (Donaldson 2010) agenda. The implications of Teaching Scotland's Future will now be discussed.

3.4.2   Teaching Scotland's Future

Perhaps the most significant development for PL since the Scottish Executive (2001) agreement for educators in Scotland has been the publication of the aforementioned Teaching Scotland's Future (TSF) report in 2010, the subsequent responses to it and implementation strategy. It involved a review of the entirety of teacher education across pre-service and in-service dimensions and was authored by Professor Graham Donaldson, now of the University of Glasgow and formerly of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIE). This report looked extensively at the continuum of teacher education, from recruitment into teacher education programmes, through transition into practice and the development of leadership expertise at all levels in the profession. With an eye on building capacity among teachers and improving the learning of the young people of Scotland (Donaldson 2010), a wide-ranging set of 50 recommendations was offered in this report, most of which are underpinned by the theme of career-long teacher capacity building. Of particular interest to this study, collaborative networks, professional learning communities and collegiality are all concepts that feature in the report:

> Most CPD is provided by local authorities and includes central training as well as supporting school or community-based professional development. They are increasingly devolving more CPD to schools and encouraging them to work in networks, clusters or learning communities (Donaldson 2010, p65).

And with reference to PLCs and collegiate (sic) working the connection between PLCs and school improvement is made explicit:

> There are increasing examples of professional learning communities which support and challenge one another around agreed areas for improvement. Effective collegiate working often includes support staff and other partners. There is also some evidence that effective collegiate working has led to increased opportunities for teachers to be involved in decision-making and to lead aspects of school improvement (ibid, p66).

The nature, detail and nuanced understanding of similarities and differences across this range of ideas are not defined. This becomes problematic when considering the influence the report has had on the profession since its introduction. All of the recommendations were presented in a generally positive way and the Scottish Government accepted all of the reports' recommendations in whole, in part or in principle. As well as this, many agencies involved in, or supporting teacher PL were considered and the report suggested an 'integrated partnership approach to teacher education across the career spectrum, involving schools, local authorities and universities' (Kennedy 2013, p930).

As mentioned above, a high profile recommendation concerns the introduction of 'Masters' level learning' as an option to be made available to all teachers. This involved the opening of a 'Masters' account' (recommendation 44) for all student teachers, whereby they could accumulate credits gained across the various stages of their career. Although this suggestion does signal a more serious approach to PL, it stops short of a Masters' requirement for teaching whilst paradoxically encouraging PL at this level. Universities in Scotland wasted no time in extending their PL offering of courses and modules at Masters' level and made them readily available to the profession as PL opportunities. The rationale for such a drive in the Scottish context is difficult to trace, according to Kennedy and Carse (2020). These scholars acknowledge the influence in Scotland of a 'global meta-narrative' (Kennedy and Carse 2020, n.p.), that obliges systems to increase the academic level of teacher qualifications in a bid to remain globally competitive. This, coupled with a bid to increase the intellectual

capacity of the profession through advanced study that encourages a greater degree of critical thinking and research-awareness in the profession, may go some way to explaining the reasons behind the policy. Smith contends that there is a lack of clarity in terms of the 'relationship between initial teacher education institutions (ITE) and CPD over Masters' qualifications' (Smith 2013, p925). Smith also points out that the position taken by Scotland in respect of Master's level learning is at odds with an increasingly general European benchmark on an all Masters' profession (Smith 2013, p925). Despite this, Kennedy and Carse (2020) suggest that there is a clear direction of travel towards a Master's level profession in Scotland, but the rationale for it and evidence that it leads to improvements in student outcomes remain less clear. PLCs represent a potential means for engaging with professional learning, at Master's level, other levels or no levels at all. They enjoy some degree of policy support from Donaldson (2010) through to current policy structures (GTCS 2019) as a site for collaborative professional enquiry. There is a risk, however, that the PLC could become caught in an uncomfortable space between informal teacher-led interest groups, formalised, award-bearing courses and mandated practices that fulfil regulatory requirements; a dilemma that will be further discussed in chapter four.

3.4.3   The McCormac Review

The Review of Teacher Employment in Scotland Committee, led by Professor Gerry McCormac (Scottish Government 2011) generated a second significant reform in Scottish education's millennium years. The 'Advancing Professionalism in Teaching' report (Scottish Government 2011) is a key document when considering teachers' practices in Scotland. It proposed that ideas and understandings of professionalism and CPD (sic), the current 35-hour entitlement, and administrative concerns around professional learning all need to adapt under the new definition of teachers' working terms and conditions. Many more references to notions of teacher professionalism, for example 'reinvigorated professionalism' (p6), extended professionalism' (p11), and 'increased professionalism' (p 52) suggest a 'deficit view' (Kennedy, Barlow and MacGregor 2012, p6) of professionalism which teachers need to improve. This will be explored in greater detail in further chapters, but the impact of the Scottish Government (2011) review on PL has been substantial in that one of its recommendations resulted in the discontinuation of one vehicle for it - the Chartered Teacher (CT) scheme. This was one of the outcomes of the aforementioned

Scottish Executive agreement of 2001. It recognised teaching expertise, served a developmental function and aimed to reward accomplishment in teaching (McMahon, Forde and Dickson 2015). It also incentivised accomplished practitioners to remain in the classroom instead of seeking reward or promotion beyond it (Forde and McMahon 2011). Paradoxically the Teaching Scotland's Future report (Donaldson 2010), that preceded Scottish Government (2011) acknowledged some of the shortcomings of the CT scheme and made recommendations for minor alterations to be made to it (Kennedy 2013). A 'Master's level profession' has been a dominant idea in both teacher preparation and PL discourse for some time (Kennedy and Carse, 2020), and Donaldson (2010) suggested the CT scheme might provide a PL pathway towards a Masters' award for all teachers. One element of the responsibility of a chartered teacher was to lead a situated collaborative enquiry. This has not been an unproblematic, however, as Reeves and I'Anson (2014) point out: the 'legitimacy' (Reeves and I'Anson 2014, p651) of the CT as an un-promoted, classroom-based practitioner leading or facilitating professional activity, was seen as incongruent with their position in the school hierarchy.

Although the CT scheme has since been abandoned as indicated above, vestiges of it, especially the situated enquiry can still be identified in contemporary award-bearing PL leadership qualifications such as, for example, Into Headship (see https://professionallearning.education.gov.scot/learn/programmes/).

3.5   Situated, Collaborative Professional Learning

Turning to a specific example of a situated collaborative practice in Teaching Scotland's Future, reference is made to Learning Rounds in the context of 'hub schools' (Donaldson 2010, p112). Learning Rounds are a collaborative, observational practice, designed to support teachers in their professional learning. The practice was adapted in Scotland by the National CPD Team from its parent practice, Instructional Rounds. Originating in consultation with Professor Richard Elmore of Harvard Graduate School of Education, the NCPD team worked in consultation with Elmore to adapt Instructional Rounds for the Scottish Context. Learning Rounds involve groups of educators voluntarily participating in

shared enquiry into an agreed area of practice – the focus of the LR. Once the participants have identified themselves and planned the schedule, the procedure has three main stages of work involving:

- Discussion: Identifying the problem of practice (PoP) or focus that is to be subject to inquiry.

- Observation: Short, planned classroom observation visits in small groups to record agreed aspects of the problem of practice in groups: recording of evidence uses a descriptive (non- judgmental) voice.

- Planning: Discussion to agree shared language, and understanding of PoP based on evidence gathered; agree next level of work to address improvements in practice.

The 'Learning Rounds Toolkit' (no longer available) supported practitioners in establishing the process in schools.

Hub Schools are described in the report as sites of partnership collaborations involving LTS, teachers, researchers, teacher educators and students. This is significant, as unusually, Learning Rounds are the only named PL practice to feature in the report. The reasons for this are unexplained, but several possibilities could be considered: it could be testament to the persuasiveness of the interviewees in the consultation process carried out; it could simply be the appeal of the process itself as it is indeed site-based and collaborative, in keeping with TSF's definition of the most effective PL as:

> site-based ,fits with an existing school culture and ethos, addresses the
> needs of different groups of teachers, is peer-led, collaborative and
> sustained (ibid p64).

In the context of TSF recommendation 33, Donaldson states that PL activities should be:

> shifting from set-piece events to more local, team based approaches,
> which centre around self-evaluation and professional collaboration (ibid
> p96).

However, this was not part of the report's recommendations, and appeared only in the appendix that detailed the concept of 'Hub' schools as mentioned above. Hub schools as a concept never materialised in practice – this was the one recommendation that was not accepted in the government's response. Smith (2011) suggests this is due to an indigenous resistance to elite levels within the Scottish education system, which these schools could potentially have created. Menter and Hulme (2012) support this by similarly highlighting the resistance to diversification of schooling they claim is evident in the Scottish system. The situated, collaborative practices, such as Learning Rounds, that supposedly support teacher professional learning, however did endure. The PLC could be understood as an appropriate forum for such situated collaboration; it appears to fulfil a development need for teachers that needs little financial support while also responding to current policy imperatives, as above.

3.5.1   Implementation of TSF and beyond

The national policy priorities concerning PL at the time of publication of TSF explicitly focussed on the fulfilment of these recommendations. In November 2012, a National Implementation Board (NIB) was established, charged with the responsibility of translating the recommendations into practice. Three subgroups were quickly set up to deal with this task, taking responsibility for PL in the early phase of a teacher's career; the career–long phase of professional learning and educational leadership, reflecting the major themes of the report. I will briefly consider some developments to date since the NIB response.

A framework for educational leadership was released in September 2013 by Education Scotland and, in a departure from the original recommendation 50 (Donaldson 2010, p101), an actual and non-virtual agency for leadership development was created in the Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL). Consultation for this framework took place prior to publication with the National CPD Network in November 2011. The consultation took the form of a senior government official sharing an early vision of the framework with the network for some detailed discussion. With the dissolution of the network after the absorption of the National CPD Team into Education Scotland, it is unclear what subsequent arrangements were for consultation after July 2012. Since 2018, SCEL has subsequently been merged with Education Scotland, forming a 'Professional Learning and Leadership

Directorate.' Partnership arrangements between local authorities and teacher education institutions were established in the immediate wake of Donaldson (2010) to manage the arrangements for student teachers in the formative and initial stages of their careers, and to provide a conduit for recommendation 44; that teachers should engage in Masters' level learning (Donaldson 2010, p99). Since a governance review prompted by the OECD report between 2015-2017, the emphasis on collaboration has been evident in policy rhetoric with the establishment of six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) Established in April 2018. The RICs are charged with responsibility to:

- provide educational improvement support for practitioners;

- develop regional improvement plans

- facilitate collaborative working across the region (Scottish Parliament Information Centre 2020).

Collaboration is a key foundation of their purpose. There is little, as yet, by way of critical analysis of the RICs. This may be due to timing and will no doubt be an area for future study or other studies of collaboration in the Scottish context.

There was significant emphasis on leadership development as a result of Donaldson (2010) but initial stages and serving teachers' professional learning were equally supported.

The middle phase or 'career long' phase of PL offers guidance on policy makers' understandings of the concept of career-long professional learning (CLPL), grouped into 'key messages' (Education Scotland website) identified in the NIB's framework model (Scottish Government, 2012). These include: planning PL; PL activities; evidence and evaluation of impact. PL in this context is described as:

> Career-long professional learning builds on current strengths of CPD and extends the concept of the enhanced professional. It sees teachers as professionals taking responsibility for their own learning and development, exercising increasing professional autonomy enabling them to embrace change and better meet the needs of children and young people (Education Scotland 2020).

The dominance here of the terms 'professional' and 'professionalism' is a reflection of the frequent references to this concept in TSF. There are 26 references to it in the report, some of which include twenty-first century professionalism (p4); professional capacity (p10); redefined professionalism (p14) and extended professionals (p18), although there is no explanation or definition of these terms offered by the report. It is worth noting that before presenting an understanding of what the term actually means, public rhetoric from policy actors reveals enthusiasm for practitioners to 'extend' their own professionalism. The concept of professionalism will be discussed in further detail in chapter four as it is relevant to the identity and accountability of teachers in guiding their engagement with all forms of PL. To finish discussion of the policy aspects of CLPL, it is perhaps significant to note that there is little by the way of evidence of consultation outwith the NIB about the key messages behind CLPL; who defined them and why they were seen as priorities , nor of how this aspect of policy was interpreted and understood by practitioners.

Presently, every phase of teachers' professional learning has been considered within the current model provided in Education Scotland's policy guidance (see figure 1).
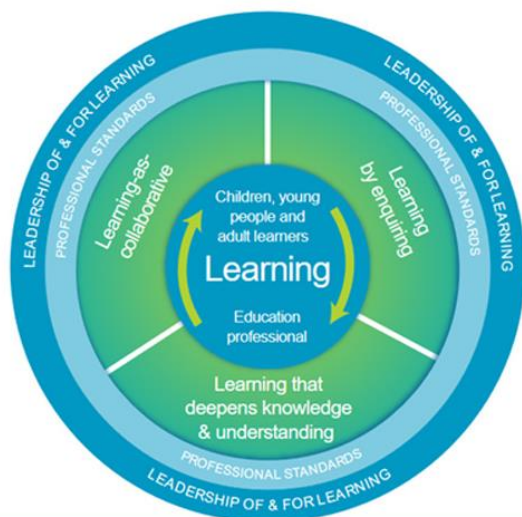
Figure 1: Education Scotland (2020) Model for Professional Learning

This model is supported by an authenticated repository of PL opportunities, stored in Glow, Scotland's national intranet. Users are invited to give details about their position within the system and a range of online opportunities will be generated based on this data. These opportunities are tailored to the information provided – six pages of opportunities were

generated on a simple search for Professional Learning Communities. Filters can be applied to tailor the opportunities to the level of the user: e.g. teacher leadership; middle leadership, school leadership, system leadership.

3.6   The Curricular Context and Collaborative Professional Learning

So far, discussion of the context of professional learning in Scotland has illuminated the development of PL as a mostly individual enterprise. Prior to 2004 with the first release of guidance and information about the major curriculum reform, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), much of the discourse around PL focused on a narrow view of improvement in teacher quality as an intended consequence of centrally mandated or designed PL 'experiences.' Most of these focused on the capacity of the individual teacher and took the form of externally provided courses or policy briefings and an assumption that hours of time spent in mandated learning experiences translated into an increase in teacher capacity or expertise (O'Brien, 2011, Kennedy 2011).

CfE, as a major reform from the early millennial years, saw a revision of the entire Scottish curriculum from ages 3-18. It has dominated the Scottish education environment since 2002. Having been initiated by the previous governing administration, CfE has been hailed as 'one of the most ambitious programmes of educational change ever undertaken in Scotland' (Scottish Government, 2008 in Priestley and Minty 2012, p1). Since these early stages, various un-evidenced mantras have served as straplines for the policy, for example: 2013; 'transforming the lives of young people;' 2020; 'putting learner at the heart of education.' The scope of the reform, however, was extensive, since it attempted to create a supposedly coherent model of curriculum designed to address the entire school age range, unlike previous, more piecemeal reforms that targeted specific stages. Standard Grade qualification reform was concerned with 15/16 year olds, 5-14 was a policy for schooling within this age range and Higher Still revised qualifications at the upper end of secondary school.

Its origins came from the national debate on education (Munn et al., 2004): a nation-wide attempt in 2002 by the (then) Labour administration to seek the views of the public on what matters to them in terms of education in Scotland. The timing of this, just 3 years after the

establishment of Scotland's first parliament since 1706, seemed to suggest a willingness on the part of the governing administration to engage with the population in matters of policy in a so far unprecedented and democratic way. The national debate gave rise to a set of key priorities (Scottish Executive 2003) which offered a starting point for the new curriculum policy. It could be argued that with the development of CfE, the change of emphasis suggested in early versions of this curricular reform project, from the delivery of set curricula to a more explicit, child-centred approach to learning (Priestley and Minty 2013), determined a moment that signalled a sea-change in attitudes to teacher PL. This policy, in its early iterations emphasised as one of its key aspects the idea of national guidelines adapted appropriately by teachers to meet local needs (Kennedy 2011). In order to implement this, there is a requirement to recast the teacher as an autonomous, reflective professional; an agent of change (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015); an architect of a curriculum that would be adapted to meet local needs but still based on a common national framework. Clearly, the intention here was not to spawn as many mini-curricula as there are teachers: teachers would need to collaborate to organise appropriate learning experiences to mediate the new curriculum. In early stages of implementation, however, the developmental focus was on content; a response, in part, to teachers' reactions to the broad parameters that structured levels of assessment in the new curriculum. Priestley & Minty (2013) reported some frustration on the part of some, but not all teachers at the lack of detail and prescription in the new curriculum. This led, at early stages, to some time-consuming and now discredited practices, such as the creation of subdivisions within levels, and later to the development of a set of 'Benchmarks' which broke down the broad descriptors that shaped the curriculum and seemed to contradict the original big ideas of the curriculum. However, pedagogical development and support for teachers to adapt or re-imagine their practices at the time of implementation was a secondary concern. The language describing the teacher as a reflective practitioner begins to take root in official policy guidance from around 2006 (see Scottish Executive 2006), variants of terms around collaborative approaches begin to appear with increasing frequency in the policy landscape in the post-Donaldson (2010) era. Further to this, the message that collaborative PL is desirable was reinforced by visits during the period from 2007-2013 from high profile educational leaders such as Richard Elmore, Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves. As invited guests of the Scottish Government, their message supporting collaborative PL was given

significant airtime at national, government sponsored education events (such as the Scottish Learning Festival) or smaller, private gatherings related to policy development (such as the Strategic Leadership Development Programme, a predecessor of SCEL). Presently, references to collaborative learning is evidenced within Professional Learning guidance from Education Scotland. This new (2020) model of professional learning and leadership (see figure 1) details: '[t]he model of professional learning identifies the key principles and features of effective learning that will build capacity and promote collaborative practices' (Education Scotland, 2020). The same trend can be identified in the evolving suite of Standards for Registration (GTCS). In the 2012 edition of the newly introduced Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning (CLPL), there are five instances of the adjective 'collaborative' or variants thereof. In the draft, updated version of the CLPL Standard, issued in 2020 for official release in 2021, there are 19 references to the same term. The other strands of the standards reveal similar increases, with the most frequent being in the Standards for Middle and School Leadership, where increases are from 15 in the 2012 version to 28 in the 2020 draft version.

3.7   Conclusion

There may not be one identifiable moment where we can say the emphasis on collaborative professional learning practices secured its place in the PL policy context in Scotland. However, the foregoing chapter has outlined some antecedents that created conditions for the introduction of CfE: the changing understanding of professionalism; the increasing focus on the teacher as an agent of change with increased responsibility for reimaging practices, as well as evolving expectations of practice and approaches to professional learning. The combined thrust of these various developments, (including the reform of the Standards, which will be discussed in the following chapter) signalled the need for teachers to become more independent and critical in their approaches. The PLC potentially offered a means of addressing some of these challenges. The new curriculum could be understood as the most significant catalyst for these changes, even although the changes were slow burning, and are still ongoing.

4 Reviewing Professionalism

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine how structures, cultures and agency are represented in literature in relation to PLCs. In part one, I begin by examining the notion of professionalism as a cultural form, with particular attention to how the term has become closely associated with measures of accountability and woven into the fabric of regulatory standards which influence teacher subjectivities and agency. I will discuss aspects of professional culture and the ideas that have shaped teachers' professional learning in recent times. I shall critically discuss the phenomenon of PLCs in part two and examine to what extent they are affordances of change. I will focus on teacher agency, and how this is enabled or constrained by involvement in a PLC, and finally, summarise their limitations.

4.2 Dominant ideas: professionalism as a cultural form

Professionalism as a concept is of significance to any study of the professional learning community, as it provides an element of its definition and as such, merits some investigation. Professionalism is a dimension of teachers' identity; it characterises responsibilities and ways in which they might behave (Scott, 2000) and it is 'fundamental to shaping the notion of the agentic teacher' (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015, p108). In this way, it represents a dominant cultural form which holds individuals in place in relation to other forms, policies and authorities within their system and with which they interact. It contributes to the conditions within which they must operate; it 'shapes situations in which individuals find themselves involuntarily – by moulding their circumstances, which were not of their making' (Archer 2003, p131). In the context of this study, recent reforms in the Scottish context have foregrounded professionalism, through 'widespread development of new rhetorics of professionalism in public policy' (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015, p108), that I will discuss further into this chapter. I will begin this review by initially considering a critical definition of the concept in relation to PLC literature.

Watson (2014) points out that professionalism and the two other concepts ('learning' and 'community') which make up the definition of PLCs, are highly contestable. She goes further to suggest that the adoption and ubiquity of the phrase in full signals a need for greater scrutiny, in order to resist the tendency 'towards de-problematisation… the processing of complex concepts for consumption by learners' (Watson 2014, p1). Watson (2014) also poses the question of: to whom or to what is the adjective attributed in this phrasal noun? Does 'professional' describe the individual or the collective? Is it perhaps referring to the nature of the learning they are engaging in? In this section, therefore, I will examine the concept of professionalism and the assumptions underlying 'the professional' as a teacher and individual and how this shapes the set of practices in professional learning communities. Subsequent sections will address some of the other dominant ideas in literature which are associated with these practices and a final section will consider how agency is presented in the literature around PLCs.

4.2.1   Definitions of professionalism

The concept of professionalism has become an increasingly dominant idea in the context of teachers' work since early millennial years. Understandings of professionalism in education are closely associated with discourses of performance and accountability under the banner of improvement (see for example, Ball 2002, Fox and Reeves 2008, Kennedy, Barlow et al. 2012), but literature demonstrates that this is rarely welcomed as a positive development for those professionals involved. Negative interpretations of the idea of professionalism, broadly speaking, present the professional as passive and powerless; working in a challenging, threatening and increasingly regulated and accountability-driven economic environment. Evetts (2011) illustrates the competing nature of different interpretations of professionalism by offering modes based on an occupational or an organisational understanding of the term. Evetts traces the origins of the occupational mode of professionalism to a real or imagined nineteenth century idealised notion, which has significantly influenced understandings of professionalism over time – reflecting the enduring nature of the phenomenon as a cultural form. She contends that it stems from perceptions of 'independent gentlemen' (Evetts 2011, p411) who supposedly project trust, competence and experience, occupying a position of respect within middle and upper class

communities, in a heavily gender and class biased way. The emphasis on: values, knowledge, judgement, advice-giving, competencies, practitioner control of work systems, extended periods of shared education and mutual support are all aspects of this understanding of professionalism described by Evetts. These contribute to idealised and sometimes patronising, gender-biased interpretations of the occupational mode of professionalism. For Evetts, this ideal-type has been constructed within, and has shaped the discourse of professionalism in certain occupational groups.

In contrast, Evetts proposes the alternative of organisational professionalism - a form of professionalism that reflects ideas of enterprise and market ideology. In this understanding, professionalism is defined by organisational priorities that perform managerial controls of work through regulatory or disciplinary mechanisms, measurement and standardisation of practice, and a focus on structures of accountability. Evetts notes, significantly, that this form of professionalism is dominant in health and education services, particularly in the UK. It also aligns with the notion of 'extended professionalism' highlighted in (Donaldson 2010). Torrance and Forde (2017) highlight the tension behind this vision that can be detected when calls to enhance agency in teachers' practices are necessarily limited 'within the confines of current policy demands' (Torrance and Forde 2017, p112).

This contention is developed elsewhere in literature: accountability and performance feature strongly in understandings of professionalism in teaching. Ball (2005) has identified professionalism (for the teaching community) in the context of the organisational professionalism suggested by Evetts as something which has been lost, in terms of 'claims of respect in all but performance' (Ball 2005, p5); something teachers have lost the right to discuss. Corbin, Stronach et al. (2002) also identify the sense of loss in professionalism for teachers (and differently, for nurses) as something once owned, but now taken away from them. For teachers it was 'something they had lost; [for] nurses…something they had failed to find.' (Stronach et al. 2002, p117). This sense of loss alludes firstly, to nostalgia for a sense of former professionalism, and secondly that the feeling of identity and self-worth teachers may have held in themselves and in the work they do, is something of the past, that can find no place in present identities. There is also a suggestion that in this sense of loss, voices have been silenced by pressure to conform and comply with policy directives, which determine the accepted ways of behaving as a teaching professional.

Day (2004) elaborates the affective dimension as an essential component of teacher identity, and points to a new, emerging professional identity, which orientates away from a sense of moral purpose towards a sense of professionalism underpinned by technical instrumentalism:

> two different kinds of professional identity are now being able to be distinguished in the reform landscape: one is located in a broader vision for professional identity which includes some responsibilities for care of the cognitive, affective, social and societal parts of the education of students by professionals who exercise broad moral purposes in their work; and the other focuses primarily upon teachers whose success is measured primarily through their ability to educate students to pass test (Day 2002, p603).

The tensions between professionalism, practice, policy and accountability are manifest across much of the literature. I will now consider the implications of these in the policy context of Scotland.

4.2.2   Professionalism in policy in Scotland

As discussed in chapter two, three major reports concerning teachers and education policy were commissioned by government and appeared in or around the first decade of the twenty-first century. All three addressed aspects of professionalism for teachers. I shall now consider the implications for teacher professionalism raised in these reports in sequence.

As previously discussed, the Scottish Executive (2001) agreement was an era-defining publication whose terms of reference (among others) included enhancing teacher professionalism in Scotland (Scottish Executive 2001). One of the recommendations emanating from the negotiated agreement based on the earlier report was an attempt to introduce (or limit) a 35 hour working week for teachers. McPhee and Patrick (2009) analysed some Scottish teachers' sense of professional duty and obligation in the light of the Scottish Executive (2001) agreement. Gathering qualitative data through interviews and focus groups nationally, this study revealed an increasing sense of being professional as being accountable. The study concludes that there is tension between teachers' sense of their own professionalism, as open-ended and not time-managed (it is linked to a sense of duty, i.e. to do what needs to be done) and the perceived impossibility of confining their work to a prescribed number of hours as set out in the Scottish Executive (2001) agreement

(McPhee and Patrick, 2009). Interestingly, few specific definitions of professionalism were offered by the participants in this study, who seemed to associate professionalism more with a:

> generalised sense of the 'good' teacher and a sense of professionalism related to personal, organizational and structural constructs (such as meeting pupils' needs, curricular development and change, providing extra-curricular activities, implementing policy initiatives and fulfilling management tasks) (McPhee and Patrick 2009, p90).

There is undoubtedly some resonance here with the contradictions and mixed messages described by Kennedy, Barlow et al. (2012) in their portrayal of the understanding of professionalism in the later Scottish Government (2011) McCormac Review, 'Advancing Professionalism in Scotland' (ibid). Professionalism here is identified as a deficit model; something teachers need more of or need to do better (Kennedy, Barlow et al.2012). This will be explored in further detail below.

Humes (2001), in his appraisal of practices in teacher education and continuous professional development in the post-McCrone era, identifies this shift in professionalism as a pervasive anti-intellectualism, supportive of a conformist or compliance culture which is taking root at the earliest stages of teacher development. He argues that this perspective devalues the status of the teacher and of research in education and policy; elevating, instead, the notion of 'best practice [as a] touchstone' (ibid, p9) for policy developments that presents us with a '…debased conception of professionalism…. professionalism as conformity is a weak and unworthy notion' (ibid). More recently Donaldson (2010) called for changes in the role of the professional. A more questioning practitioner is imagined, the notion of the 'extended professional' is introduced, with a new focus on:

> the vision of teachers as increasingly expert practitioners whose professional practice and relationships are rooted in strong values, who take responsibility for their own development and who are developing their capacity both to use and contribute to the collective understanding of the teaching and learning process. It sees professional learning as an integral part of educational change, acting as an essential part of well-planned and well-researched innovation (ibid, p15).

This document suggests that the role of the professional is in need of reconstructing if the teacher must meet the demands laid out in its recommendations and a new definition is

offered. Drawing on Hoyle's (1974) restricted and extended axis, Donaldson proposes a reimagined 'extended professional' (Donaldson 2010, p15), upon whom future success of the entire system rests. In this way, the extended professional assumes significantly greater responsibilities and new outcomes, and expected ways of behaving are illustrated. The considerable penetration of the term 'professionalism' in the post-Donaldson policy landscape in Scotland is well expressed by Humes (2020). In an updated analysis of policy and governance, Humes identifies the proliferation of boards, councils and bodies that have been created to support the implementation of the 2016 National Improvement Framework (NIF). He highlights that three recurring terms which pervade meeting notes and minutes of one such body (the Strategic Board for Teacher Education), which: 'are invoked most frequently are professionalism, partnership and collaboration' (ibid p10). Interestingly, in the analysis that includes some participant conversations, he notes that the concept is 'treated unproblematically' (ibid). Linked to this, but pre-dating it by some years, the reform of the suite of Professional Standards (GTCS 2012) was a further consequence of the Donaldson report. Although further discussion of the Professional Standards will follow, an initial indication of the emphasis on the new expected behaviours of criticality and enquiry is reflected in the frequency of references to both these terms (and derivations thereof) in the newest standard; the 'Standard for Career-long Professional Learning.' The terms 'critical' and 'critically,' as in 'critically engage,' 'critical understanding' (GTCS 2012a) occur 26 times in the document. From Humes' (2020) account above, there is some tension between policy and governance in this regard, as a lack of critical engagement with the dominant terms within the current policy discourse has been identified. The term 'enquiry' occurs 10 times, perhaps most significantly as a key feature of professionalism in one of the 'Professional Values' to which educators must aspire:

> Committing to lifelong enquiry, learning, professional development and
> leadership as core aspects of professionalism and collaborative practice.
> (GTCS 2012, p7).

Alongside this, the national agency responsible for education in Scotland (Education Scotland) continues to provide prescriptive samples of best practice (Humes 2001), for educator consumption via their NIF website and through Glow, the national intranet for schools in Scotland. There has not yet been sufficient empirical research conducted to inform how the developing critically enquiring professional and a national diet of kite-

marked good practice might interact, but their interactions might make for an interesting future study.

Finally, turning to Scottish Government (2011), Kennedy, Barlow et al. (2012) offer a critical analysis of professionalism as it is portrayed in the government-commissioned review, Advancing Professionalism in Scotland (Scottish Government 2011), also known as the McCormac review (see chapter three). The background to this report is significant; it was commissioned to revisit and revise teachers' terms and conditions of work that were established in the Scottish Executive (2001) report. This is problematic in a number of ways. Firstly, it could be argued that the title does not accurately reflect the nature of the work that took place under the aegis of the report. Secondly, a subtle alignment of the material conditions of teachers' work with ideas of improving professionalism belies a managerial view of professionalism (Kennedy 2017). Thirdly, deficiencies are implicit in the title with the implication that there is a need for professional 'advancement' to occur. Professionalism, as described by the Scottish Government (2011) is identified as something teachers need more of or need to do better (Kennedy, Barlow et al. 2012). Kennedy and Barlow (2012) further highlight significant contradictions in the presentation of professionalism in this report. These are: advancing something that has no clear definition, an appeal to innovations in practice that could be potentially inhibited by managerial constraints, and an absence of reference to inter-professional working in a context where this is demanded in the text of the report. It is to the notion of managerialism in manifestations of accountability and performativity that this analysis will now turn.

4.2.3   Professionalism accountability and performativity

The relationship between professionalism, accountability and performativity is a complex one, which has been increasingly subject to critique over recent decades. Biesta (2017) traces the development of professionalism over time from an authoritarian to a democratic form, then a subsequent post-democratic, technical-managerial form, where he contrasts the dimensions of the relationship between professionalism and accountability in democratic and in 'post –democratic' or technical-managerialist terms:

> [in] …a democratic conception of accountability, professionals are
> accountable for the quality of their professional action in a direct dialogical

relationship with their stakeholders (clients, patients, students and ultimately society as a whole) In a technical-managerial conception of accountability, however, the focus is no longer on the quality of professional action. Rather professionals are held accountable for the degree in which their actions meet certain standards (Biesta 2017, p321).

For Biesta, a focus on the collective deliberations and the collective defining of needs are key to establishing democratic professionalism (Biesta 2017). Gobby, Keddie and Blackmore (2018) see performativity as the enactment of accountability, and highlight Ball's (2003) interpretation of performative actions locking in the professional identity 'to the seemingly objective and rational measures of productivity or output (i.e. 'success') of their schools and students' (Ball, 2003, in Gobby, Keddie and Blackmore 2018, p 161). In this interpretation, performativity is the enactment of accountability that provides an externally imposed means of measurement of success. These in combination determine and shape teachers' professional identity in problematic ways. Associations of professionalism, accountability, performativity and their roots in the neoliberal agenda are elaborated in Ball's influential work, 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity' (Ball 2003). Ball defines performativity as a mechanism which regulates actions and interactions, and which hold people in place, in a values system not of their making; one that is unavoidable, externally imposed and controlled:

> Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change - based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic) (Ball 2003, p217).

The 'terror' within the system occurs in the struggle when individual's personal values and judgements are exposed as being at odds with those that are externally imposed by the various systemic policy technologies. These powerful mechanisms in themselves govern ways of being as a teacher. Some examples might be benchmarks, curricula, targets, performance indicators or appraisal processes. These are often introduced as essential and progressive tools for system-level reform, but Ball argues that they also re-form teachers' identities, ways of being and behaving as a teacher:

> Policy technologies of education reform are not simply vehicles for the technical and structural change of organizations but are also mechanisms for reforming teachers (scholars and researchers) and for changing what it

means to be a teacher, the technologies of reform produce new kinds of teacher subjects. Such reform changes one's 'social identity' (Bernstein 1996, p73) That is, education reform brings about change in 'our subjective existence and our relations with another.' (Rose 1989, ix) This is the struggle over the teachers' soul (Ball 2003, p217).

Ball highlights interplay within these technologies that results in a number of effects which have potential to reach the heart of teachers' actual identity, their 'terrorised soul,' and reform them as they interact with neoliberal performativity technologies and accountability values.

Sachs (2015), drawing on Halstead, moves the debate on in highlighting two different forms and outcomes of accountability: contractual accountability, which tends towards a regulatory environment, focused on 'compliance and control' (Sachs 2016, p416), whilst responsive accountability affords more active, reflexive engagement with the individual, here educators, who demonstrate this form of accountability through:

> decision-making […] more concerned with process than outcomes, and with the stimulating involvement and interaction helps to secure decisions to meet a range of needs and preferences and relies on self-regulation to achieve its goals (Sachs 2016, p416).

The sense of individual or collective accountability is relevant in respect to work occurring in PLCs due to the assumption that teachers will engage in shared endeavour and shared decision-making in these structures. However, evidence sometimes suggests the contrary can also be true, namely that PLCs can be used as a site of stronger compliance and regulatory control (Hairon and Dimmock 2012, Tam 2015). With accountability and performativity pressures shaping teachers' identity and their work as suggested by Ball (2003) above, the risk that the PLC may become a shared site where individuals pursue their own self-improvement agenda cannot be ignored (Charner-Laird, Ippolito and Dobbs 2016). Talbert (2010) highlights the gap between vertical systemic performative accountability to sharing accountability on a more horizontal dimension through teachers' work in PLCs and suggests that '[m]oving away from a top–down notion of professional accountability to one of professionals holding one another accountable is key to PLC development' (Talbert 2010, n.p.). The individualised nature of the mechanisms that hold teachers to account in the form

of regulatory standards is a problematic barrier in this regard for Kennedy (2016), who notes that:

> the rise in popularity of collaborative professional learning opportunities conflicts with the concomitant rise of individual accountability mechanisms in the learning professions, often characterised by sets of professional standards and associated tools such as reaccreditation (Kennedy 2016, p667).

According to Connell (2009), a focus on top-down accountability has several adverse effects: the intellectual dimensions of their work are undermined; the roles of research and judgment are limited; teachers are positioned as workers in a knowledge economy where the effects of individual accountability erode the benefits a more collective approach might enable:

> Recognition of the collective labour of teachers is essential for a better understanding of good teaching. It is often the group of teachers, and the institution they work in, that are effective or not effective. The task of improving teaching, accordingly, cannot be understood only as a matter of motivating or re-skilling individuals. Indeed, some of the schemes to do this (such as the Business Council's desire to cream-off an elite) may be extremely damaging to the real work of schools (Connell 2009, p222).

In revisiting Ball's important contribution to this understanding of performativity as a defining structure for teachers some fifteen years after publication, Holloway and Brass (2018) suggest that while previously wrestled over, or sometimes resisted, some of these technologies and performative structures have been internalised and normalised. The mechanism has transformed the subject and:

> the opposition between the subject (i.e. the teacher) and the accountability regime has been dissolved as teachers are disciplined, and discipline themselves, as marketized, managed, and performative teachers (Holloway and Brass 2018, p378).

The authors illustrate more than a passive acceptance of a new orthodoxy. The performativity structures have effected a significant transformation of teachers in the intervening years, whereby:

> The distance between the teachers and the accountability apparatus has all but collapsed, fabricating a new kind of teacher, whose value is

oriented to markets, management, and numerical performance indicators' (Holloway and Brass 2018, p380).

This highlights the power of structures to transform not only purposes and values in education, but also the teachers as subjects themselves. It serves as a reminder that we should not lose sight of wider purposes of education. Gerrard highlights these wider purposes in respect that '[e]ducation and learning are matters for and of hearts and minds' (Gerrard 2015, p856). Talbert translates these into the context of PLCs as 'nurturing a service ethic among teachers and engender their mutual accountability for improving student achievement' (Talbert 2010, n.p.). This is interesting, as the PLC, if focused on wider educational purposes, may provide a vehicle for mutual and not hierarchical accountability to develop (Cranston 2009; Dufour 2012; Noguera and Noguera 2018). The PLC offers a structure with possibilities to resist the more performative accountability mechanisms described above, if it is used for interaction, mutual support, and focused on developing the collective capacity alluded to by Connell (2009). Importantly, its role in allowing critical conversations to take place without apportioning blame (Noguera and Noguera 2018), through the collective development of approaches to changing practice may only be possible with a shared sense of responsibility towards the work involved and the acknowledgement of mutual accountability among participants in their endeavours to achieve it.

4.2.4   Beyond post-professionalism – the 'authentic' professional?

Individual accountability mechanisms have dominated discourse on teacher professionalism for a number of years. In attempting to move beyond an interpretation of professional in pre- and post-reform terms in later work, Ball makes an appeal for a new understanding, a form of 'authentic professionalism' which goes beyond the dominant managerialist leanings of the…

> …post-professional…primarily orientated towards performance indicators, competition, comparison, etc. (Ball 2005, p12).

The authentic professional according to Ball offers a third way. Ball is not suggesting a retrogressive perspective or discourse on professionalism, but an altogether different one.

This professionalism occupies less stable and certain territory than the 'post professional'; one who is accepting of the managerialist, performative characteristics of the term. Indeed, messiness and uncertainty characterises his or her practice, which, according to Ball, is one more concerned with dilemmas, creativity and contradictions as teachers '…struggle and compromise, plan and act spontaneously, and improvise within and across contradictory roles and expectations' (Ball 2005, p12).

In this portrayal, the complexities of authentic professional identity come to the fore in a clear rejection of the reductivist, mono-dimensional characteristics of the professional as an instrument of audit culture and government policy, as Stronach et al. (2002) propose. In considering the professional identities of teachers and nurses, the authors reject the notion of a singular professional identity for these groups and point out a less fixed, more uncertain way of being in practice. They also reject the notion of a uniform definition of the professional as a collective: the nurse, the teacher as a singular identity is a professional characterised by a list of attributes or skills. The authors highlight the important point that the picture is more nuanced and complex in practice than to be able to offer a collective definition for multiple individuals: in other words a professional of any variety is not a unitary thing. The authors outline the complexities in professional roles, and in professionals' identities that compel the practitioners in question to fulfil multiple roles at a given time and to 'walk the tightrope of an uncertain being' (ibid p121). That 'uncertain being' is caught in 'an accommodation between the actual and the ideal, the possible and the desirable' (ibid p131), and the instances of their professional practice articulate an accommodation between the two. It is clear to see how the limitations of an over-simplified, under–explained or under-theorised construction of professionalism can influence not only public discourses around aspects of teachers' practices, but also their sense of themselves as professional practitioners and their understandings of their role, identity and practices. Evans (2007) underlines the difficulties of achieving shared understanding of professionalism as a contested term, and proposes a model of required, demanded or enacted professionalism by way of defining and explaining the operationalising of professionalism.

 A traditional interpretation of professionalism might be aligned with certain qualifications, which represent an acquired body of regulated, specialist knowledge. Hordern and

McMahon (2019, p248) identify a close association of teachers' work, standards and ideas of professionalism as being influenced by 'relationships with the state' and that this has the potential to diminish, not enhance, teacher autonomy. Reinforcing this connection, Kennedy, Barlow and MacGregor explain managerial professionalism as:

> a state controlled, business-influenced agenda, focusing on targets, efficiency and performativity, hence serving to limit teacher autonomy (Kennedy, Barlow and MacGregor 2012, p4)

Kennedy, Barlow and MacGregor (2012) discuss the significance and lack of clarity of the term professionalism in the specific context of the Scottish Government (2011) McCormac review. Using Whitty's (2008) four descriptors of: the traditional; the managerial; the collaborative and the democratic, Kennedy, Barlow and MacGregor (2012) give an analysis of the concept of professionalism as it is presented in Scottish Government's (2011) report. Kennedy, Barlow and MacGregor (2012) conflate the collaborative and the democratic descriptors, and although they acknowledge the difference in seeing these two as distinct categories, or aspects of the same category, they nonetheless offer a broader understanding of these terms as oppositional to a managerial interpretation. In their analysis, however, it is clearly a managerial interpretation of professionalism that is espoused in Scottish Government (2011). Professionalism in the context of this report is proposed as a deficit in teachers' practice; far from being driven by enhanced knowledge and practice of teachers, professionalism is proposed as something lacking in the teacher's acknowledged practice and identity, similar to Stronach et al.'s (2002) description. The authors suggest that financial imperatives are identified as the sub-text of the review and the call to 'enhanced professionalism' (Kennedy, Barlow and MacGregor 2012, p11) is a thinly disguised criticism of a professional group upon whom there is a need to exert regulation and control. Many contradictions and ambiguities are identified in the review such as; calls for teachers to exercise greater flexibility in the name of professionalism whilst simultaneously imposing restrictions on how their time is used in schools; appealing to a reconceptualization of the teacher as an autonomous innovator whilst simultaneously subjecting them to greater restrictions and control.

4.3   Professionalism and Standards

Writing in 2000 and drawing on Neave and Berstein, Whitty described an emerging view of professionalism as an output of a paradoxical system; one which is simultaneously shrinking and expanding its centre through redistribution of certain functions and forms of power to the periphery, but increasingly managing strategic control over forms of output:

> The specification of outputs itself shapes what teachers actually do, so the state uses its levers to influence what we might call the 'content' of teachers' professionalism – or what is sometimes called teachers' 'professionality' (Whitty 2000, p284).

The content Whitty referred to above reappears later as a 'list of common competencies or standards' (ibid, p288), which are required to be achieved by teachers as outputs in order to gain entry to the teaching profession. Within a Scottish context, consideration of the 'ownership' of standards can be seen as illustrative of Whitty's central/periphery power paradox: as mentioned above, the suite of Standards for Teaching in Scotland is securely held in the jurisdiction of the GTCS, as gatekeepers to professional practice. They are also inextricable from guidance on professional development as reinforced by the national governing agency for education (see Education Scotland 2020), where resources are specifically identified to be used in conjunction with the set of standards. This inter-dependence indicates allegiance between these two central, national bodies, despite a strong defence of one as 'the world's first independent, self-regulating body for teaching' (GTCS 2016b). The 'ownership' of the standards (and the related professional learning required in order to achieve them), is paradoxically, in this light, framed as being in the gift of the teacher; teachers are exhorted to 'take responsibility for their own learning and development;' or to 'map out their own professional learning journeys and prepare for Professional Update' (Education Scotland, 2020). Standards in this interpretation are presented as simultaneously fulfilling a number of functions: competence to be measured; a target to be achieved; a journey to be travelled. As originally highlighted by Purdon in 2003, and subsequently by Watson and Michael (2016), they are both a technology of control and a self-directing opportunity for improvement.

Recommendation 35 of Teaching Scotland's Future (Donaldson 2010) called for review of the Standards and reinforces their role in the professionalisation of teaching:

> ...the professional Standards need to be revised to create a coherent
> overarching framework and enhanced with practical illustrations of the
> Standards. This overall framework should reflect a reconceptualised model
> of teacher professionalism (Donaldson 2010, p97).

In their study tracking the implementation of the (now abandoned) Chartered Teacher scheme and the changes in perspectives on teacher professionalisation in a Scottish context that this engendered, Reeves and Drew (2012) draw on Sachs (2002), Wenger (1998) and Cochrane- Smyth and Lyttle (2009), to identify three overarching themes, grounded in aspects of organisational theory. These can be identified at the root of a new understanding of teacher professionalism and are:

> an emphasis on collaborative action…. the legitimation of the reflective,
> self-evaluating practitioner……. [and] the promotion of teacher leadership
> (Reeves and Drew 2012, p712-713).

The authors contend these have emerged from a refocusing of the question of school improvement, to a growing trend that recognises the difficulty of achieving this outcome without paying attention to the importance of teachers' role in the improvement process. This view is supported and promoted by influential trans-national organisations, such as OECD, whose recent claims, have gained traction globally with policy makers:

> Nowhere does the quality of a school system exceed the quality of its
> teachers. Top school systems select and educate their teaching staff
> carefully. They improve the performance of teachers who are struggling
> and they structure teachers' pay to reflect professional standards. They
> provide an environment in which teachers work together to frame good
> practice, and they encourage teachers to grow in their careers (Schleicher
> 2018, p63).

Reeves and Drew's (2012) study tracks the transformation of professionalism through the recontextualisation of policy at various points of negotiation, as it moves in a sequence of relays through a complex network of actors. The Standard is identified as a key artefact in this assemblage; with a significant role in wielding influence by reshaping the identity of the professional it purports to construct. It should come as no surprise that current improvement agendas reflected in the reforms in Scotland, are focused partly on teacher improvement and are inextricably linked to the Professional Values and Commitments strand of the professional standards for teachers in Scotland as established and administered by the General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS 2012a; 2012b;2012c).

The dynamic between professionalism, standards and improvement is in evidence in policy terms in Scotland; not only, as indicated in Donaldson (2010), but also in the title and detail of the GTCS Suite of Standards (GTCS 2012a; 2012b; 2012c); in their website, social media feeds and literature circulated to registered members. The most recently updated and 'refreshed' standards claim to:

> describe teacher professionalism in Scotland, and have multiple purposes:
>
> • to create a shared language for teaching professionals;
>
> • as a benchmark of professional competency;
>
> • to develop and enhance professionalism;
>
> • to support career-long professional growth;
>
> • to provide a framework for Initial Teacher Education, probation and leadership pathways and programmes; and
>
> • to ensure and enhance public trust and confidence in the teaching profession (GTCS, 2019).

This is not altogether unproblematic: tensions are frequently identified in an examination of some sources of literature as focusing the responsibility for system improvement on teachers runs the risk of marginalising and downplaying other, potentially more significant socio-political and cultural factors, which wield greater influence on educational outcomes than those that individual teachers might be able to effect. Closer examination of the relationship between standards, professionalism and improvement exposes other tensions, such as that between professionalism and prescription, succinctly captured by Sachs (2003) as controlling or developing teaching. Forde et.al. (2016) also identify this uneasy strain in the purpose of professional standards as between 'regulation and development' (Forde et.al. 2016, p19). Kennedy (2008, 2016) goes further and highlights that standards are used as a double-edged weapon to support professional growth and as a means of compliance and a prescribed way of being as a teacher. Skinner, Leavey and Rothi identify a further tension which characterises 'opposing forces' of old and new understandings of teacher identity pulling against each other when the role is analysed in the light of standards, performance and managerial views on being a professional:

> [the] old view of what it means to be a teacher – that is, commitment, service to the school and pupils' learning, ownership of expertise and knowledge – and the other being the new managerialist view of being a teacher – that is, accountability, performativity, meeting standards, and stepping up to the presentation of the school in a new corporate world. (Skinner, Leavey and Rothi 2021, p14).

These authors contend that the tension that arises when these two sets of values interact has serious effects on and implications for teachers' emotional wellbeing and mental health – which is a consideration that will raise concerns for professionals. The difficulties of maintaining these aspects of wellbeing in the 'neoliberal' teaching environment have been well documented in literature (see for example, Acton and Glasgow (2015), Keddie (2018), Maxwell and Riley (2017)). As a topic for discussion, the idea of wellbeing is potentially straying from the focus of this study, and I will not investigate this further here, however, the issue is an important one and although not directly relevant, merits acknowledgement in the context of teacher professionalism. What is relevant in this discussion from the sources cited above is the power these standards have in acting as a mechanism that can shape and redefine the teacher as a subject: as Forde et al. express:

> [p]rofessional standards for teaching and educational leadership are complex ideological texts privileging particular constructions of what it means to be an effective teacher or leader (Forde et al. 2016, p19).

Returning to the role of standards in understandings of professionalism, Watson and Fox (2015) describe the trend towards 'extended regulation' (Watson and Fox 2015, p134) across health and education professionals and the growing requirement of professionals to re-accredit themselves according to Standards. They highlight the tension in combining the conflicting functions of summative accountability and formative development in standards:

> There are obvious tensions around a practice that may ostensibly serve as both a tool for management, used to increase accountability and control, and as a means of diagnosis, with a developmental function (Watson and Fox 2015, p133).

Using one tool for these divergent purposes is indeed a 'delicate task' (Watson and Fox 2015, p133). However, the authors point out the artful conflation of these purposes in the extended suite of Standards (GTCS 2012a; 2012b; 2012c):

as a form of control, in which insidious power relations which serve to undermine professional autonomy are disguised as a means to self-actualisation (Watson and Fox 2015, p135).

Thus, the standards are presented as unarguable; essential to the ever-developing and improving identity of the teacher. Much of the critique offered by Watson and Fox examines the unchallenging acceptance by the profession of the GTCS Standards, the annual review tool, Professional Review and Development (GTCS 2019) and its accompanying mechanism for reaccreditation, Professional Update.

Professional Update (PU) requires registered members of the GTCS to submit various forms of evidence in support of their continued professional development in order to sustain their registration with the body every five years. This evidence must include records of engagement with the Professional Review and Development process (PRD). The PRD process is part of the vertical accountability structure that allows teachers to ensure they can continue in professional practice and aims to 'enhance teacher professionalism' (GTCS 2019, p3). Watson and Fox (2015) detail that although it aims to be developmental in nature, it is acknowledged as falling short of this ideal. Some reflection on the increasing reach of the GTCS into teachers' practice and identity provides some pause for thought. Humes (2014) suggests PU might also be a factor in what he describes as the 'territorial expansionism' of the GTCS (Humes 2014, p59). It holds teachers individually to account for their practice in meeting the relevant standard of the GTCS for their stage or position on an annual basis. It also requires individuals to self-evaluate, evidence and record their 'professional learning' via engagement with the suite of Standards, in order to maintain their employability status. Registration with GTCS in Scotland is a formal requirement as indicated in chapter three. Without it, individuals are not eligible to be employed as teachers. The PRD process is closely linked to the National Model of Professional Learning (see figure 1) which positions a undefined notion of 'learning' at its centre. Three aspects of 'learning' are encouraged in this model, all of which could be argued are loosely associated with some understandings of work within PLCs. These are: learning by enquiring; learning that deepens knowledge and understanding, and learning as collaborative. In this way, it could be argued that a collaborative practice such as PLCs have been gradually embedded into the accountability structures governing how teachers 'become' professional.

In further exploring teacher understandings of PU, Watson and Fox reveal a highly successful exercise in policy camouflage: what is essentially a performative demonstration of fitness to practice has appeared to have been set apart in this instance from the important regulatory function it performs. At the same time this regulatory function is conflated with the supportive, development function it claims to carry out for the ever-improving teacher. Thus, PU is a mechanism that appears to combine the competing functions of standards as highlighted by Whitty (2000), Sachs (2003), Ingvarson (1998) and Darling-Hammond (1999) in the discussion to follow. What is surprising in the data the authors present is the almost total lack of resistance and recognition of any conflicting or contradictory demands in this process among participants. In conflating the dual purpose of standards, PU is presented as a covert system, which is shaping teacher identity and subjectivity capable of exerting 'greater control over teacher subjectivities than those in which the managerial focus on accountability is foregrounded' (Watson and Fox 2015, p143).

4.3.1   Defining Standards: what they are or what they do?

The discussion above illustrates that teaching standards can be understood somewhat paradoxically as items of 'doing': they are regulatory descriptors of competences, often organised in frameworks which serve as a benchmarking mechanism, against which 'quality' – however that may be understood - can be assessed. I have highlighted their double-identity before in chapter four. A further assumption is made in presenting standards as developmental tools for self (and other) evaluation, in the service of teacher improvement and shaping teacher identity. There is an implicit suggestion that this improvement is the responsibility of the individual teacher, that it will result from a successful, appropriately documented engagement with the set of standards, and that professionalism will be enhanced as a result of teacher engagement with this mechanism.

Priestley (2014) highlights further regulatory practices which influence teachers' professionalism but which do not enjoy similar levels of exposure in current discourses. Priestley synthesises a number of regulatory controls that are embedded in curriculum and assessment guidance to highlight how these structures can exert strongly centralised regulatory control on teachers' professional engagement. Through a complex matrix

detailing structural factors at play at macro and meso levels, Priestley contrasts 'input regulation' (national curricular guidance; local authority quality assurance procedures) with 'output regulation' (the inspection process; attainment data; intra/inter-school performance comparison; league tables, unofficial and official). He concludes that the combined application of these controls exposes a contradiction in Scotland's current curricular model (which originally was positioned as being less prescriptive and allowing greater autonomy than previous models). This regulatory control also undermines many aspects of teachers' professionalism in the process, by determining not only they ways in which teachers develop their practice, but also the very terms and language they use to discuss this practice. Paradoxically in this example, increasing centralised curriculum control is packaged as efforts to decentralise policy, professional autonomy is expected to result in uniformity of practice and assessment data, not outcomes for young people are increasingly used as measures of success. The conditions created to develop professionalism resulted in contradictory gains.

It might appear that there is considerable explanation in literature about what various standards do; for example, in Priestley (2014) as discussed above, they regulate ways in which teachers engage professionally with policy. In Whitty (2000) we see that they measure competences; in Sachs (2003) standards are noted as tools for defining what teachers should know and do. They control and regulate they system as gatekeepers for entry to the profession (see GTCS, 2016b; 2021), or, they are a focus for teacher quality, a mechanism for the improvement of teaching, as suggested by Ingvarson (1998) and Darling Hammond (1999). Kennedy (2007) alludes to the managerialist capacity of the Scottish standards in encouraging compliance and conformity across the profession, as they focus on accountability in a way that restricts and delimits teachers' interpretations of professionalism.

There is little, however on what standards actually are. This void is confronted by Mulcahy (2011) who positions standards as epistemic objects in a socio-materialist understanding; in focussing on what standards do rather than what standards are, Mulcahy argues, we run the risk of neutralising:

> ..the knowledge that they embed and the power relations that they are caught up in and can catch others up in (e.g. standardization, surveillance, regulation) It also has the effect of eclipsing the idea that objects such as standards are epistemic: standards are not only the objects of knowledge practice but also objects in knowledge practice, here, the practice of articulating what is valued about teaching and describing the critical features of what teachers know, believe and do (Mulcahy 2011, p96).

This perspective resonates with Sachs's (2003) caution around the pervasive view of standards presented as a common sense, irrefutable necessity, if the professionalism of teachers is to be publically recognised. Mulcahy goes further, however and exposes, through her socio-material analysis, standards as something that do not simply 'describe pre-existing realities such as accomplished teaching practice or accomplished teachers; they actively produce them' (Mulcahy 2011 p96). She challenges the immutability of standards as a blueprint for practice, as 'carriers of knowledge' (Mulcahy 2011, p98) that act as tools to be used in the reporting of practice, and have a benign effect on the professional discourse of teaching. Mulcahy describes this as the 'representational' view of standards, and contrasts this with the 'performative' view, illustrating both with data stories from empirical studies she conducted. The term 'performative' is understood here in the socio-materialist and not the neo-liberal sense. In this way, according to Mulcahy, standards are enacted into being within assemblages of material (human and non-human) actors that represent 'performances of teaching and learning in networks of practice' (Mulcahy 2011, p109). Standards here are entangled in the minutiae of teachers' work; they are part of a multiplicity of context-sensitive embodied practices, interactions actions and judgements, which Mulcahy suggests, resist the formal codification a representational understanding of standards provides.

The focus on the 'doing' of standards rather than the content of them surfaces again in Evans (2011). She examined professionalism and standards as proposed by the now dismantled General Teaching Council in England (GTC). She deployed a model which grouped the standard descriptors into three components reflecting her understanding of professionalism; behavioural, attitudinal and intellectual components. This proved a useful tool for analysing the standards for teachers, and the results showed a 'lopsided shape' (Evans 2011, p861) that emerged when the distribution of elements of the standards were

mapped against the component categories. Results showed a heavy weighting towards the behavioural components, thus depicting a representation of:

> …professionalism that is focused predominantly on what teachers do, rather than what and how they think and what attitudes they hold. The extent to which they analyse and rationalise their practice scarcely features, whereas the skills and competences and understanding that they need, and what they do and how they do it, are the key components of this professionalism that the 2007 standards and the accompanying performance management system imposed on teachers in England (Evans 2011, p861).

The disbandment of the GTC in England has not slowed down the inexorable progression of accountability in England; rather it has been intensified with an emphasis on decentralisation with increasing devolved power and budgets to head teachers and school consortia in the manner described by Whitty (2008) above, oscillating between central government structures of control and peripheral sites of schooling. Modes of governance have also evolved, and although as Glatter (2012) points out, this is not a new phenomenon (as he traced early references to concerns with accountability back to the mid-1970s), paradoxes and contradictory consequences of this 'persistent preoccupation' (Glatter 2012, p559) endure. In spite of claims of greater autonomy for practitioners brought about by the decentralisation of power, practitioners report feeling more constrained by centrally mandated requirements. Curricular autonomy and financial autonomy appear to be working against each other in these new modes of governance. They appear to achieve converse effects (in the case of curricular autonomy) to the suggested liberation for practitioners that policy makers foretold. Precarious support for the claim of improved outcomes as a result of decentralised financial control, is proving difficult to evidence empirically (Glatter 2012).

 With the evolving nature of school governance in England and Australia for example, school leaders and teachers are subject to the paradox of increasing school autonomy that actually limits and constrains the ways in which they can manifest professionalism in systems that:

> '…incit[e] freedom whilst responsiblising them to notions of autonomy constrained by performative and entrepreneurial forms of professionalism (Tseng 2015, in Gobby, Keddie and Blackmore 2018, p170).

A professionalism that manifests itself in these terms align closely with Biesta's (2017) definition of bureaucratic professionalism as teachers and leaders forge their professional identities in the context of these paradoxically autonomous and restrictive organisational structures. How teachers identify, select, organise and pursue their PL is affected by their sense of autonomy or restriction within their setting, and will influence their sense of identity. The autonomy of schools as structures themselves is something that continues to evolve: in England structures are significantly different. In recent times there has been a re-introduction of grammar schools and academy or free schools now account for nearly three quarters of secondary schools in England (Thomson 2020). This issue has rarely surfaced in Scotland in the past. In 1988 school boards were given power to opt-out of local authority control. Only three schools pursued or investigated self- governing status and all returned within ten years (Murphy and Raffe 2015). There seems to be little appetite for the same diversity of models of governance, and a more or less unitary model of state-funded, comprehensive schooling persists. There is no shortage of challenge and critique of these new structures in England, as, variously, a neo-liberal orthodoxy of our times (see, for example, Ball 2016; Davies and Bansel 2007; Slater, 2015; Wilkins, 2014) or worse, sites of serious misuse of public money and concerning and corrupt practices (Thomson 2020).

Within professional learning, Bradbury et al. (2015) acknowledge that not all current orthodoxies concerning professional learning in wider contexts, including, and beyond education, are subject to a similar degree of scrutiny. They caution against ideas that 'circulate somewhat uncritically within professions' (Bradbury et al. 2015, p125). They question the migrating practices which are adopted across professions with uncritical foundations. An example of this in the context of educational professional learning might be the emphasis on collaborative practices in education such as the Professional Learning Community (PLC). With its origins outwith education, this phenomenon has been adopted by practitioners and policy-makers, often unquestioningly. Bradbury et al. (2015) alert us to the danger that, in adopting such approaches to professional learning with the purpose of developing our practices, we run the risk of creating new dominant orthodoxies, which, when uncritically accepted as good or desirable practice, appear to undermine the very principles they are supposedly constructed to promote:

Ironically, whilst employed originally to provide a countervailing critique of normative understandings of learning, some of these latter understandings in turn become hegemonic. In other words, they may militate against the kinds of professional learning and the practices which professionals themselves would wish to encourage (Bradbury et al. 2015, p125).

This is an important consideration in the context of this study; a more detailed analysis of literature concerning PLCs will now follow.

5   Dominant structures: Professional Learning Communities

This research is investigating the social processes taking place within structured, teacher-led variations of professional learning communities. In this section, I will examine scholarly literature on PLCs, considering how they are defined and what theories underpin them. I will also consider how they are structured and how ideas and individuals interact within them. The debate in this area is largely polarised: I will consider the conflicting discourses around PLC practice as it is presented in the literature and explore some of the assumptions that are made about it.

This section is structured loosely around the following questions:

- What are professional learning communities?

- What ideas underpin and circulate within them?

- In what ways are they problematic?

- What is their role in changing practice?

5.1   What are professional learning communities?

There is general consensus in the literature examined here that the term professional learning community was derived and migrated into the field of education from that of business and organisational learning. This is often attributed to the ideas of Senge (1990), who provided a connection to the idea of a 'learning organisation' (Nehring and Fitzimmons 2011; Stoll, Bolam et al. 2006; Vescio, Ross et al. 2008; Watson 2014). There are also affinities with the canonical idea of communities of practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1991), which was developing around the same time, and philosophically, there is some traceable lineage from Dewey's work on reflection on experiences and interactions with one's own thought, with others and with the environment (Rodgers 2002; Lee and Shaari, 2012). Although Lee and Shaari (2012) determine that there are similarities between both PLCs and CoPs in their loose structure, their membership and in the emphasis on claims of

improvement in practice supported by reflection and dialogue in both, these authors also identify some conceptual differences. The differences are mainly presented on the author's understanding that PLCs are 'top down' structures, pre-determined by an existing leadership structure, and that CoPs are a 'dynamic bottom-up learning initiative' (Lee and Shaari 2012 p 458). The former, in their view, is more concerned with achieving improvement through formation of professional identity, and the latter, with induction into practice via legitimate peripheral participation. These authors contend that the former have a:

> '…preoccupation with structure and identity puts limits on possibilities, [but this…] also consolidates a common lingo that characterizes the professional identity of a discipline. PLC practitioners, as members of a profession, are intuitively oriented as professionals based on the shared identification with the values propounded…

Whereas…

> …the CoP's focus on unstructured practice forms an important basis for exploratory inquiry and authentic learning (ibid p458).

Whatever the similarities and differences of these two structures, it can be seen from the above that both are beset by loosely defined terms and ambiguous concepts. With reference to PLCs, the term presents a highly contestable etymology for Watson (2014) who sees the term as conflicting, contradictory and ambiguous, begging the question 'who or what learns?' (Watson 2014, p2). Cranston (2009) similarly identifies that PLCs have endured some conceptual oversimplification. Dufour and Eaker (1998), in contrast to this, state:

> Each word of the phrase 'professional learning community' has been chosen purposefully. A 'professional' is someone with expertise in a specialized field, an individual who has not only pursued advanced training to enter the field, but who is also expected to remain current in its evolving knowledge base … 'Learning' suggests ongoing action and perpetual curiosity …. The school that operates as a professional learning community recognizes that its members must engage in ongoing study and constant practice that characterize an organization committed to continuous improvement …. In a professional learning community, educators create an environment that fosters cooperation, emotional support, personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone. (pp. xi-xii).

This surfaces assumptions and contentions, which I will return to in later sections. What follows here is a discussion on some of the recurring terms that feature in definitions of PLCs across a range of sources.

5.2 Contestable concepts

In returning to definitions, professional learning communities are generally understood as structures within an organisation, consisting of groups of individuals, either assembled through voluntary or mandated participation who are jointly engaged in a shared activity, (whether learning or 'doing' is a moot point), which focuses on one or several problems of practice relevant to their workplace. 'Collaboration' is an idea frequently evoked in discussions of what PLCs are. Collaborative professional learning within these structures focuses on broad notions of improving practice and is generally understood as the shared activity undertaken by professionals working together in contexts such as professional learning communities as described above. Much of this is contestable, for example, when considering this fundamental and pervasive idea of collaboration, Cordingley et al. (2003) define this in straightforward terms as teachers working with at least one other related professional on a sustained basis. In the context of 'professional' collaboration, Henneman Lee and Cohen (1995) describe this as a process of joint work around a shared focus. John-Steiner et al., (1998), further elaborate this, as does Cilliers (2000), as the commitment to the sharing of expertise and thinking, through processes of shared planning, deciding and taking action within communities. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) discuss 'collaborative professionalism' in terms of ten tenets upholding it. These are: collective autonomy; collective efficacy; collaborative enquiry; collective responsibility; collective initiative; mutual dialogue; joint work; common meaning and purpose; collaboration with students and big picture thinking for all. While potentially appealing for some, the assumptions underlying this conceptualisation cannot be ignored. There is a clear assumption that social interaction among colleagues forms the basis of most of these ideas posited above. This is problematic in some ways. At a basic level, Datnow (2018, p158) points out that, 'interaction is not always a neutral endeavour.' Complexities of power, manifesting, for example through: formal and informal relationships, unspoken hierarchies or 'pecking orders' within groups, actions of, and reactions to authority etc., all significantly influence

personal interactions. At an even more basic level, and, to paraphrase Datnow, interaction is not always a natural endeavour either; not everyone is positively disposed towards interaction. Some may prefer more solitary pursuits or ways of working.

Collaboration is not the only contested term in the discourse around PLCs. Bolam et al. (2005) and Stoll et al. (2006, p223) developed and defined professional learning communities in broad terms as:

> a given group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way (ibid p229).

The cultural and relational dynamic is emphasised in Louis (2008) who sees the PLC as 'a set of dynamic relationships embedded in a supportive school culture' (p13), and the widening of learning parameters from individual to collective forms is also a feature of the definitions offered by the authors above.

Again, assumptions are underpinning the ideas that define these communities. There is commonality across all of these concepts; the use of these soft-focus terms such as collaboration, as discussed above, but also terms such as reflection; sharing, supportive, learning-orientated etc. recur in much of the literature. Although these ideas are frequently associated with PLCs, little is offered by the way of further explanation as to what these ideas mean, how they manifest themselves within the PLC, and how they might be developed in it. This leaves us with a list of what Watson (2014) describes as 'contestable concepts' (p2), which are open to interpretation and so non-specific that they are, at best, unhelpful, or at worst, meaningless. There is little doubt, however that these ideas circulate as cultural forms across the literature concerning PLCS and are used as defining characteristics for them.

There is also an underlying assumption that these contestable concepts are unquestioningly desirable, and that the PLC itself is undeniably beneficial to practitioners. These assumptions recur in much of the literature. The PLC is presented in this analysis as a visible practice which is 'done;' it exists as an entity, much in the same way as a black box, inside of which hidden processes, interactions, transactions and mechanisms remain undiscussed, and undiscovered.

5.3 Common principles

It might be appropriate to note that in the absence of a (so far) satisfactory answer to the question 'what are PLCs?' Much of the literature quickly moves from offering a definition of the term to listing key characteristics a PLC should have. Bolam, McMahon et al. (p5, 2005) propose a much-cited comprehensive summary set of eight key characteristics exhibited by effective PLCs:

• shared values and vision;

• collective responsibility for pupils' learning;

• collaboration focused on learning;

• individual and collective professional learning;

• reflective professional enquiry;

• openness, networks and partnerships;

• inclusive membership;

• mutual trust, respect and support.

These criteria are also reflected in Louis (2008) who exposes no small degree of positive bias towards PLC by subsequently claiming, 'for most teachers this sounds like heaven on earth' (p2) and reinforces her enthusiasm with empirical claims of links between PLCs and student improvement. Dufour (2004) identifies 'big ideas' which distil these criteria into a focus on student learning; a culture of collaboration and attention to results (2004). Although Dufour warns against the misappropriation of these terms (confusing collaboration with congeniality, for example) this list is no less contestable than what we have seen before, and the claims made on the strength of its argument echo those of Louis (2008) and are significant:

> The powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team

learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement. (Louis 2008, p3).

Bolam et al. (2005) similarly offer promises of positive association between pupil achievement and professional learning which the authors claim correlates to the developmental maturity of the relevant PLC. Dufour and Eaker (1998) also subscribe to the shared vision mantra and argue that the PLC is 'the best hope for significant improvement' (p15) They elaborate further that ' …if schools are to be significantly more effective, they must break from the industrial model upon which they were created ….and embrace a new model…a Professional Learning Community' (p 17).

Hord (1997, 2004) proposes a framework of principles for PLCs consisting of five related dimensions: (1) shared and supportive leadership; (2) shared values and vision; (3) collective learning and its application; (4) shared personal practice; and (5) supportive conditions. Although these lean into some of the 'cosy concepts' as described by Watson above, the emphasis on leadership and conditions for action as fundamental to the PLC, are helpful. Hord also claims that benefits extend to teachers and students in the form of reduced isolationism; powerful learning; academic gains and smaller achievement gaps (Hord 1997, pp36-37).

The correlation then, between collaborative practices as exemplified by PLCs and student achievement would appear to be a positive one. Yet if this truly were the case then any problems with student achievement could arguably be solved. As far as we know, the silver bullet which fixes student achievement has not yet been identified, far less fired, and to suggest that one singular phenomenon or form of practice might be the solution to student achievement is to grossly oversimplify a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon and ignore sociocultural contextual influences, like, for example; poverty, affluence and parental engagement in education, to name but a few.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) endorse the work of PLCs and attribute enthusiastic uptake of the PLC in North America to themselves and their collaborators, but sets out their own guiding principles in this regard, of:

> 1. Communities. Where educators work in continuing groups and relationships…. have collective responsibility for a common educational

purpose [and are] committed to improving their practice with regard to that purpose….

2. Learning communities. Where improvement is driven by a commitment to improving students' learning, well-being and achievement…

3. Professional learning communities. Where collaborative improvements…. are informed by but not dependent on scientific and statistical evidence, where they are guided by experienced collective judgment…. challenging conversations about effective and ineffective practice (Hargreaves and Fullan 2015, p 128).

In spite of the fact that we are still grappling with broad terms here, Hargreaves and Fullan do not suggest a universal appeal towards vague notions of collaborative practice but instead warn against the regulated enforcement of it in what they call 'contrived collegiality' (Hargreaves and Fullan 2015, p118). This, as an idea, has had a strong degree of influence on discourse concerning teachers' practices. It can occur in a range of scenarios when, for example, practitioners are mandated into collegial participation; or where the act of participation is foregrounded at the expense of purpose, or possibly where purpose is typically decided externally to the group. Hargreaves defines contrived collegiality:

• Working together does not evolve spontaneously but results from administrative regulation.

• Teachers are required to work together to meet the mandates of others.

• Takes place at particular times in particular places.

• Control over purposes and regulation of time are designed to produce highly predictable outcomes (Hargreaves 1994, pp. 195–196).

Hargreaves (2003) identified this form of practice in subsequent literature as 'performance sects.' He summarised and contrasted qualities pertaining to each as follows:

Professional Learning Communities	Performance Training Sects
Transform Knowledge	Transfer Knowledge
Shared inquiry	Imposed requirements
Evidence informed	Results driven
Situated certainty	False certainty
Local solutions	Standardized scripts
Joint responsibility	Deference to authority
Continuous learning	Intensive training
Communities of practice	Sects of performance

Figure 2: Hargreaves' contrasting characteristics of PLCs and Performance Training Sects

(Hargreaves 2003, p180).

There is a shift in emphasis here from mandated forms of participation to more self-directional ones; from reproduction of knowledge to a more generative approach and from context-free application to more context-sensitive awareness. There is also, however, a lack of attention to what barriers and constraints might inhibit the seemingly smooth transition from right to left in this diagram; the change processes that might need to be understood in order to achieve the transition are not made clear. It is to these problematic matters that this review will now turn.

As we have seen, there are claims made in some literature about evidence for the effectiveness of PLCs in promoting teachers' professional development and pupil achievement. However, there are others who raise fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of PLCs and argue that they are merely one further innovation that has failed to achieve its intended outcome (Joyce 2004; Servage 2008). This shall be discussed later, but for the present discussion, it is helpful to relate confusion or debate about the purposes and nature of PLCs in the wider context of the prevailing neo-liberal agenda as some scholars contend that this has shaped PLCs in particular ways (Bottery 2003, Servage 2007, 2008, 2009, Allen 2013). This wider context allows for consideration of further questions about the nature of change that PLCs are intended to produce; the necessary

conditions for change to occur within these PLCs and more generically, the models of community upon which they are founded. This section will address these issues.

When considering various types of change as represented in PLC literature, there are expectations around what PLCs might achieve that are focused on either generating new teaching practices, or more culturally focused on changing teacher relationships and culture (City at al 2009, Allen 2013, Ellis et al. 2015). These are not mutually exclusive. Both can be foregrounded in practice and both feature in available literature concerning PLCs. Servage (2008) determines that change processes arising from the practice of PLCs might be reformative or transformative. Reformative change according to Servage is limited to changing practice with the effect of achieving more efficiently existing mandated goals, or reproducing existing practices, whereas transformative change involves questioning the nature and purposes of these goals. Reformation of culture and relationships is understood as closer alignment with mandated views; transformation involves questioning the nature of relationships of all those involved, including relationships between teachers, pupils as well as authorities and hierarchies.

Several scholars identify incongruity between the aims and outcomes of change processes in PLCs. Servage (2008) highlights the disparity in the literature between the claims made for transformative change as effected by PLCs, and the substantive nature of the resulting transformation as being unclear. Riveros, Newton and Burgess (2012) similarly argue that improvement in practice is the goal of PLCs, but the nature of what is that improved practice might be uncertain. The process of collaborating and participation in groups is sometimes foregrounded over clarity of outcome, as Allen (2013) suggests.

These questions are helpful in guiding us to further analysis about more detailed aspects of PLC processes, for example, questions about the what aspects of practice do they turn their attention to, and what breadth or depth of focus their scrutiny allows. Little (2003) introduces Hutchins' (1996) concept of horizon of observation to focus on the aspects of practice that might be scrutinized during collaborative learning. A common theme that recurs frequently in PLC work is the call to deprivitisation; to break down the supposed 'isolation of teachers' practice' (City et al. 2009, p10) in opening up their classrooms and their practices to the scrutiny of others. However, if all this allows is the recursive

reproduction of mandated practices or techniques of teaching, as Servage (2008) suggests, then a more transformative process of change involving questioning and scrutiny of the wider goals and purposes of education, will not materialise. Codd (2005), Bottery (2003) and Servage (2009) attribute this lack of wider scrutiny to a neoliberal form of professionalism in teaching that limits itself to considering efficient implementation of external ideas, while leaving the bigger questions of governance and policy formulation to those in authority.

Not all PLC research fails to identify an impact on wider changes to teachers' fundamental educational vision and values, although when this does occur it is invariably in the direction that is mandated by authority. Tam's (2015) longitudinal study of changing teacher beliefs through PLC work in Hong Kong does demonstrate significant changes in culture and practice, however the staff involved were heavily mandated by authority to engage in the process. Nehring and Fitzsimmons (2011) suggest PLCs are 'countercultural;' this seems to be counter to what is perceived as teachers' existing culture rather than counter to any more managerial purpose of accountability or performativity.

This limitation of scrutiny can also relate to the established categories of discourse around classroom practice used by teachers, which 'supply both resources for and impediments to learning and change' (Little 2003, p918). Teachers' accounts of their practices rely heavily on a certain shorthand terminology and on condensed narratives that convey something of the press of classroom life without fully elaborating its circumstances or dynamics (Little 2003, p936). Little also raises the question of whether PLCs reify or interrupt this language of practice, and suggests attention should be focused on the latter. Kennedy (2016) acknowledges the tensions and limitations of the existing discourses around individual and collective professional learning experiences. Using the lens of indigenous principles borrowed from Sanford et al. (2012, in Kennedy, 2016), she invites us to consider alternative discourses of 'inclusivity, community-building and the recognition and celebration of individual uniqueness' (Kennedy 2016, p667). This, Kennedy suggests, offers a means of resistance to narrow, neo-liberal, instrumental measures of success in PLCs and regenerate a more expansive sense of purpose within them.

Associated with these concerns about discourses and scrutiny in PLCs are questions about how their practices may enfranchise a particular ontology and epistemology (Watson 2014,

Roegman & Riehl 2015, Stickney 2015). The siren call to evidenced-based teaching which is pressing many aspects of teachers' work presently, including that which is associated with PLCs, gives rise to a particular view of the questions that teachers can and should ask about education in terms of scope (i.e. observable techniques) and what constitutes evidence in relation to those questions (i.e. measurable data). This creates a positivist and possibly misleading view of knowledge as value-free and objective (Roegman & Riehl 2015, Stickney 2015).

Uncertainty also arises around the dynamic between individual and collective or systemic learning in PLCs (Sleegers et al. 2013, Watson 2014, Ellis et al. 2015). Depending on the focus of the unit of change, whether this is culture, individuals or wider groups, assumptions arise about how this is effected. A focus on process may give rise to some limited changes to aspects of individuals' practice. However, if the focus is on generating new, transformative practice, then more scope for systemic change as a result of communicating new knowledge (e.g. Ellis et al. 2015) might be demanded. This may also offer the opportunity for more transformational change, as it may allow teachers to produce new pedagogical knowledge rather than merely implementing 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1988 in Roegman and Riehl 2015) in a more technicist way.

5.4 Exposing some assumptions about PLCs

In their seminal review of the literature on professional learning communities, Stoll et al. (2005) observe that research in this area in the UK is a twenty first century phenomenon. They further suggest that the interest in PLCs perhaps reflects a need for new approaches to organisational behaviour in response to accelerating rates of change in the increasingly globalised society. In support of this, Charner-Laird, Ippolito and Dobbs (2016) emphasise the need to recognise today's society as one that is knowledge-rich and networked, bringing a greater requirement to make more tangible the connections between areas of knowledge and practice relating to it than before. Understandings of professional collaborative practice might consequently be seen as a distinguishing or a desirable characteristic of the twenty-first century educator, but it is important to acknowledge that extended connectivity in networks engenders tensions in connections as well as harmony. Drawing on Coburn's (2008) analogy of weak and strong ties, ties can be too weak to sustain any meaningful

connection or too taught to allow for flexibility. Similarly, Jackson and Church's (2009) organic networks of nodes and threads can also highlight problems in the nodes and ties analogy: nodes can be small and easily bypassed, or large and obstructive, instead of being conducive to circulation within the network.

   While these ideas may be evident in literature, they are not being proposed as an epistemological justification for PLCs or collaborative practice per se, however. The ubiquity of the terms has seen them in recent years become part of the everyday lexicon of educators in Scotland and beyond. In addition, as we have seen, professional learning communities or practitioner networks are becoming increasingly common across the teaching profession to the extent that they are sometimes accepted uncritically as beneficial for practitioners, and used as terms to describe almost any work-related activity involving groups of educators (Trotman 2009, City et al. 2009, Fullan 2007, Fullan and Hargreaves 2015). Indeed, the growth of some educational commercial enterprises who support and promote such practices has been significant. This, in itself, presents problems of definition, expectations and interpretation. Watson (2014) argues that this ubiquity is not only in danger of rendering the term (professional learning community) meaningless, it is also contributing to the 'pedagogisation [of PLCs], the processing of complex concepts for consumption by learners' (Watson 2014, p1). From a critical perspective, then, some unchallenged assumptions that seem to be widely accepted in much of the literature have potential to unsettle beliefs, casting darker shadows over PLCs and some of their component concepts.

Watson's critique of some of the concepts at work inside the PLC highlights tensions at play here. Openness and shared vision and values; norms of practice and responsibility for student learning are frequently cited as characteristic features of PLCs (Allen 2013, Bolham et al. 2005, Hord 1997, Louis 2008, Nehring and Fitzsimmons, 2011, Stoll et al. 2006, City et al. 2009, Hargreaves and Fullan 2015). Watson's critical interpretation of these sets the 'cosy concept' (Watson 2014, p5) of openness not as an antidote to isolationism as it is often presented in the literature, but as a form of surveillance and control. Sharing, another of the 'warm fuzzies' (Nehring and Fitzsimmons 2011, p526) in the discourse of PLCs becomes a controlling homogeniser; flattening out difference and silencing dissonant voices; directing discourses around pedagogies into' very particular meanings' (Watson

2014, p5). For Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017), collaboration can be understood by some PLC participants as an undermining of their individual autonomy. Among these most commonly cited characteristics of PLCs is the need for a shared vision and values – these terms are rarely defined. Some go further to suggest that only particular mandated vision and values are acceptable (Fendler 2006, Servage 2009, O'Keeffe 2012, Watson 2014, Ellis et al. 2015). Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) suggest that the mandated vision and/or set of values include issues such as the value of current curricular goals and measures of success, and the desirability of certain forms of collaboration. To seek other vision or values may lead to alienation or exclusion from the community (Fendler 2006, Riveros, Newton & Burgess 2012). Additionally, Codd (2005) suggests that attempts by teachers to resist these neo-liberal solutions paradoxically highlights the case for presenting evidence for why they are necessary. Paradoxes resulting from an uncritical approach to PLCs are laid bare here: Watson contends that in terms of values, openness (as discussed above) can lead to surveillance; that as Fendler (2006) also posits, inclusive bodies necessarily exclude; that shared vision can create a direction of travel which suppresses change and becomes myopic and that enforced cohesion can lead to isolation.

Fendler (2006) challenges the concept of concept of community through the lens of social justice and outlines, like Watson, various ways in which contrary to common understanding, the concept of community in educational research and practice operates to exclude. According to Fendler this can happen by means of affect, solidarity or 'third way' thinking. The appeal to third-way thinking (the space between communitarianism and neo-liberal individualism) invokes contradictory messages about power relations. By constructing an alternative discourse to the binary social paradigms expressed above, third-way thinking in Fendler's terms...

> ...appears to be an inclusive middle ground, so its mechanisms of exclusion, censorship, and normalization are not readily available for critique (Fendler 2006, p309).

The impulses towards assimilation and heterogeneity are depicted here as inherently exclusive, and Fendler draws on Gee (2000) to illustrate how communities conceptualised in this way can be used as sites of 'tacit indoctrination' (Gee 2000, p519). Rose (1999) suggests

that they can paradoxically be understood as sites of enforcement or governance, all the while situating themselves out with the existing structures of governance.

Fendler also shows how the frequent appeal of solidarity in community is prevalent but hides an inherent, underlying contradiction: the existence of a community in the very fact of including only some, maintains power relations which reinforce deficiencies of those excluded. Those on the outside of the community may find themselves subject to interventions made by the community as happens in many educational practices such as Learning Rounds; Instructional Rounds, Lesson Study, collaborative enquiry or other collaborative observational practices that 'other' some teachers in subjecting them to a clinical gaze (Stickney 2015). Those on the inside are not considered deficient. Fendler sees this as a reinforcement of hierarchies of power whereby the status of both those included and those excluded is established and maintained. Fendler strongly critiques the affective aspect often invoked in conceptualisations of community in terms of universality – no-one person can necessarily have the same feelings about a situation than another; and the unsettling nature of experiencing those feelings when they provoke unfamiliarity or dissonance, thus further reinforcing her inclusion/ exclusion argument.

Servage (2009) has considered the ethics of care as one feature of the work and make-up of the PLC. However, Servage (2009) also argues that even in the most favourable of circumstances, where there is an evident 'orientation to care' (p158), there is little room for optimism in the face of competing demands from the North American managerialist, standards and accountability-driven current system. Servage observes that sloganising statements which masquerade as policy (the examples she quotes are 'learning for all' and 'all children succeed' (p158). These are recognisable in similar UK/Scottish versions (c.f. Getting It Right For Every Child GIRFEC- an acronym that has passed into common educational parlance), are often assigned to PLCs as a focus for their work. Servage suggests this risks generating cynicism, if the PLC is seen to be a vehicle for 'contradictory, technocratic standards-driven outcomes' (Servage 2009, p159). Servage warns against PLCs accepting the managerialist gauntlet as this not only generates cynicism and dilutes the potential of rich collaborative learning, but will also limit the work of the PLC to constraining practices of implementation, audit, assessment, reporting or 'pedagogical best practice' (p164).

Fendler (2006, p304) contends that community is a concept that 'seems never to be used unfavourably and never given any positive opposing or distinguishing term' even although communities can also reinforce existing power relationships and 'foreclose possibilities for diversity' (Fendler 2006, p310). Concerns about the paradox of 'mandated' (Servage 2009, p150) community have been expressed elsewhere in relation to PLCs, in which 'co-operation turns into co-optation' (Stickney 2015, p490). Teachers hold dual positions as agents and subjects of change in a process of adopting an imposed policy agenda and conducting surveillance of colleagues to ensure that it is implemented (Bottery 2003; Codd 2005; Fendler 2006; Watson 2014; Ellis et al. 2015). Mifsud describes the mandated experience of collegiality in her study of distributed leadership: in attempting to mandate collaborative practice, leadership merely ensures that 'the discourse of collegiality and collaboration drown out that of isolationism and individualism' (Mifsud 2017, pp22-23).

The concept of culture seems to come with a particular understanding in much of the PLC literature; it is perceived as being externally generated by management or policy makers rather than by teachers themselves (Joyce 2004). Vongalis-Macrow (2007) describes how teachers receive periodic 'makeovers' through new forms of professional development that are imposed upon them. In this light, PLCs can be perceived as another form of makeover visited on teachers from outside while appearing simultaneously to make them both the agents and the product of the change process it defines. Nehring and Fitzsimmons, however, establish that through sustained interrogation of the norms of practice, PLCs run counter culturally, problematizing accepted ideas such as collaboration and improvement, which unless problematized through inquiry work in a PLC remain 'unassailable verities, akin to truth, goodness and beauty' (Nehring and Fitzsimmons 2011, p526).

Some examples of PLCs in the literature are driven from the top or centre of hierarchical structures by school leaders and/or local government. For example, Leclerc et al. (2012) give principals a surprisingly important role in developing the capacity of teachers to work collaboratively. Mifsud (2017) outlines the failure of a programme of enforced 'contrived' collaboration in school reform in Malta. Nehring and Fitsimmons (2011) similarly present an authority-led top down model of PLC development, with a contrasting degree of approval. The role of leadership, internally and externally in the PLC surfaces tensions. It is acknowledged that school leadership support of PLCS is important (Bolam et.al, 2005; Harris

and Jones, 2010; Harris Jones and Huffman, 2017). The balance in which this is held within the PLC is essential but delicate. Without support or endorsement from school leadership or authority, any staff-driven initiative may founder through lack of parameters, focus, direction or resources. In contrast, with excessive control and direction from authority, PLCs may risk becoming the enforcement arm of a leadership or management agenda. According to Dufour (2007b), this tension plays out in practice as a form of leadership described as 'loose-tight:' where direction and leadership are carefully balanced in order to allow autonomy to be fostered within a framework of priorities. This begs the questions of membership and leadership of PLCs, which will be discussed in the sections that follow.

5.5   Composition of PLCs – membership, relationships and structure

There are clear concerns in some literature about the propensity of PLCs to engender homogeneity. There are also questions around how this affects the processes of interaction between participants in PLCs and the actions they may take as a result of these interactions. In this section, I will consider how the ways in which PLCs are structured are reported in literature.

Relationships within PLCs have commanded considerable attention from several scholars over time (see Bolam et al. 2005; Stoll et al. 2006; Cranston 2009; Coburn, Choi and Mata 2010, for example). Louis (2008) uses this term in defining the PLC, as 'a set of dynamic relationships embedded in a supportive school culture' (p13). Much of the literature conflates relationships with collaboration (see Hargreaves, 2013; City at al 2009; Allen 2013; Ellis et al. 2015 for example). Relationships are seen either as a pre-condition for successful PLCs, and are also identified as a factor in creating a culture that is conducive to sustainable school improvement (Lee and Louis, 2019). Although there is clear consensus that relationships are fundamentally important to the PLC (and any aspect of collaborative practice per se), the nature of the relationships warrants some scrutiny. The distinction between social affordances in relationships and the requirements that may be demanded of professional interactions may not always be clear. Hallam et.al. emphasise the importance of informal as well as formal dimensions of relationships:

A successful PLC team collaborates both formally and informally. In the hallways or the teachers' lounge, team members share current lessons and activities, teaching ideas and methods, and specific students' needs, along with aspects of their personal lives (Hallam et al. 2015, p195).

However, Cranston (2009) cautions against over-emphasising congeniality at the expense of more robust professional conversations, aligning with Hargreaves's (2004) suggestion of contrived collegiality, and Meirink's (2010) incremental typology of collaborative practices that range from scanning and storytelling to more robust discussion of teachers' shared work. Cranston's (2009) discussion suggests that school leaders often focus on the processes involved in the forming and enactment of each PLC, but their perspective should perhaps be focused more on moving relationships beyond congeniality to collective responsibility for improving student outcomes. This, Cranston suggests, would involve the school leader actively engaged in supporting these communities to become places of trust and risk-taking that 'allow and provide occasions for the kind of disagreement and disequilibrium that comes with critical questioning and debates of best practices' (ibid p17), in order for meaningful change to have a chance of occurring.

Risk-taking and disequilibrium also feature in other scholars' work from a more radical perspective, who argue that diversity and dissent are essential for any form of collaborative learning, particularly transformative learning to take place. They argue that that the all-pervasive emphasis on shared vision and values can inhibit individuals' actions and decision-making (Fendler 2006; Servage 2008; Watson 2014; O'Keeffe 2012; Ellis et al. 2015; Stickney 2015). There is also concern that teachers' established social relations within school communities serve as proxies for the more robust professional community that are necessary to productively manage fundamental disagreements and allow for professional growth (Dooner, Mandzuk & Clifton 2008; Nehring and Fitsimmons 2011; O'Keeffe 2012).

The desire to avoid disrupting existing practices, or supportive social networks and communities might subvert the more challenging work of disruptive conversations that PLCs are capable of accommodating (Maloney & Konza 2011; Allen 2013; Owen 2014). Little's (2003) idea of the 'horizon of observation' encourages a wider perspective on the focus of work in the PLC. This may provide the opportunity to welcome alternative voices, values and

perspectives on practice that may allow for challenging or disruptive conversations, as suggested by the scholars above.

The dilemma about membership relates to uncertainty in the literature about whether community is a prerequisite for a PLC or its outcome. Joyce (2004, p78) describes PLCs as a 'collision with the norms and structure of the workplace.' Roberts (2012, p10) writes that one illustrative example of PLCs, the Instructional Round, is 'intended to disrupt the typical patterns of interaction between adults in schools.' If (improved) interactions are an outcome of PLCs not a starting point, we need to consider how the requisite skills and behaviours to support and enable them are developed as part of the work involved in them. This might be necessary before any consideration of transformative power of PLCs can occur (Joyce 2004, Dooner, Mandzuk & Clifton 2008, Maloney & Konza 2011, Thessin & Starr 2011, Leclerc at al 2012, Owens 2014, Balyer, Karatas & Alci 2015). It may also be necessary to recognise the importance of working through difficulties after the early stage of development to achieve this (DuFour 2007, Maloney & Konza 2011). Mandated or voluntary participation can also impact upon the outcomes of the PLC according to Nehring and Fitzsimmons (2011), who advocate a 'top –down' arrangement, and claim that as long as participation remains optional, effects will be limited. This is at odds with the idea of the PLC as a teacher–initiated structure based on informal ties of varying dimensions such as that proposed by Coburn and Russell (2008); Coburn, Choi and Mata (2010) or the re-imagined PLC based not on a sense of community, but more one of creative collective, as suggested by Allen (2013).

Relationships in PLC literature are also described as internal (between individuals within the PLC and within the school), or outward facing (to external agencies and partners). In these contributions, however, there is little exploration of what relationships are or how they are conceptualised. According to Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015, p86), relationships also allow for the mediation of cultural forms - they 'are the means for, or barriers to cultural diffusion' within social systems.

Membership and composition of PLCs is clearly of significance when considering how they might support or limit changes in practice. Closed communities can be by nature, self-limiting and exclusionary, or even hostile to external perspectives. Access to alternative

perspectives can often be lacking in PLCs, but these can also bring a beneficial interruption to 'group think' and existing, accepted assumptions or mandated views of 'good practice.' For example, a critical friend or a partner from the academic or research community (as suggested in Donaldson, 2010) may add particular value, especially where there is strong 'vertical accountability' (Little 2003, Stoll et al. 2006, Vescio, Ross & Adams 2008, Owens 2014, Watson 2014, Ellis et al. 2015, Roegman & Riehl 2015, Stickney 2015) in relation to school improvement. However, careful consideration might be required when considering membership of PLCs, as any insular or exclusionary practices in this regard, as reported by Servage (2009), could potentially inhibit the espoused aspirations for change. The wider, more inclusive approach to membership as suggested here might act as a counterbalance to the perceived authority of policy prescriptions, and provide a means of introducing existing research and theory, which may in turn lend weight to the authority of teachers' interpretations of practice.

5.6   Roles and leadership in PLCs

Leadership is significant in direct and indirect ways in PLCs. There are two themes that emerge in literature here: firstly there is a significant body of literature concerning the role of the school leader in supporting and sustaining PLCs; and there is considerable literature focusing on the PLC as a site to support the development of leadership in participants. Each of these themes will be considered in the following section.

Within the literature, the school leader's role in supporting and sustaining PLCs is typically concerned with creating conditions that foster trust, the sharing of power and autonomy (see for example: Hord 2004, Stoll et al. 2006, City et al. 2009, Cranston 2009, Hallam et al 2015). A broad assumption across this body of literature interprets the school leader's role at being at arms' length from the PLC. They may guide, motivate, provision or supply resources for the PLC but, in this presentation, are rarely involved in intrinsic practices at its heart. Some literature probes further into school leader or principals' responsibilities to the PLC placing them closer to the work and actions involved in the PLC. Louis (2008)

recommends that school leaders should show their commitment not only by support, but also by sharing the workload. This is elaborated by Hairon and Dimmock (2012), who, researching in a South East Asian context, caution against temptation on school leaders' part to create structures and conditions for PLCs but pass responsibility for them to other levels of leadership. They also advocate that school leaders should have more direct engagement inside the PLC:

> [m]oreover, if principals fail to role model and actively participate in PLC activities, then the cultural change necessary to develop and sustain PLCs is likely to be further undermined (Hairon and Dimmock 2012, p419).

This is an under-estimated aspect of leadership responsibility to the PLC and reflects a tension that they have to navigate between micro-management and leadership responsibility, as suggested by Hallam et al., (2015). Their potential to contribute wider, system-level knowledge and 'big picture thinking' (Tam 2015) may be missed if they do not participate in PLCs. Keung et al (2020) also present an analysis of PLCS in the South East Asian context. These scholars perceive the presence of authority carries a risk of inhibiting or distorting the development of relationships and reinforcing deference to hierarchies. This idea will be further explored below.

The role of the school leader as instructional and transformational is highlighted by Vanblaere and Devos (2016) as being key to developing a sense of collective responsibility in the PLC, through being involved with classroom practices and providing teachers 'with suggestions or guidance as an instructional leader' (Vanblaere and Devos 2016, p35). Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017) go further and advocate that principals have responsibilities towards intellectual stimulation, interaction feedback and modelling within PLCs. In contradiction to this, Stickney (2015, p505) advocates resistance to any form of 'centrally mandated' professional development in order to promote professional growth through attending to the exploration of their own 'pedagogic truth….instead of passing time as docile listeners' (Stickney 2015, p505).

However, this is not to say the influence of leadership should be entirely absent or participants should be entirely self-directing; some alignment between collaborative activities, leadership and wider school improvement aims is essential (Carpenter 2015;

Godfrey 2014). Nehring and Fitzimmons (2011) caution against lack of leadership at school level in the PLC suggesting that this may jeopardise efficiency. However, in maintaining fidelity to the alternative leadership focus in PLCs, that of the development of teacher leadership, school leaders might prefer to stay at arms' length from the PLC. Their role can still be implicit in maintaining leadership authority within and across the school, in opening up structural spaces within the organisation, or in restructuring existing arrangements to enable PLCs to exist.

DeMatthews (2014) posits the idea that principals have an important role to play in respect of establishing conditions that are conducive to the development of PLCs and disseminating knowledge across the school community, but also acknowledges that they should also protect staff from excessive reforms:

> …social interactions can facilitate the development of trusting
> relationships, collaboration, and a diffusion of expertise and knowledge
> They can also buffer teachers from district policies and fast-paced changes
> that disrupt school improvement continuity (p 182).

DeMatthews develops an extension of a suggestion in Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, who describe a similar process, drawn from Osborn et al. (1997, in Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015). These authors describe a process that involves teachers protecting students from aspects of policy they deemed more harmful than beneficial, and acted to protect their students from them in 'protective mediation' – the selective undermining, side-lining or deflecting of such policies (p42). DeMatthews (2014) suggests that school leaders might use the structure of a PLC to take a similar measure, in providing a safe and supportive forum for discussion as suggested above. Wilson (2016) identifies technical and cultural factors that school leaders can directly control which create conditions that are conducive to supporting the development of PLCs. Technical factors, being easier to manage might include, for example, the slackening of timetables to allow for shared planning time, the organising meetings, spaces or administrative support. MacGilchrist, Myers and Read (2004) propose that cultural factors are constituted by three components - professional relationships; organisational arrangements and opportunities for learning. Schoen and Teddlie (2008) distinguish between school climate and school culture, arguing that the former is a subset of the latter and a school culture is composed of four elements; '(I)

Professional Orientation, (II) Organizational Structure, (III) Quality of the Learning Environment, and (IV) Student-Centered (sic) Focus' (p139). Such cultural conditions, according to Wilson (2016) are hard to evidence; school leaders can be mistaken in thinking that if the technical factors are in place, the cultural ones will automatically follow. Conversely, absence of leadership support can inhibit the development of a culture that is generative of the conditions for PLCs to thrive, as McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) identify:

> For better or worse, principals set conditions for teacher community by the ways in which they manage school resources, relate to teachers and students, support or inhibit social interaction and leadership in the faculty, respond to the broader policy context, and bring resources into the school (p.98).

Timperley et al. (2007) note that in providing the technical conditions, for example, giving teachers the space to talk alone is insufficient for any meaningful professional development or improvement to occur. In spite of suggestions in much of the literature that PLCs are connected with school improvement (see previously; Stoll et al. 2006, Hord 2004, Hargreaves and Fullan 2015, Lee and Louis 2019), the mechanisms for achieving this are less clear: there is perhaps insufficient attention given to the work done inside them and the processes and interactions that occur. It is acknowledged that leadership style is important in this regard as top-down, overly hierarchical lines of communication can have negative effects (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015). Datnow (2012) discusses how leadership involvement and directive in teacher networks are more effective when communicated indirectly via the proxy of willing teacher leaders, from whom the messages are accepted more readily. Hallam et al. (2015) counsel resisting the urge towards principal's micromanagement of PLCs, insisting instead on the importance of facilitating trust and sharing leadership using the mechanism of PLCs to do so. The role of the school leader in this respect might get lost in DuFour's (2007b) loose-tight dilemma, should their involvement or leadership fail to strike the balance required between power, priorities, parameters and the agency of all those involved.

In spite of their ubiquity, PLCs can often occupy a problematic space in the structure of a school. They are sometimes positioned, as was the case in this study, to provide alternatives to, or bypass existing and established structures, such as secondary subject departments or primary school broad stage groupings (i.e. early stages, middle primary, and upper primary).

Spillane (2012) also suggests that they offer a manifestation of distributed leadership, a recognised, if problematic form of leadership (Torrance 2013), which aims to redistribute power within a school structure from 'power over' to 'power with.' Torrance also points out that the term is conceptually confused and is a vehicle for a range of understandings that simultaneously occupy both ends of a spectrum, ranging from some that are welcomed with enthusiasm to others that are treated with suspicion (Torrance 2013). Crawford (2012) neatly captures this paradox in summarising the ubiquity of the term in the particular context of school governance discourse in England:

> the whole discussion around distributed and other forms of shared leadership is part of English government rhetoric to claim that power and autonomy are being shared with schools, whereas the reality points to centralization and many different forms of managerialism (Crawford 2012, p612).

Within a distributed leadership (DL) model, leadership is exercised by a range of people within a school and an assumption is made that it is 'uncoupled' (Bush 2018, p536) from authority roles. Harris (2013) determines that DL does not mean that everyone leads, but that, under the right conditions, everyone has the potential to lead. DeMatthews (2014) acknowledges the importance of power sharing in PLCs, but positions this as the relieving of pressure on the side of the principal, rather than an enabling and developmental opportunity for participants:

> Although it is clear PLCs require leadership and principal support, it is increasingly evident that leadership cannot remain only in the hands of the principal or other traditional leaders because of the demands, responsibilities, and expertise required to support teachers in a modern school are too significant (DeMatthews 2014, pp183-184).

This interpretation is supported by Torrance (2013), who finds that leadership power is distributed in name only and ultimately rests with authority. When PLCs are positioned as a dimension of teacher leadership or distributed leadership (Lieberman, Campbell and Yashinka, 2017; Harris 2007; Harris and Spillane 2008) without concomitant distributed power, they can be perceived as a mandated 'middle rung' of the leadership hierarchy. This is at odds with a popular presentation of the PLC as an alternative horizontal, teacher – led, model that sometimes is idealised in literature. In this interpretation, leadership responsibility is organised laterally, rather than vertically and hierarchies are supposedly

flattened (City et al., 2009), irrespective of the existing relationships, experiences, tensions or resentments that are at play. City et al. (2009), in making reference to the practice of 'Instructional Rounds' (the parent practice of Learning Rounds), highlight how principals and teachers work together to inquire, engage in leadership, and share their knowledge and expertise to enhance their community's ability to meet the needs of all students. However, Harris (2003), Harris and Jones (2010) and Charner-Laird, Ippolito and Dobbs (2016) strongly support the idea of PLCs as a vehicle for DL and conclude that multiple forms of leadership are essential to the successful and sustained development of PLCs. They suggest those greater opportunities for teacher leadership will lead to meaningful innovations that support professional and organizational learning.

5.7   Agency in PLCs

Agency has been increasingly theorised in literature relating to professional learning to explain individuals' interactions with resources and ideas within a socio-cultural context (see for example: Reeves and I'Anson 2014, Pyhältö et al. 2015, Toom et al. 2015). Through an increasing focus on their potential, however well or poorly evidenced, to support reform (see above), some scholars see the PLC as an appropriate vehicle for the development and exercise of teacher agency (Masuda 2010, Lipponen and Kumpalainen 2011, Riveros et al. 2012). This is generally presented in the literature as human action taken within a socio-cultural context that is seeking to influence practice or events. Philpott and Oates (2017) identify specific affordances in the LR model that could support teacher agency. These include: using the LR to critically examine assumptions about practices; relaying between generating fine-grained evidence about practice and keeping an eye on wider purposes – the 'big picture,' and developing collaborative relationships with facilitators or other expert outsiders, from the Academy, for example, rather than assuming that installing the process and handing it over to teachers is a guarantee of agency.

 Edwards (2005) further emphasises the role of actors as resources for each other, who activate agency in each other, in introducing the concept of 'relational agency.' This denotes a capacity that materialises from human interaction that is aligned 'in joint action on the object' in a Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) analysis. The activation of agency is essential for this to occur and the elaborated forms by logical necessity, post-date the

original forms: agency cannot pre-date the structural and cultural conditions in which it occurs. Respected scholars such as Priestley (2011a; 2011b; 2014) and Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) for example, consider agency as something that can be exercised by individuals as a property of the individual, but is reinforced through collective action that takes place in wider structures such as PLCs or other collectivities such as subject departments, networks or PLCs.

Regardless of the nature of the structure, the relationships and the cultural forms that shape it, the agency of individuals both results from their interactions within the socio-cultural context these forms provide, and will be enabled or constrained as a result of interactions with them. Brodie emphasises that this is not accidental but an inevitability, even when apparent inaction is the result:

> teachers always enact agency, even when they choose not to act, or might seem to 'passively' accept policies or practices from others. These too are agentic achievements and need to be understood as such in relation to particular social and material conditions and relations of power (Brodie 2019, p3).

Agency, therefore is varied and nuanced. It is not a unitary entity, but rather, as Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) outline, it is a unique phenomenon that is dependent on the interplay of individuals and the structural, cultural and material resources they encounter in their social context. This interplay can result in effects which lead to transformation or stasis; in critical realist terms, this is explained in terms of morphogenesis or morphostasis (Archer 1995), which will be explained fully in chapter six. Brodie (2019) identifies three categories of agency that reflect the degrees of transformation that might (or might not) occur within PLCS: agency can be engaged, rejected or avoided. Teachers either actively engage in the PLC resulting in productive collaboration, trusting relationships and sustained enquiry, or reject these overtly. A third scenario may see them abstain due to mistrust of any one of these components. In this analysis, the relationships support the development of agency in participants when trust, productive enquiry and collaboration emerge as a result of certain interactions between people, resources and ideas. Conversely, however, agency is rejected, or avoided in their absence.

5.8　Limitations of PLCs

There are exhortations in literature to recognise some adverse effects on practice that can occur in PLCs. However, there are clear tendencies in the literature so far examined to overstate the benefits of them, with a few exceptions. Joyce, in particular, recognises the importance of paying attention to processes, failures and internal dynamics (Joyce 2004), alongside the focus on ultimate student learning outcomes. Riveros, Newton and Burgess (2012) also recognise the importance of explicitly embracing, and not filtering out the failures and negative experiences, which may provide valuable data on operationalising future versions of the PLC. Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) identify uncritical acceptance of under-defined, underpinning concepts by those involved as a potential barrier to meaningful participation. Watson (2014), Servage (2009) and Fendler (2006) highlight the tendency of PLCs to encourage insularity, rather than expansive, transformative practice. In summary, there are limitations with current PLC practices, which need to be acknowledged if they are to be considered as mechanisms for change. These are:

• Acknowledgement of the limitations and failures in current PLC practices

• Restricting the focus of work to existing mandated practices

• Privileging measurable evidence over alternative or critical perspectives

• A lack of clarity in the process of converting individual learning to scaled-up system - wide improvement

• Insularity, conformity and lack of alternative voices arising from homogeneity within the PLC

• Availability of leadership and operationalising expertise to facilitate the PLC

It is important to recognise that some of these shortcomings are already acknowledged and researched in the field. Horn and Little (2010) draw attention to some processes internal to the PLC in the specific conversational routines and the nature of teachers' talk inside the teacher community. These scholars identify that the sharing of problems of practice and dilemmas within the PLC can serve as affordances for teacher opportunities to learn when

and also, importantly, position 'teachers as agentic in their own work' (Horn and Little 2010, p201). Some necessary structural and cultural conditions were identified to enable this to happen. These were:

- shared framework of reference (a common language with which to express ideas);

- a common curriculum (which had been designed and revised by the teachers involved), and

- leadership within the PLC (a participant who provides direction and keeps focus in discussion).

Additionally, positive interactions with the PLCs studied in this context occur, they claim, when conversations are allowed to relay between 'specific accounts of practice, and general lessons from experience' (Horn and Little 2009, p202). These scholars contend that this allows the participants to construct principles or frameworks to guide their practice within the context of specific examples. Conversely, verbal exchanges were also found to constrain development when they fail to generalise problems and maintain their focus on approval or 'feasibility of particular lessons' (Horn and Little 2009, p208). Although many other features which influence these internal dynamics are at play in this example, the focus on the nature of the language serves to shed some light on the nature of teacher interactions and provide some finer grained detail of internal processes and mechanisms at work inside the PLC, which is where this discussion will now lead.

Coburn et al. (2013) provide a rare, but useful, demonstration of the dynamics of network formation within a specific policy implementation involving the teaching of mathematics within one US district. This study investigated the nature of the ties that were generated within networks, and the mechanisms which supported and sustained their formation. Two modes of organisational context were identified as having important influence upon the nature of the ties teachers made with one another: physical proximity of colleagues and homophily (e.g. perceived similar approaches to work, class-stage partnerships). These were seen as foundations of tie formation in early stages. However, other emergent factors such as the cognitive categories of the roles they perform, available support from coaches deployed as part of the initiative, and the increasing awareness of the expertise of others

gained through opportunities for structured discussion all heavily influenced relationships as the networks matured. Depending on leadership attitudes and expertise within schools, as suggested above, these mechanisms can be supported to a greater or lesser extent within the different organisational contexts of many collaborative teacher networks; the extent to which this happens, it is suggested by Coburn et al., determines the success or failure of the network.

5.9 Conclusion

This analysis concludes that PLCs as structures have strong appeal for practitioners – both classroom and school leaders - however the assumptions and contested concepts that underpin must be critically examined by all those participating. Relationships need to accommodate critical questioning and challenging conversations. There are tensions concerning micro-level leadership within the structure and meso-level leadership at school level. The PLC tends to be positioned unproblematically in some literature as a mechanism for distributed leadership, and the school leader's role in relation to the PLC needs to be carefully navigated in order to balance the loose-tight dilemma of agency and control.

The research questions my study seeks to address intend to build on this foundation and to shine a light inside teacher professional learning communities. In doing so, it will attempt to illuminate the internal workings of PLCs with a specific focus on Learning Rounds and augment the so far limited research that presents detailed analysis of this. This research projects therefore also seeks to foreground structures, ideas, conditions, barriers and enablers at work in the internal processes of LR as a form of PLC and as such, seeks to offer insights into the transformative (or otherwise) potential this collaborative practice may afford.

6   Methodology

6.1   Introduction

In previous chapters, I have outlined that this research study aims to shed light on the processes, interactions and emergent practices that occur in versions of teacher professional learning communities. This chapter sets out the methodological dimensions of the project, starting with a justification of the underpinning theoretical orientation, including a discussion of ontology and epistemology. Research aims and questions along with the rationale for case-study methodology are then elaborated; progressing to a description and justification of the data gathering methods, ethical considerations and an account of how analysis was carried out.

Crotty (1998) advises that a four-stage approach to research design, involving discussion of epistemology/ontology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods, provides solid foundations for the study, and the following subsections of this chapter are in line with this suggestion, with ethical considerations being included in methods and methodology, and considered at the end of the chapter.

6.2   Epistemological and Ontological Perspectives

This study is premised upon the depth ontology of Critical Realism (CR), which, as a philosophy, stems from the work of Roy Bhaskar, (1998) and in this section, I will justify its suitability as a guiding paradigm for this research study. Although it has been sometimes overlooked or is lacking in application in qualitative research methodology (Fletcher 2017), there is nonetheless growing evidence of the increasing relevance and practicality of CR in educational research in schools and in other settings (see Case 2015, Priestley 2011a, 2011b, Scott 2000, 2005). It has also been used in studies concerned with information technology (see Mingers 2004, Bygstad 2008, 2010, Bygstad, Munkvold and Olkoff 2016, Heeks and Wall 2018); information systems and organisational learning (see Herepath 2014, Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett 2010, for examples). Perhaps most significantly it has been

used in sociology and social sciences more widely (see Brock, Carrigan and Scambler 2016, Donati 2014; Easton 2010; Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent 2014, for examples). This is not surprising given the origins of the theory and the fact that it gives us a means of understanding the social world. To elucidate a definition drawing on Scott (2005), this approach is described in accessible terms as realist, because it acknowledges that there is a world that exists, independent of human attempts to know it and, as critical, because it acknowledges that any attempts to explain aspects of the social world are fallible. As this study is concerned with aspects of the social world, i.e. the experience of teachers in Professional Learning Communities, and all the subjectivities, bias, complexity and fallibility this entails, alternative positivist or empiricist paradigms which eschew these influences are here rejected in favour of Critical Realism. Additionally, and in keeping with the CR paradigm, the focus in this study is on revealing the hidden and unknown mechanisms that have caused the events unique to this case to happen. Therefore the assumption has to be made that these exist without our knowing of them in order for them to feature in this research process. Epistemologically this is in contrast with a post-human, socio-material research orientation, which collapses human and non-human entities, i.e. where the knower attributes all matter with agential capacity and presents an anthropomorphic account of the world (Lupton 2018). In CR terms this is 'the epistemic fallacy' (Baskhar 2013, Archer 1995) where the nature of reality is conflated with knowledge of it. Ontologically and epistemologically therefore, this project, in seeking to uncover mechanisms we cannot see is inconsistent with such a research paradigm, but conversely, entirely consistent with CR, which is why this paradigm was considered most appropriate.

The proposed depth ontology of CR (Bhaskar 1998) will be explored in detail more fully in the course of this chapter. It conceptualises the social world as being composed of stratified layers, where visible and invisible mechanisms and phenomena are at play. In social science research, this methodological approach allows investigation of the structural, cultural, and material influences of the interactions of phenomena and mechanisms within a given case. This is a useful approach for the purposes of educational research when considering education and schooling as a social world. It provides not only a philosophical foundation but also a framework for analysis of invisible underlying causal mechanisms and effects beyond what is visibly and empirically available to us. Some further discussion of the

relevant key concepts within this ontology will now precede a summary of the specific methods and analysis deployed in this study.

6.3 Depth ontology and stratification

The key concept of depth ontology in CR supposes a view of the social world defined by a distinction between different layers of reality - the empirical, the actual and the real. As previously discussed, in CR, the social world is understood by way of interactions of mechanisms within these three domains. The 'real' in CR terms encompasses all phenomena in our social world; their existence is acknowledged and accepted whether they are known or unknown to the individual. It includes deep-level and surface-level expressions of the social world. It acknowledges that underlying generative structural or cultural mechanisms exist and that they can causally influence events in the other domains, but are not directly observable. Heeks and Wall describe these mechanisms as having 'an 'intransitive' (speech marks in original) objective reality independent of human thought or belief: they are not merely social constructions' (Heeks and Wall, 2018, n.p.). Ransome (2013, p117) defines the real as 'all the stuff in the world, of whatever kind, whether observed or not, or indeed whether it is observable in the usual sense of the term.' Examples from educational research of such generative mechanisms occupying the level of the real in CR depth ontology might be, for example, beliefs about practice held by teachers such as those documented by Stylianou and Zembylas (2019) on practices of inclusion. The actual is what happens; it is a subset of the real and consists of events or experiences and also 'entities, which may or may not be observed' (Elder-Vass 2008, p458). There will be many potential versions of the actual; in CR terms, the actual is the version that did occur but may or may not have been directly experienced (Ransome 2013), thus, the epistemic fallacy presents its challenge. According to Scott, (2005):

> '[e]vents can occur in the world without them being observed by
> everyone, or indeed anyone; mechanisms can act to neutralise other
> mechanisms, so that nothing changes in life which can be directly
> observed' (p14).

An example from educational research of the realm of the actual might be, for example, the existence of children's rights to education but the absence of direct experience of many of

these rights by certain underprivileged groups (Alderson 2016). That such rights exist, is not disputed, but the experience of them is not universal.

The empirical, which is the surface-level of reality within this model, is also within the domain of the real but it is what is directly experienced by the social actor – this is only part of reality within this stratified ontology. Examples of the empirical in educational research are abundant; indeed Biesta (2007, 2015) suggests that reliance on the use of empirical evidence to support, or further, to justify certain practices has become deeply problematic. Biesta argues that empirical evidence has become over-sure of itself, that it supports a narrative of certainty and fails to acknowledge '…that education 'works' through language and interpretation, meaning-giving and meaning-making, and thus through processes of communication and encounter' (Biesta 2015, p84). To summarise the stratified ontology of Critical Realism, the stratum of the real hosts the mechanisms; the actual hosts events, and the empirical hosts experiences.

Thus, the social world is stratified into these three separate but inter-connected layers: the real, within which is nested the actual, within which is nested the empirical. These distinctions are crucial to understanding of this methodology, as they outline its ontological and epistemological position and illustrate the 'beneath the surface' depth that reality is concerned with in this ontology. To consider an ontological perspective that is drawn only from empirical experiences of reality is to limit our understanding of the world to superficial observations, which are always from a particular perspective, and therefore, by nature, incomplete. This is not to say that increasing the number of perspectives by, for example, expanding the number of participants, will rectify the problem, as Archer (2013) explains in discussing how news reports are constructed, supported and justified by data:

> Since reports are always expressed from a perspectival vantage point, this means that empirical and experiential access to the real state of affairs is necessarily incomplete. Were it possible to combine every existing perspective that would not be to combine every perspective possible. This is not a methodological problem about representativeness. It would remain if everyone in the world contributed their perspectives, because their composite would not be a readers' digest of unvarnished news but merely 'global perspectivism' (Archer 2013, p4).

Therefore, ontologically, empiricism is exposed by CR as an inadequate methodology for research that concerns a human and social dimension, offering only a superficial view of the world: a deeper examination of causal mechanisms is required if we are to more fully understand the nature of social reality. This is important for this study, as it is concerned not with observable events but with seeking an understanding of underlying mechanisms within PLCs in schools; what mechanisms are at play, how these interact and what effects they have. The depth ontology of CR offers a methodology that allows a closer examination of factors lying beneath the surface and an explanatory framework for analysis of the causal effects and observable changes or experiences that may occur as these factors act upon each other in their own contexts. These will now be discussed.

6.4   Emergence

Emergence in CR terms is the result of the interactions of underlying mechanisms in the domain of the real that occur to produce actual events. Ontologically, emergence is an 'act of composition….of coming into existence' (Donati 2014, p10). Causal power within social, material or cultural structures is synonymous with emergence according to Elder-Vass (2007). He explains interactions as being part of a recursive process, and describes emergence as the causal power attributed to entities, which are not possessed by the individual components within that entity but are possessed by the sum of its parts as a whole. The example he gives is the time on an analogue clock. This is only produced when the cogs and other parts (such as springs, hands etc.) interact, resulting in the emergence of time. Time would not result from a cog alone, or from the hands on the clock face in isolation. Emergence therefore comes into being from interactions of individuals within a structure, but *only* as a result of the interaction and it is necessarily influenced by pre-existing structures and cultural ideas (for example, a group of individuals, acting within an existing structure, influenced by cultural norms, ideas and values can interact within and with that structure). The collective interplay results in emergence, which can influence or change, but importantly not determine, all entities (Eder-Vass 2007). Emergence in CR terms consists of properties of entities with inherent structural and cultural mechanisms, and this is a unique characteristic of CR, according to Elder-Vass (2007). As will be further discussed below, emergence is temporally dependent – it can only occur after the interactions have

taken place and this is what gives it causality: it results from the interactions of pre-existing entities and mechanisms within a given system. (Elder-Vass 2007, p466). This is not to suggest that emergence is causal in a linear way or that it closes down alternative possibilities, offering only a deterministic view of outcomes: the methodological implication it presents in paying attention to underlying mechanisms in context-dependent ways allows for the opening up different possibilities: it shapes, but does not determine action (Heeks and Wall, 2018). Ransome (2013) highlights that:

> Critical realism offers social researchers an approach to social research that contains within its own theoretical construction of cause and consequence an openness towards imagining how other outcomes really are possible (p116).

An example of emergence in educational research might be a particular ethos of trust that develops within a group, resulting from leadership actions and relationships in the context of shared enactment of a new practice, for example.

6.5   The Case for Structure, Culture, and Agency

For Crotty (1998) the theoretical perspective in research provides a philosophical stance that informs the methodology and is congruous with the ontological/epistemological perspective. As discussed above, within this ontology, structure, culture and agency are constituent, interlinked and inter-dependent phenomena of the social world. These same components feature in many theoretical approaches to research. There are philosophical arguments about the relationships between these; however, remaining consistent with the CR approach, an explanation of all three as relevant to this study, will be elaborated here which draws on the work of social theorist, Margaret Archer.

In contrast to some other thinkers who have theorised the social world, Archer (1995) offers a stratified distinction between the social world or society, and the individual in order to advance a means of explaining and analysing the human condition. In Archer's (1995) model, society, or the social world comprises structure and culture and the interplay and influence of these two phenomena with the individual human agent. However, for her, the practical application of theory is essential. Social theory must be 'useful and useable: it is not an end in itself' (Archer 1995, p135). Theorising the social world is therefore a task that

must be tackled '*in* theory and *for* practice' (Archer 1995, p135: emphasis in original). It may be helpful at this point merely to underline this point. Archer's theory is a social theory; one that is intended to help explain the nature of reality and the mechanisms at work that enable or constrain changes within society. This theory is helpful to a study such as this, as it is practice-focused and is seeking to theorise processes and practices not in social movements but in a particular area of teachers' work. Essentially the theory has been 'scaled to fit' to allow its use in the examination of much smaller social units and systems. Further discussion of the relevance of this theory to this particular study will follow.

6.5.1   Structure

If we were to understand structure as a set of isolated entities within our social world, examples of these may be roles; rules; relationships; hierarchies; social institutions which hold manifestations of power. It is important, however, to be reminded that these entities do not exist in isolation –as expressed by Archer (1995 p141); '[t]he peculiarity of all things social is that they are activity dependent.' Elder-Vass (2010) identifies the philosophical antecedents of social structures in Durkheim and draws on Lopez and Scott (2000, in Elder-Vass 2010) in presenting structures as both relational and institutional: they are 'systems of shared norms, values and ideas that shape social behaviour (Elder-Vass 2010, p78).

For Porpora, structures are 'relations among social positions' (Porpora 2013, p27). For Elder-Vass, the properties of structures extend to include the parts, the sum of all the parts and what emerges when all these act upon each other: 'social structures comprise the constituent parts, the relationships between them, the emergent whole and the properties of the emergent whole' (Elder-Vass in Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015, p86). Structures, like culture are closely linked to agency: one depends on, but is not determined by the other. Human action is guided by structure and culture, but also in turn acts back on them and in doing so, can shape them.

  It is important to understand the range of features relationships have and the number of different ways they can be characterised. These can include characteristics such as, for example, 'power, competition exploitation and dependency' (Porpora 2013, p27). They may also include the degree of formalisation in any given relationship; how relationships persist over time and space; the amount of knowledge of their role in the relationship actors

possess; how knowledge is framed and structured; bias, such as gender or racial prejudice and degree of access to and control of resources (Scott 2000).

Drawing on other thinkers in the field, such as Porpora and Elder-Vass, Priestley (2011) presents a nuanced and insightful explanation of the complex interplay involved: structures (and culture) provide the context for human action, but can change and can be changed by the interaction of human agents with these two elements of the social system. Structures influence, and are influenced by humans as agents who act upon, and interact with them. The extent and nature of the effects of these interactions are variable, as humans exercise thought or reflexivity in their actions, and the emergent properties resulting from these human interactions with structural and cultural forms create the conditions of human existence.

Thus, Archer views structure and culture as interlinked with, but still 'analytically separable' (Archer 1995, p66) from agency. This is significant, as through social processes and interactions, human beings are influenced by, and act upon these structures in our social world. The emergent properties from these interactions are the unintended consequences that result from compromise and concession amongst those involved (Archer 2016) and these then become subsumed in new structures, new cultural forms, that exert causal power. The nature of these interactions will be addressed in further detail in the 'Analytical Dualism' section, but a more detailed development of the elements of culture, and the role of agency within this framework, will follow directly here.

6.5.2 Culture

Culture, according to Archer includes all items of intelligibilia within a social system (Archer 1996). Beliefs, language and norms of behaviour as logically related sets of ideas are key components of this understanding of culture. Importantly, however, these are also at the heart of human interactions. Culture is therefore seen as comprising inter-related phenomena grouped together (a cultural system), which condition social interactions. Culture is both 'the product of human agency, but at the same time, any form of social interaction is embedded in it' (Archer 1996, p77). Archer distinguishes the cultural system from sociocultural interactions involving it, contrary to some other social theorists whom, Archer argues, conflate these two notions into the 'Myth of Cultural Integration' (Archer

1996, p7) which she claims, suggests that culture can independently function to shape the social world. She presents the cultural system and sociocultural interactions not as unrelated separate entities, but again, as inter-dependent and simultaneously 'logically and empirically distinct, hence can vary independently of one another' (Archer 1996, p4). Thus the cultural system, as a set of relations between ideas, can influence and condition social interactions between people. These, in turn, via social interaction, act back upon, and shape the structures they operate within; thus giving rise to emergence (see above). Archer's theory posits that this sociocultural interaction leads, in turn, to further cycles of elaboration of the cultural system, and offers us a framework for the analysis of social change.

6.5.3   Agency, agents, actors

Agency in the context of PLCs has been discussed in chapter five. What follows here is a methodological examination of agency and its role in the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Agency, as a feature of Archer's social theory, is proposed as the capacity for humans to act in and upon their environment - the socio-cultural world. It is not action in or of itself. Archer's theoretical contribution here invites us once again to consider the phenomenon of agency as resulting from the interaction between human disposition and capacity for action, and the affordances or resources for agency of the particular sociocultural context (Archer 1995). The activation of agency is essential for this to occur and the elaborated forms by logical necessity, post-date the original forms: agency cannot pre-date the structural and cultural conditions that in which it occurs. This will be further explained in the following section.

Roles within structures merit some particular attention here as Archer distinguishes between two forms of agents: Primary and Corporate Agents. Corporate Agents are those who are 'aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organised in order to get it, can engage in concerted action to re-shape or retain the structural or cultural feature in question' (Archer 1995, p258). In the context of education, corporate agents would be self-organising groups or individuals who seek to innovate pedagogical practices and take risks, for example, introducing new technologies or seeking to challenge assumptions about racial minorities in education. Typically they might be what

Lieberman, Campbell and Yashkina refer to as 'mobilzers (sic) of their knowledge and action rather than being primarily the recipients of 'outside' expertise when approaching educational change' (Lieberman, Campbell and Yashkina 2017, p86). Many examples of such agents can be found in self-organised online educator communities such as the WomenEd network (see @WomenEdScotland), or the Anti-Racist Educator platform (see https://www.theantiracisteducator.com/about). Primary agents, by contrast are 'lacking a say in structural or cultural modelling…..they neither express interests nor organise for the strategic pursuit' (Archer 1995, p259).

Primary Agents, according to Archer, do not articulate their vested interests. These are people 'to whom things happen, who respond to happenings not of their making' (Archer 1995, p260). The implication here is not of intrinsic passivity however. Avoidance of engagement can signify resistance in itself, as 'passivity itself represents suspension – often deliberate suspension – of their agential powers' (Archer 1995, p260). Primary Agents are lacking the sort of visible influence that corporate agents may enjoy, but this does not mean they have no effects upon structures. Primary Agents in teaching terms would correspond to Lieberman, Campbell and Yashkina's (2017) portrayal of the passive recipient of another's knowledge or expertise. They may show little interest in innovation or risk taking, preferring instead to implement policy without challenging it. However, as Archer proposes, Primary Agents' pursuits or projects may remain 'un-articulated' (Archer 1995, p259) but in, for example, silently resisting attempts to reshape structural or cultural forms such as curriculum policy, they can still have effects upon them that may sustain, reinforce or entrench particular versions of them.

Structure, culture and agency are therefore different entities, with different properties and powers, despite the fact that they are crucial for each other's formation, continuation and development. Through combination in interplay, they are capable of producing causal powers (also known as emergence). Within the context of this study, a possible outline of the entities of structure, culture and agency can be seen in figure 3:
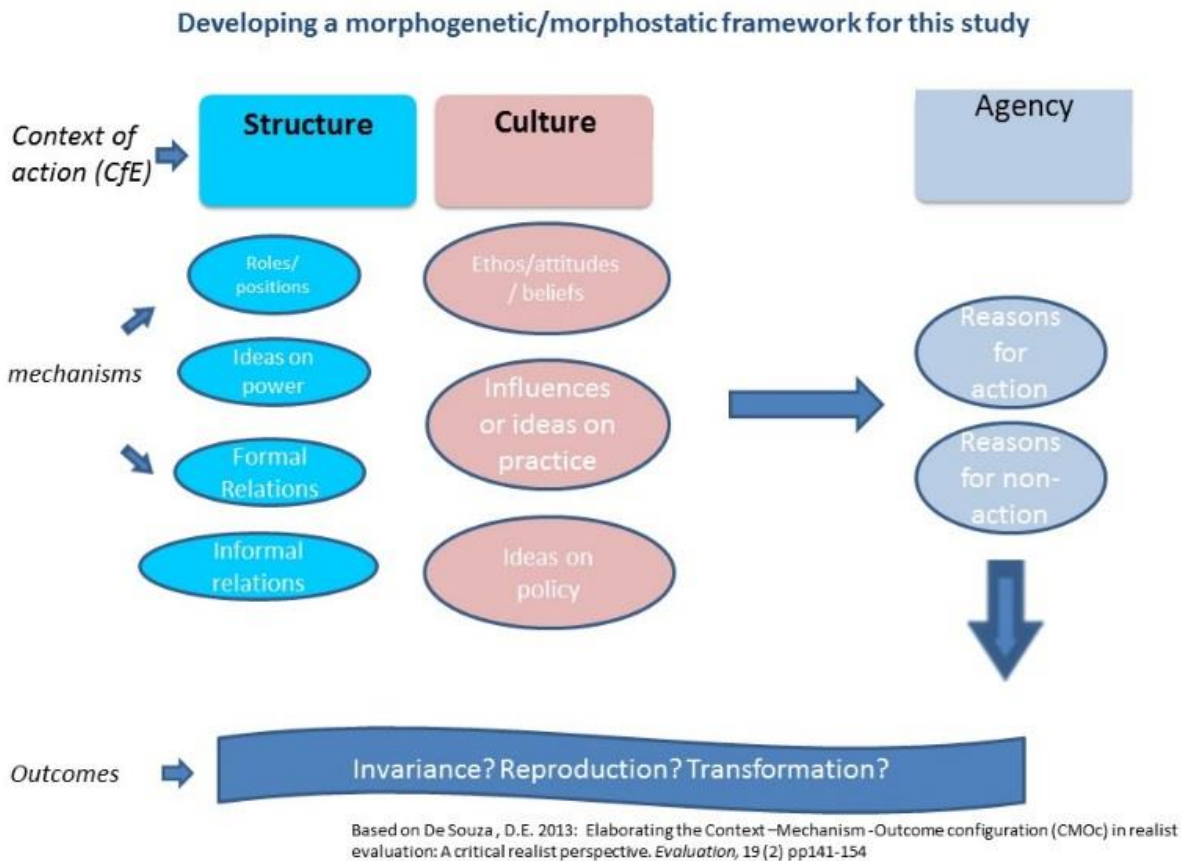
Fig 3: Developing a morphogenetic/morphostatic framework for this study

Archer argues for an ontological perspective that is social, i.e. 'peopled' (Archer 2013, p4), and contingent on human thought and action. She also acknowledges that individuals are acted upon, and act back on other phenomena within the social system, whose 'ontological constitution is utterly activity-dependent, despite the fact that people's thoughts and actions give rise to factors that are 'not people'—the most important of these being culture and structure' (Archer 2013, p4).

Thus, in a CR perspective, everything we can understand about reality comes in a SAC (composed of the three features of Structure (S), Agency (A) and Culture (C)), and that any analysis of the social world must involve an understanding of the complex and recursive relationship between all three. They are seen as distinct but inter-dependent, and importantly in Analytical Dualism, no one can be subsumed by any other and they do not exist in rank order or priority in relation to each other. In creating these distinctions, Archer (1995) offers an alternative to previous conceptualisations of the relationships between

these entities. Most notable, perhaps is her critique of the conflation of these phenomena. She critiques upward conflation; whereby within social interactions ranking, or the attribution of greater significance is attached to one or the other element. For example, the individual is subordinated to the collective (structure) with little room for agency – society is privileged at the expense of the individual (Archer 1995). Similarly, she critiques downward conflation, which conversely prioritises structure over agency; structures are subordinated to the creation of human agency and cannot be distinguished from it; the individual is privileged over society (Archer 1995). A third alternative interpretation of the relationship between these three essential components of our social world is central conflation, as advanced by Giddens and Bourdieu (Archer, 1995) which gives primacy to neither structure nor agency, but sees both as mutually constitutive, with neither having greater influence over the other.

In justifying a distinction between these entities, Archer (1995) contends that they do not co-exist; they operate diachronically over different time periods because structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) that transform it and any transformations that occur in the form of 'structural elaborations' necessarily post-dates those actions. Thus, Archer offers an alternative explanatory framework for the interaction of structure, culture and agency over time that illustrates the distinctiveness, but also the inter-dependence and interlinking of the components of our social world; the morphogenetic approach.

6.6   The Morphogenetic Approach and Analytical Dualism

 As discussed above, CR is accepted by some as a useful ontology for navigating the relationships between the individual or groups and society; between structure and agency. Archer's concept of analytical dualism develops this ontology by offering a way of separating out agency from the structural and cultural conditions in which it occurs, rendering the 'conditions of action analytically separable from the action itself' (Herepath 2014, p861). This provides an opportunity for the avoidance of the conflation of structure and agency. The morphogenetic approach (Archer 1995) further extends this concept by allowing a detailed examination of the interplay between the non-observable mechanisms present, but unseen, within the structural and cultural domains, and the individuals concerned in any

given system. This will be detailed further on in this chapter.   In this study, these relationships occur in schools as social systems and between individual teachers who are working within PLCs as collectives. The effects of their actions and interactions with each other, and with cultural forms they encounter may or may not prompt changes to their social system. Within this context, morphogenesis/morphostasis (M/M) offers a response to previous conflationary ontological positioning of structure and agency, which, as detailed above in Archerian terms, neglects the relational and reflexive properties of human actors within any given system.

Like Elder–Vass (2007), who elaborates the interactions across the cultural and structural domains within social systems, Archer (1995, 1996, 2000) supplements CR ontology and offers by way of extension the M/M approach as described above. The relationship between this model and the wider CR ontology reflects an important theory –practice connection highlighted often by Archer and others. As previously mentioned, Archer sees theory as something that must have purpose in practice. For her, theory and practice are mutually dependent: practice without theory is little more than common-sensical instrumentalism and theory without practice is unusable and un-user friendly. In order to allow this ontology to describe and explain our lived reality, she offers her model of morphogenesis/morphostasis (M/M) as an 'explanatory programme (EP);' a theoretical precisioning tool, which serves as a 'methodological complement' (Archer 2013, p9) to CR's ontology. It extends and supplements this theory, but it is not a theory in itself. It is offered as a refining theoretical model for the practical description and explanation of social systems; 'an explanatory programme - providing guidelines for other investigators about how to investigate what they seek to explain: it is not a theory and thus it explains and purports to explain nothing' (Archer 2013, p9). The relationship between social ontology, the research problem, and the EP is illustrated below:

SO → → → →   EP → → → →   PST
Social Ontology   Explanatory programme   Practical Social Theory
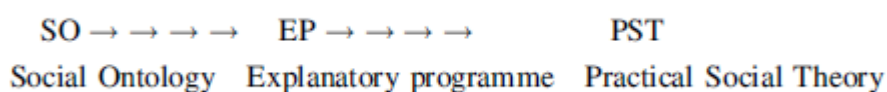
Figure 4: Archer's Social theory

Ontology does not explain the social or physical world but governs the concepts that are relevant to it. The research problem is supplied by the researcher. Description and explanation are enabled by the EP, and, if successful, a new theory is generated.

Thus, through the interaction of the entities within the given social system over time, transformation or reproduction of phenomena within them may occur, which in M/M terms is referred to as elaboration. Morphogenesis according to Archer refers to:

> …the complex interchanges that produce change in a System's given form, structure or state ('morphostasis' is the reverse) (Archer, 1996, p xxiv).

It is important to acknowledge that as it concerns the analysis of system-level stability or change in the social world, many of its proponents consider M/M as higher-level meta-theory (Porpora 2013), operating at an abstract, macro-level. Porpora details this as the process that identifies the 'ingredients' (Porpora 2013, p26) of social change and their interplay at a systemic level, but claims that it operates agnostically, not explaining 'anything in particular' (Porpora 2013, p26). However, that is not to say that it cannot be used to explain particular situations and particular contexts; Lazega (2014) distinguishes between the concepts of the (meta-level) morphogenetic society and the morphogenetic approach – the latter defined again as 'an explanatory framework, presented as appropriate for analysis at all levels from the micro- to the macro-level' (Lazega 2014, p167). As this study is analysing particular micro-level social systems within particular contexts, it is important to clarify that any reference to M/M denotes the morphogenetic approach, not the morphogenetic society, in keeping with Lazega's distinction.

In this understanding, therefore, M/M allows us to identify and analyse underlying influential factors at work on human actions and interactions in particular contexts over different time periods; T1, T2 andT3. It submits that present actions are shaped and influenced by structural and cultural conditions that have happened in the past (T1). It also submits that transformation within social systems and agents occurs as interactions between individuals and the cultural and structural domains (which happen at T2) of the system they belong to result in elaborations (T3). These are the end product, changes brought about by interactions within a set of identified conditions. Any agency resulting in T3 cannot pre-exist the conditions in T1: Importantly, therefore, the conditions pre-exist the

action that emerges through interaction in social systems. The process can be repeated with the newly elaborated cultural or structural forms creating new conditions at T1. 'Thus, cultural elaboration is the future which is forged in the present, hammered out of past inheritance by current innovation' (Archer 1996, p xxvi). A failure to form new elaborations at T3 would result not in morphogenesis, but in morphostasis. Structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) that transform it and, structural elaboration necessarily post-dates those actions.

Extrapolating this timeframe, we can add T4, which might be the space where phenomena are further problematised, and research questions are formulated giving rise to the need to recursively go back to T1 to examine underlying causal factors in a new cycle.

6.7   Analytical dualism

In order to analyse emergence, reproduction and transformation of cultural systems and social structures there is a need to focus on the dynamics between the system and socio-cultural interactions (Vanderberghe 2005, p229). This allows us to examine effects of interaction of phenomena at different levels within the stratified ontology have on individuals with the system and upon the system itself. Archer's methodology of analytical dualism (Archer1995) offers a conceptualisation of such changes as social transformations and reproductions which occur in the M/M cycles as described above. It goes further by taking into account change processes for both individuals within the structural and cultural dimensions of the system and the system itself (hence 'dualism'), whilst allowing this and the dynamic interaction between the system and the individual to be analysed. Using analytical dualism, we can separate structure and agency and examine their interplay to account for the structuring and re-structuring of the phenomenon under scrutiny. In the words of Priestley (2011):

> It allows us to disentangle the various aspects that contribute to the unfolding of a given social situation enabling us to make judgments about the relative causative weight of culture, structure, and agency (p13).

Through analytical dualism, therefore we can separate structure, culture and agency and examine their interplay to account for the structuring and re-structuring of any given system or group. Analytical dualism allows us to acknowledge that structure, culture and agency are

different kinds of emergent entities, with different properties and powers; however, they are at the same time crucial for each other's formation, continuation and development. Archer's (1995) description of society through a series of riddles, neatly summarises this paradox:

> What is it that has no form without us, yet which forms us as we seek its transformation? And what is it that never satisfies the precise designs of anyone yet because of this always motivates its attempted reconstitution? (p165).

6.8　　Aims, Questions and Research Design

This theory offers much potential in developing understanding of the social processes in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). It can be applied to analyse social interactions within a social group or structure such as a PLC. It can also help to identify any cultural or structural properties that might pre-exist and provide conditions for interactions within the structure to occur. It can also 'disentangle' (Priestley 2011, p13) the visible and invisible components at play within structures and relationships. This is important, because as I have argued in chapter five, the social processes of PLCs remain under-explored. Lastly, it can offer an original contribution to the field of PLCs in identifying the resulting elaborations of these interactions and the ways in which they may mediate change by either morphogenetically transforming or morphostatically reinforcing existing structures and cultures.

 In doing so, this study will critique the internal social practices of PLCs which are poorly understood due to limited research in this area. It will investigate whether or not PLCs offer an effective model of collaborative professional learning, guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways are PLCs understood and valued as a professional learning activity by practitioners, school leaders,

2. What cultural factors are at play within PLCs an in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

3. What structural factors are at play within PLCs an in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

4. What individual factors are at play within PLCs an in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

5. What outcomes can be identified through this process (for example changes in individual attitudes, practices, or changes to school structures and culture)?

6.6.1 Context: identifying participants

In order to identify likely sites of research, I required knowledge of what was going on in the field. This was essential before any formal arrangement could be put into place. I firstly needed to identify schools where there is interest in PLCs and where staff may be considering including this as part of their professional learning or 'collegiate time' plans. There also needed to be some alignment with a timescale that was compatible with my research plan. Although this may appear to be straightforward, it requires constant scanning of the field to develop knowledge of practitioners and what their interests are. It requires alignment in constellation of a number of factors: finding out where are the pockets of interest; who is or has been carrying out this practice; whether they might be planning it within a compatible timescale for my research and crucially -will they be likely to wish to engage in a research project about it?

This process has proven to be problematic and, as a result, the study has encountered many false starts, which have contributed, in part, to the excessive duration of the project. As a challenge, this is something that future researchers in this field may wish to note. In so far as identifying participants for this research process can be defined, the approach adopted corresponds to Patton's (2002) definition of opportunistic sampling: taking advantage of whatever unfolds as it unfolds by utilising 'the option of adding to a sample to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities after fieldwork has begun' (Patton 2002, p240). I will briefly outline the various turns and obstacles encountered in the recruitment process along the way, further exemplifying the messy reality of research processes.

Once ethical approval had been granted by the Ethics Committee (further detail on this is available in chapter six), I used my professional network to solicit interest in participation in the project. One school responded quickly (School A), but this early response to calls for interest floundered, in spite of some previous experience with Learning Rounds, which had already been made in the school by a senior leader, who was the key contact. For a fuller explanation of this, please see Oates and Riaz (2016). There were many competing interests at play in this circumstance and in spite of gatekeeper support for research access, it was not held in parity of esteem by those who were taking part due to the introduction of a new system of assessment at upper secondary stages, and the fact that the school was in the throes of reconstruction. . As a result of this, it could not be sustained and a consideration of the ethical dimensions of this will be made in chapter six.

Further to this, I became aware of two other schools (schools B and C) where PLCs were operational. Having made contact, the PLC collapsed before I had the chance to conduct interviews. Key contacts moved on through promotion or were absent through extended leave. In schools D and E, I met with better success: the school invited me to join them in collegiate time and school leadership released participating staff for interviews. Later in the process another school leader (School E) made an unsolicited approach via email asking for some guidance on the LR process. This was followed up with emails, telephone conversations and meetings with school leader, Gerry. During these conversations, I raised the possibility of alerting staff to participation in my research project. As gatekeeper, Gerry showed enthusiasm for this arrangement and the possibility of a reciprocal arrangement was explored. We discussed my role, in supporting staff to set up a LR at Eden with a view to enabling staff to take ownership of it. I would help them with an introduction to the process and protocols in order for staff to eventually lead the process in the school. Gerry, as gatekeeper, would introduce the idea to staff and raise the option of taking part in this research opportunity with them.

This created some imbalance across the two cases. There was an 'uneven relationship' (Clerke and Hopwood 2014, p *iv*) that will be explored in the following chapter. In terms of the data, Clerke and Hopwood suggest that asymmetry in research (in their account, specifically ethnographic research) can lead to productive divergences that can add value to the project. In spite of the 'uneven relationships' (ibid) evident in this study, the imbalance

allowed for some opportunities to generate productive data, which are analysed in chapter seven. In order to map out the pathway that eventually led to identifying Eden and Monkshill as sites of research, a summary of all the schools who featured in the course of this research project is found below (with HS and PS denoting High School and Primary School as appropriate). Five other schools showed interest, or were approached but ultimately yielded no data are not listed here:

School	PLC type	Data	LA agreement
School A HS	1 x LR + 1 x CAT session	Recording of de-brief 2x interviews Field notes Presentation to CAT	No, but project collapsed
School B PS	1x LR	Recording of briefing meeting Field notes Recording of de-brief 1xInterview	Yes but key staff moved on, project collapsed.
School C PS	TLC – Learning Trios-Current	Learning trios ongoing Field notes from participation in collegiate session on cooperative learning Photographs of notes and reflections from collegial meetings Photographs of improvement planning process Staff identified for interviews Interviews arranged (June)	YES
School D PS (Monkshill)	LR	Documentation from 8 previous LR since 2010 Orientation with DHT/staff generally Field notes Photographs of Discussion with lead teacher Audio Recording of professional reading group LR data 11/05 and 18/05 Participation in LR 18/05 Staff identified for interviews Interviews recorded and transcribed Relational Maps	YES
School E HS (Eden)	LR - ongoing	Programme of staff development and support began Aug 2017	YES

Figure 5: Table of participant schools

Schools D and E, having self-identified as interested and willing to taking part in the research process, became the case study-schools, referred to in this study as Monkshill and Eden schools. At Monkshill School, all staff have at some point participated in a form of PLC – either Learning Round or Professional Reading Group and most of the participants in the most recent LR volunteered for interview. At Eden High School, this was not the case. The staff complement of the school was three times the size of that at Monkshill, so participants represented a subset of the larger whole staff group, and a smaller subset again volunteered for interview.

Prior to volunteering, members of staff involved in the LR in each school had an opportunity to read Participant Information Sheets and consent forms (see appendix i) in order to allow them to decide whether or not to participate in the interview, and to allow me to identify interview candidates (ethical dimensions of participation will be further explained in chapter six). As it was a voluntary process, it was impossible to stipulate the number of participants involved. It is also considered inadvisable to seek calculability (Brinkmann 2018) in interviews as the rationale for specifying numbers of participants can be difficult to justify on the basis that it is difficult to know exactly how many participants will be required. Through this voluntary recruitment process, 26 interviews were conducted across the two case study schools, but there are some tensions surround this process that will be discussed in the following section.

6.7   Study design – a Critical Realist case study

The methodological intention for this study is case study. This methodology lends itself to small-scale research with a CR perspective, as it provides the scope for a deep understanding of complex phenomena within their context (Baxter and Jack 2008), which is in keeping with CR's ontological and epistemological proposition as detailed above. Further to this, case study methodology applies a focus on that which is specific, unique and bounded (Stake, 2005). Similarly, Yin (2014) also emphasises depth in defining case study as an 'empirical inquiry which examines a contemporary phenomenon in depth, in its real-life context (Yin 2014, p16). Yin further offers a typology of case studies using various

categories: single or multiple, descriptive, explanatory or exploratory (Yin 2014, p11). Explanatory case studies have a purpose that 'is to explain how or why some condition came to be' (Yin 2014, p238). As this study seeks to explore and explain teacher collaborative working practices in context, it corresponds to Yin's definition of a multiple, exploratory case study. Collaborative events taking place within individual structures such as a school, with their inherent and individual cultural conditions, and complex formal and informal relationships lend themselves to this methodology (see Graham 2007, Hipp et al. 2008, Little 2002). Case research allows a detailed examination of a contemporary phenomenon, taking place in this instance across two research sites. A fundamental aim of this study is to understand why things are the way they are, and for Easton (2010), the depth ontology of CR offers a strong philosophical justification for the use of case study methodology due to the opportunities it offers us to examine phenomena comprehensively, in depth and in context:

> Critical Realism is particularly well suited as a companion to case research. It justifies the study of any situation, regardless of number of research units involved, but only if the process involves thoughtful in depth research with the objective of understanding why things are as they are (Easton 2010, p119).

Although limitations of this methodology have been raised concerning rigour and generalisability (Yin 2014, Flyvbjerg 2006), Flyvbjerg argues a coherent defence of case study methodology, outlining five common misunderstandings of this methodology. Among these, he identifies: the over-looked importance of context-dependent knowledge in case-study; the perceived predisposition towards verification of researcher bias and the perceived inherent difficulty of summarizing and developing general propositions and theories (Flyvbjerg 2006). The importance of context-dependent knowledge and experience, as opposed to context –independent knowledge and rules are necessary to allow people to develop from rule-based beginners to virtuoso experts (Flyvbjerg 2006, p222). This is because expertise, Flyvbjerg argues, develops from engagement with many cases in the discipline concerned. The case study, therefore offers an opportunity to provide a 'nuanced view of reality' (Flyvbjerg 2006, p223) that more closely reflects the multiple dimensions of human experience.

Similar to Baxter and Jack (2008), Yin (2014) and Stake (2005), Flyvbjerg (2006) celebrates the value of the case study in terms of richness, depth of detail and proximity to real-life situations description that it can help achieve. He draws on Wittgenstein and Goffman to illustrate how when properly conducted, the case study can provide the necessary examples of context-dependent social phenomena in all their messy complexity, as the researcher seeks to go beyond 'what is available to public scrutiny' (Flyvbjerg 2006, p24) and explore what is less immediately visible within them; their underlying aspects. Thus, this case study seeks to illustrate a real-life situation and examine in close detail examples of collaborative practices of teachers; using the concept of depth ontology to go beyond what is visible and explore underlying mechanisms which facilitate this process and shed some light on hidden aspects of the processes involved in these collaborative practices, in context-dependent situations.

6.7.1   Boundaries

Yin (2014) encourages reflection on the boundaries defining the case to add rigour and clarity to the study: boundaries of the case in question need some definition. As previously discussed, the phenomenon under scrutiny in this case is professional learning communities for teachers. My intention was to undertake research in two schools involved in a form of PLCs, the practice of Learning Rounds, (LR). Due to difficulties in recruiting participant schools as indicated in introductory chapters, this plan needed to change to include a wider range of collaborative working practices. Thus, the boundaries of this case had changed from that of a discreet identifiable practice, which was named and programmed to occur at specific times within the school routine, to the broader, more generic collaborative working practices undertaken in PLCs. New boundaries were therefore established to include wider interpretations of the PLC in practice.

Little (2003) studied interactions inside teacher communities and established a set of parameters within which the wider interpretation of collaborative practices were located. These included out of classroom interactions; teacher development in everyday work, and the intellectual, social and material resources that teachers supplied each other with through interaction. Out of classroom interactions can be formal (at planned and organised events or meetings, in school or out of school, for example), or informal (chance exchanges

in the staffroom or corridor). The resources that teachers supply each other with can be intellectual (a comment, question or reflection verbally developed through conversation) or material, involving a product such as a book, artefact or report. Teacher development in everyday work would involve articulating observations and reflections on aspects of practice. Thus, the cases have boundaries that include planned meetings and discussions; some policy documents, school websites and teachers' reflections on practice in interviews.

6.7.2 Out of bounds

Elements of teachers' work that blurred some of these boundaries include teachers' curriculum plans; assessment and attainment data, and interactions with children, and I will discuss their status within the study. There were parameters set around teachers' participation which is detailed in the Participant Information Form (see appendix i), and these did not include direct scrutiny of any aspect of their planning or classroom practice, beyond the observations which they may have experienced as part of any work undertaken by the PLC or other collegial activity. The reason for this is the focus of the study, as stated in the aims, is on the dynamics and interactions within collaborative groups. It is less concerned with what happens in teacher-pupil instructional interactions, and so these were not specifically considered as directly relevant to the study. Curriculum content, and assessment and attainment data also fell into this category. They were not directly analysed themselves, but are recognised as informing aspects of the school improvement process, which can exert influence on collegial activity. As such, these are considered as part of the context of the study (Yin 2014); this context is useful in Archerian terms as cultural forms that shape interactions between and upon participants.

Children offered a different level of challenge in this study. This will be discussed more fully and given due consideration under ethical considerations. Children are necessarily part of the context of any classroom observation, but as the focus of the study is teacher interactions within collegial groups, it seemed clear they would be outwith the boundaries of this study. The guiding questions of the study, with their focus on teachers' experiences confirmed my decision to avoid any involvement with them beyond their being present in any of the routine observations taking place in classrooms. This posed a problem at

Monkshill School, where, having decided to focus on feedback in the classroom, staff had invited pupils as observers in their LR. I was mindful to confine my recording of data to staff accounts only in this instance. This included field notes and interviews. The school had made an audio recording of a discussion that occurred in the wake of this LR that they shared with me, but none of the data from this were used in the study.

6.11 The Cases

I have offered a rich description of each case study school in detail in chapter seven. What follows is a brief description to contextualise the data production process, and a consideration of the asymmetrical nature of the cases. Some divergences and dilemmas resulting from this asymmetry are explored, reflecting some of the messy realities and challenges of research processes.

6.11.1 School one: Monkshill Primary School

School one is a medium-sized, non-denominational primary school within a mid-sized rural market town. This is a double stream school: it has two classes at each primary stage through from primary one to primary seven. There is also a nursery with morning and afternoon intake that is accommodated in an annexe in the school grounds. It has a teaching staff of around 20, with addition leadership and support teams, and a school role in the region of 400 pupils. The staff team is balanced in age terms, with an even mix of some experienced staff and younger staff new to the profession, including two probationary teachers. The gender balance is more skewed however, with a dominance of women teachers within the staff group, in keeping with the general profile across Scotland in this respect. Leadership roles in the school comprise head teacher, deputy head teacher and principal teacher. The school had some previous experience of Learning Rounds, that originated from Nic, the deputy head teacher who developed interest in the process having heard about it via the National CPD network. Monkshill school adapted the LR formula to their own ends. The instance, I observed in the course of this research departed from the 'norm', in that they had gathered some evidence from children that suggested they held misconceptions and lack of clarity about feedback in learning. This prompted a move to

include learners in P5 and P6 stage in the LR concerned and a programme for a round of discussion, observation and planning, as detailed in chapter three, with some identified pupils was scheduled.

6.11.2   School two: Eden High School

School two is a medium sized, six-year non-denominational comprehensive secondary school situated at the edge of an area of extensive urban development. The building is new and it accommodates roughly 1000 pupils and 100 members of teaching staff. The teaching staff is, again mixed although more heavily biased towards the younger age range than Monkshill. As a larger establishment there is more ethnic diversity within the staff group, although this is still limited. The school offers a wide range of certificate courses and is structured in discreet departments, having resisted the pull to a faculty structure. Leadership structure includes head teacher, deputy head teacher, departmental heads and faculty leads for some whole-school roles. Gerry, the HT had experience of LR from a previous role in a different school. Gerry was keen to explore the theoretical underpinnings of LR as her previous experience focused heavily on shared observation. I facilitated this LR (see below). A full cast of characters, detailing participants from each school will be elaborated in the following chapter.

6.7.3   Data production methods

Data were produced in this research project over three phases involving initial introductory site visits, interviews and informal observation of the LR process in Monkshill and facilitation of the process in Eden. Due to the asymmetry noted above, there are imbalances in the data that make direct comparison unhelpful. However, according to Flyvbjerg it is essential to consider the context-dependent nature of each case in question in order to achieve a 'nuanced view of reality' (Flyvbjerg 2005, p223). Only in locating data in context can more granular understanding of the research setting be achieved. The variances and inconsistencies that are presented in this data set (see figure 6 below), on the empirical level, reflect the asymmetry of the cases. This corresponds largely to differences in size and practical, operational arrangements that determine the function of schools in the different

sectors. Using depth ontology, however, it is possible to reach a more granular, nuanced and context-dependent understanding, which further analysis of these data in chapters 8, 9 and 10 provides.

Data set	Monkshill School	Eden School
Site Visits	Between February 2016-February 2017	between August 2017- March 2018
Number of orientation visits	2	0
Duration of visits	Usually 10am-2pm	Usually 3.30-5.30pm
Formal meetings with School Leadership	0 (instead informal conversations on arrival with Nic usually took place)	4
Number of classroom observation visits	1	0
Number of LR observations	1	0
Facilitation of LR	0	6 sessions
Individual Interviews	12 (over 2 days)	15 (over 2 days)
Recorded Discussions	• Learning Round Discussion • Professional Reading Group Discussion	0
Photos	26	0

Figure 6: Table of all data produced. Blue indicates field note/informal observation opportunities)

The following section addresses the principle data-gathering method for the study, the interview, and justifies its use in this study in relation to the guiding theory for this study and the research context.

6.7.4   Interviews

As a means of exploring lived experiences in context-dependent situations, interviewing is a primary method for data generation in qualitative research but can be complex and problematic. Yin (2014) justifies interviews as an appropriate method for case study as they provide an 'essential sources of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or actions' (p113). However, Silverman (2013) critiques qualitative researchers for using the interview in the manner of an 'almost Pavlovian tendency' (p318). He claims that this may lead to the silencing of other, potentially enriching data sources, suggesting structural or material phenomena like for example, websites or building design may often have a contribution to make to the research project. In the case of this study, it was important to explore through discussion, the teachers' perceptions of the PLCs they

were engaged with and, in keeping with depth ontology, aim to identify the underlying beliefs or influences which were not immediately observable. Only they could reveal and explain these experiences, their understanding of them, and the value they placed upon them, and semi-structured interviews, as opposed to standardised, structured interviews allowed a more open-ended dialogue to develop and provided a key data generating method. Semi structured interviews according to Brinkmann (2018):

> can make better use of knowledge –producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee, and the interviewer has a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding behind a preset (sic) interview guide (Brinkmann 2018, p579).

In these circumstances, a carefully negotiated interview is necessary, where dilemmas and tensions which have to be navigated in the interview situation are recognised. There is a requirement of the interviewer to be aware of the possibilities for misconstruing language and interpretation, of the social and relational dynamics of the interview situation, and of the possibly competing agendas of researcher's concern with their topic and interviewee's responses (Brinkmann 2018). Some of these tensions arose in this study and were easier to navigate than others. I was mindful of the importance of clarifying terms and meaning, asking straightforward questions, and inviting participants to revisit any parts of the interview, ask questions themselves, or add anything they felt might have been omitted at the end of the process. It was important to acknowledge my status as invited 'guest' into the research setting: I was there as a guest of senior leadership staff, not teaching and support staff more generally. Although accessing the research field presented some difficulties as detailed above, I formed good relationships with those involved in each case-study school, including with non-participants such as administrative staff, and made multiple visits to each when field notes were made. Interviews were always arranged at times identified by the school's timetable and of individual participants choosing. Interviews were conducted in a quiet, private setting to minimise anxiety and allow participants to feel at ease. The head teacher at Monkshill made her office available for me for this purpose, and at Eden a general purpose meeting room was similarly made available. They took place in participants' work setting, in non-teaching rooms where furniture arrangements were optimised for informal interactions (low chairs around a coffee table).

All participants were provided with teaching cover from classes to take part to minimise disruption to classroom routines, apart from non-teaching school leaders where this was not required. In both cases the semi-structured interview schedule (appendix iii) was made available to participants in advance. However, in spite of these efforts to minimise an asymmetrical relational dynamic, I was conscious of monopolising participants' time within their working day, as pressure on teachers' time is a well-known problem in the profession. Participants were made aware that the interview would last around 30 minutes. If any lasted longer participants were given the option to stop the interview, which none did. I was aware of asymmetry in the situation, as an outsider who had been invited in by leadership, not participants, in each setting. This was compounded by potential associations of expertise with the LR process through previous roles and publications. Although it is difficult to estimate the degree of influence of these factors, it is important to recognise that they exist, and they are impossible to deny. These dilemmas are reflected in the following summary by Brinkmann (2018):

> The interviewer has scientific competence and defines the interview situation. The interviewer initiates the interview, determines the interview topic, poses the questions and critically follows up on the answers, and also terminates the conversation. It is illusory to think of the research interview as a dominance-free dialogue between equal partners; the interviewer's research project and knowledge interests set the agenda and rule the conversation (p588).

To fail to acknowledge these tensions would betray an 'unreflective qualitative ethicism' (Brinkmann 2018, p588), but that is not to suggest that there are shortcuts or readily available solutions offering alternatives, however some further considerations can be made to mitigate these effects. Hierarchical focusing is a method of interviewing which attempts to mitigate these tensions by aiming to achieve more of a balance between 'emergence of the interviewee's perspective [and] the researcher's own research agenda' (Tomlinson 1989, p155). Hierarchical focusing (HF) acknowledges the need to be aware of differences in variations of humans understanding of phenomenon under research, including reflexive awareness of the researcher towards their investigation. It strives to balance the need for an open approach towards interviewees' construal of the event with the necessity for the researcher's requirements to be met without their agenda exercising excessive influence on

the situation or the interviewee. It advocates a five-stage process involving the following steps:

1: outlining the content and structure of the research domain as seen by the researcher;

2: Identifying the research focus within the domain that is to be elicited from interviewees;

3: Devising a HF framework of questions for the interview which move from conceptual to contextual or from more open/general to more closed/specific questions;

4: Carry out the interview using the hierarchical model in an open-ended way; adopting a non-directive, non-judgemental style and not paraphrasing what is said but sticking to terms used by the interviewee;

5: Transcribe and analyse.

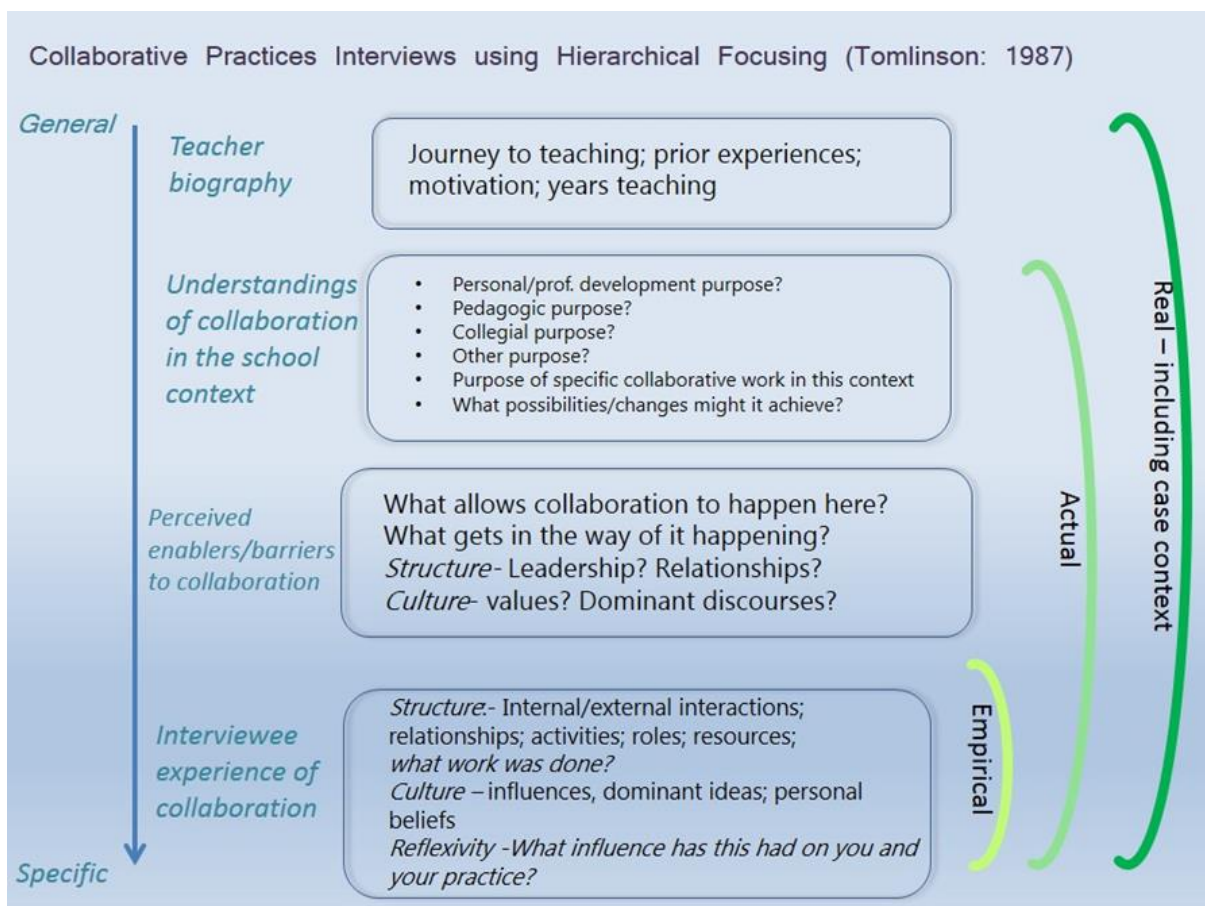Figure 7 below illustrates how HF was adapted for the interview process in this study:

Figure 7: Hierarchical focusing in interviews: LR study.

6.7.5   Synthesising theoretical approaches

In the context of this study, HF afforded a useful vehicle to mobilise the M/M theoretical framework. Individual interviews allowed a detailed exploration of individuals' experiences and were carried out and recorded in the participating school settings using a framework based on the method described above. A brief outline of the purpose and focus of the research project was shared with each participant after procedures for the interview were explained, consent verbally confirmed and non-traceability and confidentiality arrangements were reiterated (this information was also available on the participant information sheet). Introductory biographical details were noted, and participants were asked if there was any requirements to clarify any of the information in the interview schedule that had been previously presented to them. After this consent to record the interview was verbally confirmed and the recording device was switched on and left on the table. The questions for the semi-structured interview were framed in such a way as to allow the conversation to proceed in a semi-structured manner based on four ideas relating to the practices within each PLC (see appendix iii): The context; the purpose; the processes and participants experiences of the learning round within each school. Using HF to frame the semi-structured interview in this way allowed me to work from general opening discussion and follow up with increasingly specific probes as was required in each interview.

6.7.6   Field notes and observations

As I was fortunate to make multiple visits to each research setting, it seemed important to make note of what people are doing, and whatever is going on in order to capture some of actions and routines taking place, although the study was not ethnographic and did not involve field work to such an extent. Any field notes made from observations during visits were not made in a formal way – these were incidental and made only when time allowed, as participation in the projected detailed participant time for interviews only. Informal field notes can enrich a data set by allowing the researcher to make a record of contextual, visual data that cannot be captured in recorded interviews (Silverman, 2013). I made hand-written noted in notebooks, and when time allowed, I expanded on some, but not all of them, and added them to the digital data management system or stored them in files along with the other data. Participants were made aware of the observational note taking, and this sometimes led to some limited discussion, although participants' professional

responsibilities always took precedence so discussing any observations was rarely practical. Additionally I was very aware of my responsibility as a researcher to abide by the conditions by which consent has been granted (see appendix ii) which detailed that time would only be demanded for interview.

6.8 Analysis

As detailed above, data were generated in this research project through semi-structured interviews, observations and field notes. The time frame for this part of the process was extensive – between 2016 and 2018. This was due, in part to difficulties explained in the previous section. As such, the data had to be stored carefully to avoid getting lost or damaged, and to allow me to access them easily, keeping them available for easy recall.   In order to organise the data for analysis I used the digital management tool, Nvivo. Nvivo allows all data to be entered and categorised by source as the researcher requires. I created two sources to group the data from each case and transcripts were stored in this way. Coding of the data creates 'nodes' which groups relevant data under categories, allowing for the identification of themes, so the data can be managed by both source and by node (see appendix iv). This system was advantageous for me as the digital storage of the data eliminated the danger of physical notes getting lost, damaged or forgotten over time. Digital management and storage systems are not without critique, however: Erikson (2018) argues that they 'simplify data analysis' (Erikson, p56) and reinforce a quasi-scientific appeal in presenting qualitative data in digitised, systematic, quasi-scientific ways. Although it is important to acknowledge these tensions, digitised data is better than lost or damaged data and a thoughtful theoretical analysis, based on the methodology above can bring out richness in the data set regardless of how it is stored. I will explain how CR underpinned the process of analysis in the following section.

 In keeping with CR research methodology, analysis started by highlighting broad patterns or tendencies at the empirical level of reality in the data that were derived from the themes and codes as indicated above; this provides starting points for the analysis. The next stage in this process represents a move beyond description to a greater degree of theoretical engagement, enlisting the processes of abduction and retroduction to do so, in order to

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foreground underlying causal mechanisms at play in the deeper level of stratified reality. Abduction is a process of inference whereby empirical data and observations are re-described using aspects of theory identified in literature to lead the researcher towards a 'plausible explanation of the mechanisms that caused the events' (Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent 2014, p17). Working alongside this in CR research, the process of retroduction can support abductive inference, as it also seeks, through analysis, to uncover the causal mechanisms within the deeper layer of reality that provide the conditions for, and are responsible for the observable occurrences and experiences at the empirical level (Fletcher 2017). Retroduction intensifies the process of analysis through bringing data and 'the best theory that explains that data' (Ketokivi and Mantere 2010, in Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent. 2014, p19) together, and allows further theory building to occur by zig-zagging between concrete data and abstract theory and back again (Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014; Emmel 2015). Therefore, the process is not necessarily linear or sequential. The result, when successful, can elaborate new theories and/or a new view or understanding of entities. Essential to this process is Archer's M/M explanatory programme, in serving to identify the relationship between the underlying causal mechanisms and their effects on empirical experiences. These may enable or inhibit some of the empirical events and experiences. As detailed above, the interactions within Archer's M/M explanatory framework are organised around the concepts of structure, culture and agency, and these concepts provided the basis for interview questions, and a starting point for analysis.

 The next stage in this process of analysis is to examine the interplay of mechanisms that create conditions to cause these patterns to appear as they do. The explanatory programme of M/M, comprising structural, cultural and agentic elements, is essential in this process as it allows us to disentangle the separate but intertwined mechanisms at play at the real level of reality, which influence the actual level of events and the experiences of the actors within the social system under examination (Priestley 2011). Isolating these for analytical purposes is helpful in establishing some sort of evaluative judgement about the weight of influence they may bring to the social system (Priestley 2011). However, it is also important to bear in mind the importance of emergence in analysis, as suggested by Elder-Vass (2008 – see also

chapter three); the causal power attributed to entities in combination, when they are not possessed by the individual components within that entity.

As this study seeks to uncover the individual, cultural or structural factors within the practice of PLCs in the research schools concerned, the analysis is organised using the category of culture, structure and agency as core element of the M/M framework. The analysis is then drawn to a concluding discussion of implications for future research and practice.

6.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in this study have been governed by, and are compliant with the code of Ethics within the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Stirling. The principles enshrined in these guidelines are drawn from bodies such as the British Educational Research Association (BERA) or the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and include: guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality, informed consent, the right to withdraw from participation, and lack of malfeasance and deception. These principles are commonly adopted and accepted into many university ethics committees' practices, including my own, in order to assess researchers' suitability and grant permission to proceed with their projects. The application followed all aspects of due process. It was discussed with my supervisors and after negotiation on some wording on aspects such as confidentiality of data storage, for example, I submitted it to the (then) School of Education's Ethics Committee. The committee at that time did not process applications through the Electronic Research Manager System (ERM). The ethics committee granted approval for the research to proceed via my supervisor. In respect of local authority gatekeeping responsibilities, I informed education officials at both local authorities involved of the proposal. In neither of these instances was further documentation required, but the relevant gatekeepers had been informed and gave approval for me to access the schools for research purposes. However, I do not wish to limit the interpretation of ethics on 'rule-governed behaviour,' as Pring (2015, p173) and many others highlight, the importance of moral judgement in balancing ends to be pursued with the means of achieving them calls for an approach that considers ethics as a moral problem. Ethical dilemmas can emerge when trying to achieve this balance. With this in mind, I will now discuss my approach to the

ethical dilemmas I encountered in this project when they are weighed up against the guiding ethical principles of research.

6.9.1 Anonymity and non-traceability

In inviting participants to take part in this study, I made clear to them in dialogue and in the participant information and consent forms that their identities and those of their places of work - both schools and local authorities - would not be revealed. Identities would be protected and care would be taken when sharing circumstantial detail to ensure that the geographical locations would as far as possible be protected.   Pseudonyms were created for individual participants using, as far as possible, gender-neutral names. The names of the schools involved have also been created for the purposes of identity protection in this study, and similarly, any other identifiers, for example, the names of towns or local authorities involved have been replaced with pseudonyms. No other personal details, such as gender or age, for example were relevant to the analysis, although a reference to a notional, but not specified, number of years' experience in teaching of participants is made where relevant. My initial intention to further preserve anonymity was to make consistent use of the gender-neutral pronoun 'they' when making reference to each participant in writing. Instinctively this felt correct and supplemented other non-traceability measures, such as using gender-neutral names. After some initial analysis, and on advice of my supervisor, it became clear that this was leading to some clumsy phrasing in writing, and I reverted to randomly assigning male or female gender pronouns to each participant, which, to an extent, also contributed to preserving their anonymity. Any gender assignation to participants therefore, is entirely random.

Although these measures were taken to avoid traceability of schools and participants in as far as was possible, it is important to acknowledge that I was unable to make failsafe guarantees of anonymity. For example, it is not impossible, in a small education community such as Scotland, to narrow down schools who are engaged in the practice of Learning Rounds, which was the focus of the research activity in the case-study schools. Similarly, it is not difficult to associate researchers with a specific research area especially since there are few, if any, research studies into this practice in this country. Lastly, although I took steps to anonymise participants, the dilemma of anonymity does not always weigh equally heavily

on researchers and participants (Silverman 2013, p172). I know that one of the schools was working with other research teams on another research issue during the time of my involvement with it. It is impossible to guarantee that any comparison between these two projects, even in informal discussion among participants, might not lead to disclosure of the name of the school and participants' involvement in this research project, rendering both it, and them traceable. In considering presenting findings from the alternative project at conferences for example, supposing the research conducted for this project is disclosed, then the school's identity in this thesis could be compromised. This situation arose, because a proposal on the basis of the other research project had been made and accepted for an academic conference by one of the schools in collaboration with the other relevant researchers. In order to mitigate the potential breach of anonymity, I discussed with the HT whether reference were to be made to other research going on in the school in the shared presentation. We agreed that this research project would only be referenced as 'another research project going on in the school' with neither researcher nor participant names to be associated with it.

As mentioned above, researcher and participant do not always attend to the ethical concern of anonymity with equal import: it is conceivable that research participants may sometimes prefer to be exposed rather than remain anonymous. If, by participating, they are responding to policy imperatives to become 'research engaged schools' (Dimmock 2016, Godfrey 2016, McAleavey 2016), school leaders may actively and understandably wish for their schools to be named in order to gain recognition for their efforts; some may even argue that they have a right to do so, although no participants in this study did. This ethical dilemma is difficult to resolve, reinforcing Silverman's conclusion that ethical issues in research rarely have 'easy answers' (Silverman 2013, p173). In making the Participant Information Sheet as transparent as possible, and highlighting the ethical importance of identity protection and the right to withdraw from the process at any time for participants in both cases, I believe I gave participants the necessary information to allow them to make as informed a choice as possible. Informed consent can be a blurry issue, however (Silverman 2013). My experience in this project highlights that even with discussion around the detail of what they are agreeing to, teachers can be hasty to complete these forms. However, I maintain that with the relatively low-risk nature of this project, the competing

needs of researcher, participants and the ethical codes of my institution were balanced in seeking to protect participant anonymity as described above, in as far as was possible, in carrying out this research project in an honest, transparent and ethical way.

6.9.2   Confidentiality

In keeping with ethical guidelines, the data were kept confidential, and only made available to supervisors. Participants were made aware of storage arrangements to ensure confidentiality of the data in the Participant Information Form (see appendix i). Interview data were recorded on a mobile device (ipad) and stored there as sound files until they could be transferred to a secure laptop, when they were then deleted. From here, the sound files were transferred to an encrypted external hard drive passport, where they were prepared for transcription. They were transcribed by a commercial organisation for a fee, who destroyed the audio files on completion of the task. Once transcribed, the text files were uploaded to the encrypted hard-drive for back up and to Nvivo for analysis. The data remained confidential within Nvivo, as the laptop where this programme is installed is password protected and secured with standard university security firewalls. Member checking of data to ensure data accurately represents participant testimony of what transpired in the field is an important ethical consideration, and in this regard, two participants were given an opportunity to review and verify transcripts. Ideally, I would have widened this opportunity for a larger sample of the participant group, to enhance transparency and trustworthiness of the data (Silverman 2013). However, I took an interruption to the study for personal reasons between the data gathering stages in each case and contact with the settings lost a degree of momentum to an extent. For analysis, where I was unsure of certain interpretations, I discussed misgivings with peers who were not involved in the research, to ensure that I did not make false or misleading conclusions. Supervisors also gave feedback on some interpretations.

There were further ethical dilemmas encountered: some emerged that relate to access and participation that required ongoing consideration, and are detailed in the following section.

6.9.3   Participation and consent

Access to schools as sites of research involves seeking permission from several layers of authority before seeking the consent of the participants involved. There were procedures to facilitate this at local authority level, and as detailed above, school leaders actively sought out opportunities for their schools to participate in the study. This did not necessarily mean that staff would also be willing to participate, but within the hierarchical structure of schools, their option to meaningfully consider their participation and potentially refuse was not always evident, in spite of what was agreed to in the consent form. This was particularly problematic in School A (see figure 5), where a subtle flexing of power on the part of senior leadership in the school spoke for their school community in initiating the LR made resistance to the project difficult within the structure of the organisation. Although consent had been obtained on paper, the nominated participants in school A exercised their resistance through non–participation. Only three members of staff identified as participants in this school, and only one interview out of three was achieved here: absence, unanswered calls and the eventual school move effectively led to the collapse of the study in this school, as this was clearly a more pressing concern for the school community. The situation was resolved with an agreement between myself and the instigating leadership team member that the timing of the project was unsuitable. An important lesson was learned with this experience: firstly, to assess any potential wider risks that may impact the study and discuss their potential effects on research timeline and participant availability. Secondly, to meet with any prospective participants in advance of any agreement and to ensure that participants can make a voluntary decision, are briefed and fully informed and aware of what will be involved before agreeing to take part.

This guided further engagement with, for example school E (case study school 2- Eden School). As detailed above, an unsolicited approach was made to me in an email from the school leader and I agreed to facilitate a number of professional learning sessions for staff during their mandated 35 hours of professional learning and development time, which fell within the category of their normal 35 hours working time agreement (Scottish Executive 2000). Staff participated in a voluntary basis in the 'twilight' professional learning sessions over a period of time between September 2017 and March 2018. An introductory meeting was planned for the beginning of academic year 2017-18. A colleague from my institution

(UWS) assisted with specific content on two of the twilight sessions due to her specialist knowledge of dialogic teaching, which was one of the areas of focus the group wished to consider. At the beginning of this process, the school's head teacher, Gerry, agreed that I could seek permission to interview participants from this group who took part in the LR on a voluntary basis, in line with ethical protocol. After some preparatory 'twilight' sessions spanning from September 2017 to March 2018 as detailed above, a learning round was held in February 2018. Subsequently, discussions concerning voluntary participation and consent were held. Participants were invited to read information sheets about the study, and return consent sheets if they wished to participate in interview. Out of the group of 24 teachers who took part in the LR that day, 15 returned signed consent sheets that signalled willingness to be interviewed. Interviews with these participants were arranged for March 2018.

The arrangement at Eden contributed to further asymmetry in the cases as it positioned me differently from my involvement in Monkshill. In neither case-setting was I a disinterested researcher. My professional interests and identity positioned me as an academic practitioner, in whom both groups of participants invested with a degree of expert knowledge. However, due to the nature of the work in introducing staff at Eden to the LR process, a further dimension was added here –leadership of the LR facilitation and my alignment with Gerry, the school leader positioned me in a different power-relationship with participants at Eden. The nature of this relationship goes beyond the insider/outsider divide, as described by Thomson and Gunter (2011), who advocate for acknowledgement of the 'messily blurred' (ibid, p26) nature of this binary.   If I was not a neutral outsider in relation to these participants, neither was I an embedded insider; it is important to acknowledge that my role reflected some of the blurriness of both these stances, as well as perhaps a combination of both. The impact this troubled stance had on participant relationships is further examined in the following chapter.

In Monkshill School the process of engagement was more straightforward. I made an approach to Nic, the deputy head by email, enquiring if the LR work in the school was still ongoing. Nic had been a member of the CPD Network (see chapter three) and we knew each other from our shared work in the network. Having discussed the idea with Lee, head teacher, Nic invited me to visit the school in May 2016. He shared notes and information

with me about previous LR that had taken place and invited me to participate in a forthcoming one that was planned. I was also invited to collegiate meetings but was unable to attend, and to make observations in the school. I met with Nic, then with Alex, who shared some details on past LR experiences and the names of LR participants in the school. In the staff room I explained the study to those present and shared participant information sheets in advance along with an interview schedule. Consent forms were also distributed for consideration and signing at participants' discretion: 8 volunteered for interview, along with three members of the senior leadership team allowing me to interview a total of 11 participants.

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical orientation of the study with a discussion of its ontological and epistemological orientation. It has considered how the depth ontology of Critical Realism has shaped and guided the study design and methodology, and detailed the methods of data generation, organisation and analysis. Finally, it has presented and discussed ethical issues and tensions as they occurred and were resolved in the research process. The following chapter begins an analysis of the data.

7   Introduction to the cases

The previous chapter outlined the methodology of this study. The purpose of this chapter is to set out the cases in question by providing an introduction to the two schools involved in the case studies; Monkshill Primary School and Eden High School, and the respective issues raised in the data for further analysis.   In a critical realist analysis, the aim is to illustrate a movement through stratified layers of reality (described in chapter three) from the empirical to the real, by firstly providing a rich picture of the surface level events: a descriptive account of the landscape and context of the cases in question. This initial step in the analysis of the empirical data is an abductive process, detailed by Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent as 'a description of empirical things and events' (2014 p11). Analysis then moves towards processes of retroduction in subsequent chapters that seek to theorise the data more theoretically to uncover mechanisms and causal processes at work in this context. Therefore, the foregoing account seeks to provide some context for the research setting and to highlight the main themes for consideration in the analysis with respect to the research questions guiding this study.

It will start with a descriptive account of observations arising from the data in each case. It will proceed to outlining some trends and themes concerning each school in relation to the questions above; its context, its teachers and leaders. It will provide a basis to address subsequent and research questions in more detail and deeper analysis in the chapters that will follow.

7.1   A portrait of Monkshill Primary School

Monkshill Primary School is a large primary school in a market town in rural Scotland. It is a non-denominational school and serves a sizable area of the town as well as some outlying rural communities. It is not the only primary school in the town it serves, although two-thirds of the town's primary school-aged population attend. The school is double-streamed; i.e. it has at least two parallel classes at each of the primary stages from one to seven. It also

has a nursery provision. Its pupil population is in excess of 400 pupils, served by some 20 teachers, including three school leaders, part-time and full time teaching staff, along with some visiting specialists. The school leadership team comprises a head teacher and two deputy head teachers, one of whom is part time and one principal teacher.

The school is set on the outskirts of the town and is surrounded by farmland and countryside. The grounds are extensive and are often used to support learning out of the classroom, as well as by the children at lunchtimes and intervals. A busy pupil gardening club has been established in the grounds and runs with support from parents and other members of the local community. Due the increasing school role, the two classes in the nursery section of the school have been moved out to annexed porta-cabins in the school grounds. The grounds surrounding the nursery classes have been adapted for regular outdoor learning, and the nursery children in particular seem to spend a considerable amount of time outdoors.

The main school building has also been extended to accommodate the increasing numbers, with a new gym hall and teaching rooms being added in recent years. The school premises are attractive and in good condition. The classrooms are organised in a roughly circular arrangement around the central dining/assembly hall, and there are several open areas between classrooms at various stages for children to work independently or with others not necessarily from their own classes. There is steady movement of children and adults in these areas, as well as ongoing work involving small groups of children, either with an adult, or independently.

The infant area for pupils in primary one to primary three is the most overtly open plan part of the school, where classroom walls fully retract and the open area between them is integrated into the shared teaching space. This area is also located closest to the nursery buildings. There is a lot of movement of children and adults in these areas. The school environment generally facilitates physical proximity of colleagues, which has been identified by Coburn et al. (2013) as one of the influential factors in the early stages of relationship building and tie formation among teachers. In the infant area, this is most strikingly visible.

Monkshill Primary School is at the low end of The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) indicators[1].   A small percentage of the school's pupils have free meal allowances (source – field notes). Pupil attendance is above the national average (source- School Handbook).

The teaching staff in the school represent a mixed age and experience profile; it includes probationary teachers along with some teachers of many years' experience and some relatively young teachers of around ten years' experience. The school's head teacher has been in post for less than five years at the time of research.

This is an appropriate moment to introduce participants from Monkshill Primary School. Pseudonyms have been used to minimise traceability as explained in chapter six. The senior leadership team consisted of Lee (HT), Nic, (DHT) and three principal teachers, two of whom participated in the research. These were Alex and Leslie. Alex and I knew each other through a personal connection and Nic and I had worked together in the National CPD network. Some experienced class teachers also participated in the research; Kim, Carey, Rowan, and Charlie. Jordan and Muir, though also experienced, were more recently qualified and Ali was the least-experienced participant, being in the final weeks of the teacher induction programme at the time of research. In terms of attitudes and dispositions of teaching staff to professional learning, most of the participants expressed enthusiasm, but this was notable especially with Alex, Carey, Jordan, Muir and Charlie. Lee and Nic also expressed strong support for this as a means of supporting wider school improvement. Alex and Nic were the strongest protagonists of the learning rounds initiative, and both of these participants had invested some time in getting to grips with the process, through engagement with wider PL networks and academic literature. These participants are summarised in the table below:

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[1] SIMD is a government survey which identifies levels of deprivation in geographical postcode areas, based on a number of factors including health, education, rates of employment and crime.

Lee	HT
Nic	DHT
Alex	PT
Leslie	PT
Kim	Experienced CT
Carey	Experienced CT
Rowan	Experienced CT
Charlie	Experienced CT
Jordan	Early career teacher
Muir	Early career teacher
Ali	Induction year teacher

Figure 8 Cast of characters: Monkshill

7.2 Community, Culture, Relationships

The following sections discuss factors that merit consideration in relation to research question two. They may provide surface level indicators of deeper-level mechanisms that may explain some of the social practices in question.

The school provides a welcoming environment to visitors and the atmosphere is friendly. Visitors are invited to comment on their visit experience on leaving. The majority of the staff lives in the town the school serves, and there is a deep sense of community that is apparent through observing interactions between all school staff, and staff and pupils. Some have deep-rooted historic connections with the school and the local community, having attended as a child. One example is Leslie, whose father worked in the school when she attended:

> Dad had a huge impact [on me], even though he was the janny, he wasn't teaching, but he had a massive impact on these children's lives, and I just thought that was brilliant, to have that kind of rewarding job, helping children, being part of their lives and having that influence...it was amazing watching that as I was growing up, I just thought- I want to have that…... people would stop him in the street, and they just had such a love for him. They weren't even his children – I was his child! Now I see it with my sons

(laughs) they say, why….. you can't walk along the high street without people talking to you! But I just love that, that community, being part of it, people really respect you, care about you, and you care about them [Leslie].

Local community connections are further reinforced by Kim, who also attended the school as a child:

I've worked in all 3 primaries in Thistown and I've worked in Othertown as well so I've worked in a lot of schools in (this authority) Ehm, I live in this town, I went to Monkshill Primary myself (interviewer: oh wow…) just in P 7 …. Ehm and I always felt far more comfortable in this place, I don't know whether it's the management team, or colleagues in the school, I get on well with them, it's just a very, very supportive school[Kim].

The sense of feeling comfortable in, supported by and belonging to the school community is a dominant feature of most participants' responses, and is not restricted to staff members with a historic association with the school. Jordan is not from the local area, although he now live in Thistown:

I've been here 10 years (laughs) and I didn't know the pupils at all, I didn't know the town, I didn't know the area, it was all very new to me, I still lived in Farawayplace for the first six years of being here, but I've just been incredibly happy here (said with emphasis), it's just the….. it's a very positive school; everyone is very friendly, parents always comment on that, how very welcoming we are. I felt welcomed as a team member very early on [Jordan].

Interactions in the staffroom are cordial and relaxed. There is a constant to - and - fro of all staff members, including janitorial and support staff. Classroom assistants also support the view that the school provides a happy working environment. One classroom assistant describes the school as a 'happy place' with 'well looked-after happy kids and approachable staff. ' The role of the classroom assistant at Monkshill extends beyond traditional classroom, task-based support and playground duties. Their considerable knowledge of individuals in the school community can extend back generations, and the insights this brings highlights the importance of relationships within the community. An intervention during one of the interviews, with Nic, the DHT, illustrated this:

Intervention 1: One of the classroom assistants comes to the door. Nic says – you okay, Mrs E? Mrs E says – just a little problem with S. I've just been politely told to eff-off… (Nic: 'right…') in the class. He's just refusing to do

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anything. He wanted to take your building stuff and I said no and made up a box of other building stuff, and he got told to keep it in his quiet space, but he's coming out with his wheels and disturbing the rest of the kids doing maths - was asked to put it away, he refused. I says, well, 10 seconds, and you lose your box …for minutes, and he's just politely… swore (Nic: 'right,') What do I do? He's still sitting under the table. I'm going to leave him until he calms down.

Nic: Get him out the class, and sit him in the office. I'll have a think about this. I'd rather he was out the class... the language thing … I'll deal with it. (Classroom assistant leaves, interview resumes after a pause)

Nic: ehm – there's someone, relationships… what you've got with D, there, she's been in this community, she knows everyone, probably related to most people, and, talking about relationships, knowing what's going on in the community, for supporting the children, supporting some of the staff, what's the relationship there? Then you can support round about it …. That's someone I can go and speak to and D will come and speak to me, if there is an issue with a member of staff, it's a real strength. She'll talk about 'my boss' – there is a hierarchy, but it's blurred, and… (second intervention ensues –different concern with different pupil).

These data suggest two things: that pre-existing relationships have shaped, and continue to shape the school community over time, and that relationships within and between members of the school community at different levels of the hierarchy are strong and valued by the leadership staff at Monkshill School.

 Wider data (School Website; School Handbook) suggest parents engage well with school staff, and are consulted in annual surveys about aspects of teaching, learning and children's experiences within the school. Lee, the school's head teacher (HT) is emphatic about the relationship with parents and values the support enabled by this relationship:

It's a lovely community to grow up in. There is huge parental support we've got again. This is this respectful relationship being open. We get a fantastic support from our parents financially. A lot of them don't have the time and are working. Again, we've got fantastic parents who I think know that if something is wrong, we'll listen to them [Lee].

There is clearly a strong and identifiable supportive ethos within the school, which emerges from multi-dimensional, social and professional relationships that weave through the school's social system and have done so over time, as the data above suggest. All of these

relationships - between teaching staff and non-teaching staff, between leadership and all staff, between adults and children and between the school and its community have the potential to influence teacher's agency (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015), which will be further analysed in subsequent sections.

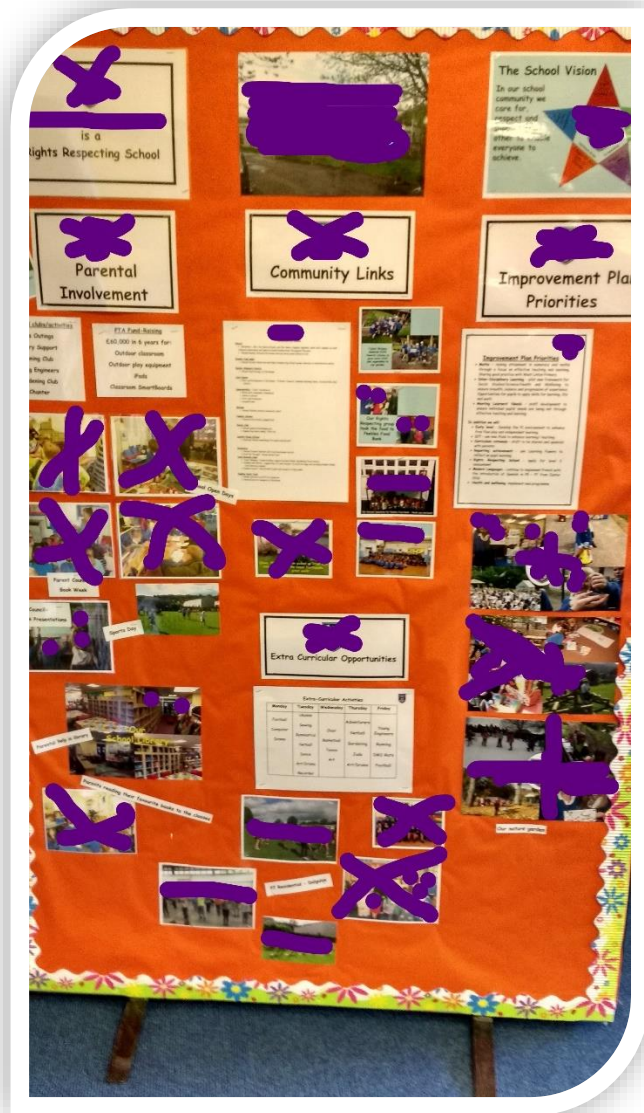*Figure 9: Community noticeboard in Monkshill School entrance*

 It was evident that school leadership in both settings were keen to develop relationships that would be supportive of a school ethos of openness, where practices could be shared and which might contribute to the whole school's identity. This approach is similar in terms to Schoen and Teddlie's (2008) definition of school culture, as being composed of the four

elements of professional orientation, an organisational structure, the quality of the learning environment, and being student-centered.

Professional orientation in Schoen and Teddlie's interpretation is referred to as attitudes, perceptions and goals, and as indicators of professional growth that has a focus on student-learning. Modelling behaviours and maintaining a student centred focus are described as components of professional relationships at Monkshill, and outlined here by Nic, deputy head teacher:

> Behave, like you want people to behave to you, I always think… in a way that you want back…We do get it back. People get along well with each other. If they are not getting along well, they handle that, they don't go about negatively bringing someone down, they'll try and support, they'll come to us if something's not right, we don't have cliques, we are part of the school, and we are here to help each other, help the children and take the school forward. I don't know, there is something about rights, and understanding that you've got this entitlement, and professionally, with the children, we've got to give this entitlement and it feeds back, and into our professional relationships as well I think [Nic].

Lee (HT) also subscribes to the responsibility to model appropriate behaviours and maintain a student focus within the school. Monkshill is a Rights Respecting School and this as a significant cultural form that influences behaviour shall be analysed in more depth in the forthcoming chapter. For Lee, the UNCRC serves as the foundation for school culture.

Culture can be understood as being constitutive of relationships as well as ethos. It is important to note the distinction between relationships, in a common understanding of 'social interaction', as being distinct from relationships, in CR understanding, as social structures. This definition was highlighted in chapter three. In a research context, Priestley (2011), Priestley Biesta and Robinson (2015) and Wallace and Priestley (2011) deploy Archer's understanding of culture as norms, values, ideas and knowledge (Archer 1988), providing an illustration of ethos as a distinct entity from relationships. These ideas will be analysed more theoretically in subsequent chapters.

7.3   Structures, Support, Leadership

Data suggest that things have not always been so 'incredibly happy' in Monkshill Primary School, and all relationships are not so consistently positive with everyone concerned in this environment. The senior leadership team had been in place for 18 months at the time of

research. One year prior to this, there was a temporarily appointed 'acting' head teacher, as this post had been left vacant due to circumstances resulting from the inspection process. This was as a direct result of a problematic inspection experience that has left some staff feeling damaged and resulted in a breakdown of trust. Nic, the depute head teacher expressed deep concern over the long-lasting effects the inspection experience has had, and can have on individuals and the school as a whole:

> There was a really damning HMIE, that caused one of our senior colleagues to lose their job and that was for me, very sobering…. It was horrible… some years ago and it's clouded me, affected me a whole lot about my own career development because I don't trust the authority, that's what it comes down to, I don't trust them at all, I think they expect the HTs to be doing it and take no cognisance of the pressures that are there, they just three line whip them…[Nic].

This illustrates another dimension of relationships within the school; those involving structures of governance and accountability. Accountability mechanisms claiming to generate improvement in performance have been subject to critique in chapter four through the studies of Ball (2002), Fox and Reeves, (2008) and Kennedy, Barlow et al. (2012). What is alluded to above suggests a tension resulting from combined effects of the negative inspection experience with HMIE coupled with a related lack of prior or subsequent support from the local authority. This illustrates some overlap in the role that these two bodies perform. Inspections are carried out by HMIE, but local authorities also have a legislated responsibility to assure continuous improvement and 'quality' of education in their schools, to the extent that this part of their role now dominates the work they do (Croxford, Grek and Shaik, 2009). This has had a contrary effect in Monkshill, however, as the anticipated improvement resulting from the conjoined (or disaggregated) approach by these two organisations, appears to have had a seriously negative impact on the school and on Nic as an individual.

Other participants also described the negative impact of the inspection process and associated local authority support, or lack of support. Other experiences of staff who came from a different local authority area before joining Monkshill, report similar experiences.

These are not unique experiences. Within this one setting, three different participants from three different contexts (two prior to joining Monkshill) identified a pattern of inspection followed by staff disruption involving extended head teacher absence, compounded by their ultimate removal from post. Data support a low level of confidence in these processes along with strained and problematic relationships with the local authority in the Monkshill School community.

By contrast the leadership team is generally well respected and held in positive regard in Monkshill. It is clear from the data that staff feel supported and consulted in decision-making; that they perceive the leadership team to act in the best interests of the pupils and staff in the school and that staff feel valued. Data identify Alex the PT as playing a key role in leading and supporting LR. It is important to acknowledge that these data represent voluntary responses from self-selecting participants, and that assumptions cannot be made that non-participating members of staffs' attitudes and beliefs will be similar. Nonetheless, there is evidence in the data set that relationships between leadership and staff at Monkshill Primary School are strong, reciprocal and positive.

7.4   Professional Learning at Monkshill

In line with national policy, staff at Monkshill Primary have contractual obligations to spend time in professional learning activities. These can be self-determined, but are usually identified by local authority or school leadership as mandated collegial meetings or activities for PL purposes that take place within the stipulated 35 hours (Scottish Government, 2011); this arrangement is commonly referred to as the Working Time Agreement (WTA). Professional learning has a relatively high profile in Monkshill School. Mandated time for this is referred to as CAT sessions (Collegiate Activity Time) in Monkshill, as in many other schools and authorities. The school improvement plan is behind the focus or agenda for these meetings. Recent work(at the time of research) focused on mathematics. Data support the view that most of the teachers see this, along with stage-partner relationships, as opportunities to collaborate around their practice at different levels. For some, such as NQT Ali, this gives an opportunity to look inwardly and discuss fine-grained curricular detail. For others, such as Sandy or Jordan it allows them to report on and share external PL experiences they may have had outwith the school.

Stage partner pairings as well as forming the basis of relationships also provide a forum for collaboration that features prominently in the data. For Jordan, although they see this as an opportunity to 'share practically everything', they acknowledge that this is encouraged by leadership 'for a consistent approach to teaching.' There is also evidence that some staff enjoy a refreshing of the stage partner arrangement, and that leadership also supports this view. Not all participants view stage-partner collaboration positively, however. For Charlie, who performs a non-class committed role in the school, the stage partner arrangement is a barrier to collaboration, and activities based on it at CAT sessions can make them feel 'isolated' and 'quite vulnerable.'

The staffroom has a dedicated professional learning noticeboard that is used by both staff and leadership for formal and informal communications about PL, notices of forthcoming events and meetings for PL purposes. One regularly updated feature of the noticeboard is the staff 'Professional Reading' group that meets on a Friday after school in their CAT sessions (see figure 10).

Figure 10: Reading Group: Monkshill noticeboard

Although membership of this group is voluntary, time spent in it is included in the mandated number of hours. The conflict between mandated PL practices and voluntary ones has been highlighted as an influential factor in the power of PLCs to effect change (Philpott and Oates, 2017). This group seems to straddle the mandated/voluntary divide and is well attended. Staff make suggestions for reading sources from meeting to meeting. A collegial discussion of the chosen source takes place. Sources for discussion have included titles such as, for

example: Shirley Clarke's 'Outstanding Formative Assessment' or Alan MacLean's 'The Motivated School.' Attendance sits typically around 8-12 members of staff who may participate in any given meeting. Senior leadership support the group providing material resources by buying texts if required. They sometimes attend out of their own interest, but are mindful about the impact this might have on the dynamics of the group and freedom of expression: Lee is aware that senior leadership attendance at the group might inhibit staff to 'really talk about things honestly 'which is something they are keen that the group promotes. The structure provides a space for professional conversations to occur.

As well as the Professional Reading group described above, the school has been involved in developing PLCs through Learning Rounds over the past few years (prior to time of research) Through discussion of how these evolved and were supported and enacted in the school, data emerged which responded to the research questions.

The first instance of Learning Rounds (LR) at Monkshill had taken place a number of years ago and was supported by a contact from the National CPD Team who was known to have expertise in the practice. The relationship developed from Nic's participation in the National CPD Network. The process was introduced initially by Nic but was subsequently supported by Alex, who voluntarily took leadership responsibility for organising the LR as part of their principal teacher responsibility. Data from various respondents suggest Alex's mediating role between Lee, Nic and the teaching staff position them significantly as lending 'strength' to the process; Alex's knowledge and leadership is valued by staff in the process because 'it's not the head teachers and deputy head teachers saying we've got to do this.'

 It is clear from the data that engagement with the process has changed over time in several ways; participation, for example, has moved from a voluntary to a mandated basis. For some teachers this is less of a problem than for others and some tensions can be identified in this respect. The purpose of observation also raises some conflicting perceptions in the data: for some participants this needs to be a 'warts and all' experience, but there are concerns identified that special preparation is going into the lessons that are observed in some instances.

Some data from Charlie, the learning support specialist in the school, present observation in itself as problematic. Charlie expresses concern for safeguarding the more vulnerable children in the school who need extra support, often in a safe space and feels the process can compromise the trust they need to develop with these children. This contradicts the principle of open door de-privatised (City et al. 2009) observation as practiced in LR. This was compounded, for Charlie, when in the most recent LR, children participated in the LR and observed some teaching in their class. Thus, although many respondents reported positively on their experience in the LR, some tensions emerged from the data concerning the practice and purpose of the LR.

In summary, Monskhill Primary School presents a picture of a supportive community where internal relationships are strong and leadership is valued. Its experience with national agencies and the local authority have affected its positioning within this structure; steering it towards a status of 'the independent state of Monskhill' in the words of Nic, the DHT.

Collaborative practices and professional learning feature significantly in the school's profile and both leadership and staff generally value these, there are tensions between mandated and voluntary practices, and also some tensions around the purpose of their PLC. Data identify key individuals who play a significant role in mediating between leadership and staff.

7.5   A Portrait of Eden High School

By contrast, Eden High School is a medium-sized secondary school, situated on the outskirts of a populous, suburban area. It is a non-denominational, comprehensive school with a roll of around 1000 pupils in years one to six. It is a medium sized school within the range that its local authority area serves, and its catchment area covers the large suburb adjacent to it. Similar to Monkshill Primary, it also sits at the lower end of the SIMD index.

The staff roll is sizeable – around 100 teaching staff work in the school. Their roles are broken downs as follows (there is some overlap in the roles in this table):

School staff by role	N
Promoted staff: Head teacher	1
Promoted staff: Deputy HT	6
Promoted staff: Principal Teacher	20
Teachers*	68
Support for Learning Teacher	2
Support for Learning Assistant	9

Figure 11:Breakdown of staff at Eden School

*Information on proportion of full time and part time teachers is not available.

The Eden school leaders who participated in the research project were Gerry and Chris. Gerry was a relatively new head teacher and Chris had been deputy head of the school for some time. Middle leadership roles were performed by some participants, either as departmental leaders, such as Jude, Sam and Pat; or in whole-school principal teacher roles such as, for example, Principal Teacher of Raising Attainment, which was Viv's role. Morgan was a probationary teacher and several participants were within the first few years of their teaching careers: Danny, Kelly, Ashley, Sian and Coryn. Jo and Lindsay were experienced classroom teachers of considerable years, and Lindsay had previously gained Chartered Teacher status. It was clear from the beginning that the main protagonists of LR in the school were Gerry, Danny and Viv. In volunteering to participate in the process, all of the

other participants showed interest in professional learning. There were some fault lines that could be loosely determined among the attitudes to PL in this group of participants. Some, like Sam, Coryn and Kelly demonstrated insight into wider perspectives on professional learning and made connections with prior PL experiences. Interest in theory and literature relating to PL was expressed explicitly in interviews by Danny, Gerry, Lindsay, Viv, Sam, Kelly and Chris. This may have pre-disposed them to new initiatives like LR.   The table below summarises these details:

Gerry	HT
Chris	DHT
Viv	PT – whole school
Jude	PT- subject
Sam	PT- subject
Pat	PT- subject
Jo	Acting PT -subject
Lindsay	Chartered Teacher
Danny	Early career teacher
Kelly	Early career teacher
Ashley	Early career teacher
Sian	Early career teacher
Coryn	Early career teacher
Morgan	Induction year teacher

Figure 12: Cast of characters: Eden

The school buildings are new, having replaced the site of an original school in the mid-2000s. The site is extensive and incorporates several outdoor pitches. The building is light and modern, and has three floors. Subject departments are grouped in corridors with staff bases. There is a central social and dining area in the middle of the school. Although there is a large staffroom, this was rarely used by staff: it was only used by small numbers of visiting tutors and other visitors during the research process. Staff identify strongly by their departments and gather in these bases in non-teaching time.

Like Monkshill, the school is a Rights Respecting School (RRS), having gained this status via the UNICEF Rights Respecting School award scheme, but there is less obvious material evidence of this in the buildings. Where Monkshill had large, publically available floor books detailing pupil work and charter posters in corridors and classrooms in this regard (see figure 13), there was only more formal acknowledgement of the status in the with the flag at the school entrance and a plaque in the reception area at Eden.

The curricular offering is extensive: all core subjects are offered to pupils along with a suite of options that are included in the timetable for first-year (S1) and second year (S2). The profile of the school suggests high attainment is a priority: young people in the school enjoy a broad and varied curriculum. Options are offered in in S1 and 2 and include subjects such as ceramics, astronomy, gardening and dance. As well as these curricular options, a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities (around 50) are available to all young people in the school, ranging from music and sports to lego and human rights. The ethnic diversity of the school is limited.

7.6   Leadership, support, structure

The school's head teacher, Gerry, had been in post for around nine months at the beginning of the research process. Gerry leads a sizeable team of six senior leaders and twenty principal teachers in the school. Chris, one of the DHTs and Gerry were the two members of the senior leadership team most involved in the research project. Unusually, initial contact was solicited by Gerry about this research project through an interest in developing and supporting PLCs in the school. It is important to acknowledge that the research circumstances differ from Monkshill, in that I was invited to work with the school in supporting the development of a trial Learning Round in this school (see chapter six) and all due ethical processes were followed. In facilitating this, an opportunity to generate data for my study opened up; one I was not in a position to refuse given previous difficulties in securing access to the research field (Oates and Riaz 2016).

 Field notes from early meetings in the school relate how Gerry describes a shift in personal attitude towards the value of research in education: her recently completed leadership qualifications changed their opinion on this from initially one of resistance to one of enthusiasm, and they were keen that this might become a feature of staff PL in the school.

In Eden High school, mandated professional learning time, dictated by the Working Time Agreement (Scottish Government, 2011), is identified in the calendar for the standard pre-sessional and mid-term in-service days, but there is a flexible approach to how staff use it. The mandated versus voluntary tension in professional learning has a more nuanced complexion than in Monkshill: while the mandated hours are the same, the time is made available to be flexibly used by teachers for professional learning purposes of their choosing. This decision was taken by Gerry as a way of highlighting the importance of, and encouraging self-direction in professional learning for the staff. However, professional learning is also structured around a number of working groups in the school (Literacy; Numeracy; IDL; Self-evaluation) which have voluntary membership. These groups are intended to encourage collaboration in a PLC-oriented way and a further teacher-led Learning and Teaching Working Group (LTWG) was established which was to oversee the learning round. A self-evaluation working group had also been established and was facilitated by a DHT colleague, but ultimately the aim is for this one also to be facilitated by a teacher. Gerry emphasises that participation in these groups is voluntary, but the option not to participate was not on the table: all teachers in Eden High School were expected to participate in one of either LR or Lesson Study.

7.7 Relationships

The scale of Eden High School compared to Monkshill Primary School dictates, to a certain extent, the relationships that can exist within it. As mentioned previously, staff identify by their departments and there is a tendency to remain in atomised departmental bases, rather than use the staff room at break and lunchtimes. This potentially impacts how relationships are formed within the school. Data report patterns of respondents describing feelings of 'isolation' in departments. In respect of this, there was evidence in the data that the LR process facilitated some inter-departmental relationships to emerge and that this was valued: data report some enthusiasm from many of the participants to take advantage of the opportunity to make connections across departmental divides and build relationships with colleagues they might rarely otherwise might work with. From the data, it is clear that the idea of sharing practice and peer observations was highly valued, but although this

enthusiasm was evident at Eden High School, how far participants were willing to allow new structures to disrupt their existing relationships was less apparent.

7.8   Professional Learning at Eden High School

Gerry introduced Lesson Study (Dudley, 2005) to a whole staff meeting at the beginning of the session 2017-18, and the self-evaluation working group voluntarily pursued the idea as a means to developing an approach to self-evaluation that focused more on collaborating on improvements in practice rather than fulfilling administrative requirements of self-evaluation in a performative way (self-evaluation is encouraged as part of both the HMIE inspection process and professional update). This strategy met with success and staff involved shared their experiences enthusiastically.

Gerry recognised the benefits of collaborative working that the lesson study approach introduced and wishing to build on this, investigated Learning Rounds as a potential alternative form of PLC that might be developed within the school. Gerry had previous experience of LR from a former post, but reported conclusions consistent with other research findings, i.e. that they were unconsciously being used to reinforce existing notions of 'best practice' as mandated by external authorities, demonstrating the 'rhetoric of conclusions' identified by Clandinin and Connelly (1995). This is in contrast to the stated purpose of observing and analysing existing practice, examining assumptions about practice and building a body of evidence supporting a causal link between instructional practices and their effects that are used to inform future plans (City et al. 2009).

 In discussion with Gerry, we agreed that as researcher, I would work with staff to support them in implementing a learning round in the school. A schedule for this was agreed (see appendix v) and an initial meeting was planned to introduce the concept to staff. Participation was to be voluntary and we established a programme running from August to March. Many staff members expressed interest in initial stages and participated in introductory workshops. A core group of around 22 emerged which could be identified as the PLC although this was a fluid number, and 13 participated in interviews for this research process. Sessions three and four on the schedule were concerned with identifying the focus

for the observations. Learner conversations were being introduced in the school and featured in the School Improvement Plan. For this reason, dialogue and feedback were raised as potential themes for observation in the LR process. A colleague who has expertise in this area was approached invited to contribute to the LR at this stage.

An explicit focus on collaborative practices was identified as a leadership priority in the data: Gerry was emphatic in searching for and supporting collaborative models of PL that were not….

> a top-down, hierarchical head teacher watches deputes who watch principal teachers who watch our teachers. I wanted staff to be working a lot more collaboratively on it, and I wanted staff to work more in terms of teams and professional learning communities through reading that I'd done [Gerry].

7.8.1   Leadership of PLCs

Some tensions around leadership of the process arose in the data. The model espoused at Eden High School corresponds to Harris (2013) and Harris and Jones's (2010) conceptualisation of the PLC as a vehicle for distributed leadership. There was a clear sense of support and encouragement for teacher leadership of the project from the senior leadership team. Chris, DHT became more involved as Gerry gradually withdrew from the process and some middle-level leaders, such as Viv emerged as leaders in managing contact with researchers and taking some responsibility for the organisation. Data reveal that non-promoted teachers, however, often positioned themselves as passive recipients of others' knowledge and expertise, which remained at odds with Gerry's intentions of:

> Empowering them to take ownership of it and take it forward without me imposing it upon people and saying this works because...[Gerry].

Although one of the intentions of the LR, as far as leadership was concerned, was to disrupt the prevailing hierarchical structure in the school, there is evidence in the data that it may have potentially and inadvertently reinforced it. In contrast, there is also evidence to suggest that the LTWG allowed significant influential individuals who were not associated with the leadership structure to emerge.

Through engagement with the LR process, data have highlighted that, similar to Monkshill, professional reading became a significant feature of the work of the PLC. Gerry's ambition

for the school staff to engage with academic literature underpinned the involvement of this aspect of the work carried out in both the LR process and the Lesson Study. Participants responded positively to this aspect of their work and many saw it as important for their understanding of the process and, more significantly, as an important aspect of their professional learning. There was strong commitment to the process and some participants invested quite heavily in the academic reading. For some, this invigorated their interest; for others, such as Danny, they saw it as 'pushing the gap between academic theory and practice in a practical setting.' This became a key feature of the work of the group, resulting directly from Gerry's underlying intention to develop engagement with literature across the school's staff.

7.9 Partnership and uneven relationships

The facilitation of the LR process at Eden imposed a difference across the two cases that resulted in an asymmetrical case study that has been detailed in chapter six. I have acknowledged that this caused some imbalance across the two cases. However, Clerke and Hopwood (2014) suggest that asymmetry in research (in their account, specifically ethnographic research) can lead to productive divergences that can add value to the project. The 'uneven relationships' (Clerke and Hopwood 2014, p *iv*) that influenced how power was navigated by participants, researcher and school leaders in this study, were more obvious in Eden school than in Monkshill. In keeping with Clerke and Hopwood's assertion, however, some opportunities to generate productive data arose. These are detailed in the section below, but some further probing of the uneven nature of the relationship is warranted, in the interests of researcher transparency and integrity.

Unlike Monkshill, where I had known both Nic (through the National CPD network) and Alex (through a personal connection), I arrived at Eden school as an outsider from the academic community, knowing virtually no-one. I did not arrive at the school from a particular vantage point that supports: 'an approach to knowledge construction that adopts a 'view from nowhere' or a 'bird's-eye view' that is not available to those who are situated' (Marotta 2012, p868). Instead, I sought to work alongside participants where they were situated, as they probed aspects of their own practices through the LR. There is no doubt, however, that my perceived alignment as a university 'outsider' and as an invited guest of

the HT influenced the balance of power in my relationships with participants and inhibited, to an extent, the possibilities for achieving a working relationship of this manner. One consequence of this is reflected in some participants positioning me less as a facilitator of their work and more as an expert-bringer of knowledge (see below). With reference to the original problem of asymmetry across the cases, a further consequence in the Clerke and Hopwood (2014) interpretation resulted in the productive divergence of some data, illuminating participant perceptions of partnership working.

School and university partnership working has increasingly become a feature of the education landscape at different levels within the system. In this case, the nature of my facilitation led to some observations on participant perceptions of school-university partnership arrangement. A publication ensued (Oates and Bignell 2019), and the relationship which developed extended beyond the original terms foreseen by both parties. until Covid 19 restrictions, I was involved in ongoing discussions about aspects and organisation of professional learning in the school. This particular version of partnership aligns most closely with the empirical orientation proposed by I'Anson and Eady (2017) That is, one which is 'mobilized in practice within specific contexts… identifying particular issues, tensions and understandings that emerge' (ibid p4).

Although almost all teachers spoke positively of the partnership experience, there are variances in data, suggesting that for some participants the partnership enabled a sense of increased agency that will be discussed in subsequent chapters, whilst some others, such as Lindsay, continued to position university staff as 'expert bringers' of knowledge. They would consequently position themselves passively as subjects to whom knowledge might be 'imparted,' and thus they would diminish their sense of agency. This surfaced a problematic contradiction in the data that will be further explored in chapter eight.

Eden High School presents in many ways as a typically high-attaining school with enthusiastic staff. It is a lively school community, with a leadership team that is perceived as strong and supportive by the staff in the school. The HT in particular places an emphasis on improving collaborative working and supporting staff in deepening and extending their professional knowledge and practice.

7.10 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has described observable patterns in the data that indicate both commonalities, regularities and divergences across both cases. Leadership and relationships warrant further analysis in both cases. A strong focus on learners at the centre of improvement processes surfaces in both cases. Enactment of Professional Learning Communities, approaches to professional learning and the role of professional reading are also factors that warrant further investigation. Specific to Eden High School, the relationship between the school and the university is a factor that yields interesting data. Having abductively analysed the two cases and contextualised them in this study, a deeper retroductive analysis will be explored in the following chapters. This seeks to understand more about the underlying causal mechanisms at work in this study and how they are at work within this context, by a deeper theoretical analysis of the causal processes at play that allow a deeper understanding of the observable events and the mechanisms that underpin them in the context of this study.

8   Culture

As this study seeks to uncover the individual, cultural or structural factors within the practice of PLCs in the research schools concerned, the analysis presented in this chapter focuses on the category of culture as a core element of analytical dualism's M/M framework in response to RQ 2: What cultural factors are at play within PLCs an in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

 Further chapters will address the other M/M elements of structure and agency, drawing the analysis to a concluding discussion of implications for future research and practice. It is important to reiterate that, in submitting the stratified ontology of structure, culture and agency, critical dualism offers us a way to consider these elements as analytically distinct and separable in order to expose underlying mechanisms that create and shape conditions for action. This is not to suggest that these elements are analytically isolated from each other and could be considered as ontologically detached – they are necessarily related to each other. In the analysis that follows, although each element will be considered in turn, there is some inevitable 'bleeding' across the categories, as they interplay in an analytically separate but inter-dependent way.

The previous chapter presented an abductive analysis of observable features of the research context. It is useful to be reminded of the explanatory framework of M/M comprising these structural, cultural and agentic elements. In Critical Realism, as a method of analysis we separate out the 'parts' – the structural and cultural forms, from the people within a given system. This allows us to understand interplay between these phenomena and individuals within the system. As previously discussed, 'culture' in this analysis, represents all items of intelligibilia within a social system (Archer 1996). From the initial cross-case abductive analysis, some broad patterns or demi-regularities have surfaced, as indicated above: leadership, relationships and approaches to professional learning. The next stage in this process of analysis is to examine the interplay of mechanisms that create conditions to cause these patterns to appear as they do. Starting with the category of 'Culture', abduction and retroduction are used in analysis, as described above, to bring theory to bear upon the data and identify the causal mechanisms and conditions that were shaping teachers' experiences in PLCs in the two schools.

From thick description of the cases in the previous chapter, a pattern of commonality across both schools identified that engagement with professional reading and research, i.e. the reading of agreed texts or research articles for group discussion, was a cultural form that featured in both schools' social systems. Although analysis might also consider this as a structural form (because informal meetings enable relationships), in M/M terms, ideas along with beliefs, values and norms, belong to the cultural domain (Archer 1988, Priestley, 2011). The analysis that follows will highlight some relevant connections with literature in the data and identify the contradictions, sites of tension and complementarities - reinforcements; clarifications; confirmation or vindication (Archer 1988, p153), that these cultural forms expose, and the underlying mechanisms which are enabling elaboration to occur.

8.1   Climate, culture and ethos

Finding 1: School ethos underpins relationships that enable PLCs and is modelled by leaders as a way of being especially in Monkshill School.

Leadership support for PLCs is seen as essential in literature (see chapter five, and Stoll et al. 2006; Hairon et al., 2014; Harris and Jones, 2010; Vanblaere and Devos, 2016). PLCs are also understood by some scholars as a form of distributed leadership in themselves (Harris and Jones, 2010, Spillane, 2016). Although leadership pertains more directly to discussions of structure in this analysis, some aspects of the data highlight the emphasis school leaders' placed on the 'culture' of their schools. Discussion of this finding shall be considered here with reference to leadership as a structural form, and its influence on the idea of school culture.

It might be helpful here to distinguish between the accepted notion of school culture and the specific analytical feature of 'culture' here. Hallinger and Walker (2016) adapt Bossert et al.'s (1982) model of leadership influences and use the term 'school climate' to denote the 'atmospheric conditions' that can be intuited in school buildings. Schoen and Teddlie distinguish between school climate and school culture, arguing that the former is a subset of the latter and a school culture is composed of four elements; '(I) Professional Orientation, (II) Organizational Structure, (III) Quality of the Learning Environment, and (IV) Student-Centered Focus' (p139, 2008).

'Climate' is a useful term to use in this study for two reasons. Firstly, as it distinguishes the term from the analytical understanding of culture in analytical dualism terms. This is discussed in chapter six. Secondly, the term 'climate' conveys a sense of the currents, pressures and temperature variances at work as causal mechanisms, beyond what we can empirically experience. These are invisible yet ontologically real, as they create effects that can only be experienced at the empirical level of reality. Climate is also is a subset of the wider understanding of culture as detailed above. Therefore, this is the term I will use in further discussion of the phenomenon of the 'atmosphere' of the school, as distinct from the CR understanding of the term to express epistemic forms.

Gerry at Eden had a vision of the sort of school climate she wanted to create in the school, one that is based on positive relationships and realistic expectations of staff:

> I think relationships is at the heart of that, to be honest, and I also think it's about.., I do think it's about good leadership and what my expectations are as a leader. I've been trying to make their situation here as comfortable for them as I possibly can and being realistic about what my expectations of them are and support them in pretty much anything that they would want to try or take forward or do. I think it's about me being approachable and being reasonable and treating people properly and trying to create a relaxed, comfortable environment that people enjoy, children and adults come and enjoy working in, ... It's about that one-on-one interactions that you have with people on a daily basis about how you treat them, and I'm always really keen to do that. I would much rather go and speak to somebody face-to-face than send them an email, so a hands-on approach to leadership and being around the building and speaking to people when you need to speak to them, rather than obviously being stuck in my office constantly. I think the leadership side of things is important as well, and creating opportunities, creating time. Setting aside time, not having lots and lots and lots of priorities, having one or two, that you're making things manageable for people so they don't feel their workload's a burden. I think all of that certainly contributes to it [Gerry].

In Monkshill, leadership plays an equally important part in the influencing the climate of the school, but in a subtly different way. Jordan's comments are reflective of most others when asked about components of the climate of the school:

The willingness of everybody …. I think again it comes from management. They've got that respect from the majority of colleagues in school….because of decisions they've made before that have benefitted our school, and have pulled us right up; because they do ask for our opinion, because you do get quality feedback from them. I feel very strongly that they give us quality feedback about what, like for example your PRD, …how you're getting on, what strengths are areas you'd like to develop, and they'd always encourage that and yeah, it's just the way that they treat us, and the openness and the way we are made to feel valued well, most of the time. It's not always perfect, we all have our mumps and groans, about things, but it's just like that. I know that I feel that way, I don't know that everybody feels that way, but I think in general, we are a fairly happy school and that does come from leadership a lot of the time [Jordan].

Data support oft-cited mainstream (Niesche 2018) leadership sources (D. Hargreaves 1994; Bush 2014; Leithwood 2015, for example), in claiming that leadership actions are frequently invoked as a powerful influence in the climate of each school. However, it must be recognised that the differences in size and scale of each case naturally have a bearing on how this is enacted within the schools. School leaders in both cases consistently recognised the importance of communication and relationships in developing a positive climate in the school; Lee expresses this in different terms, however, as a 'way of being in school:'

Respondent: Having good communication, I think, is probably a part of it, the work we're doing in respectful relations is another big part of creating a culture of respectful relationships between staff, between staff and pupils and between pupils and pupils and with parents. The fact that we should be treating everybody regardless who walks through the door with respect and with the work that we've being doing and-

Interviewer: What is 'respectful relations,' is that a programme or ….?

Respondent: It's just a way of being, I mean, as a school [Lee].

One cultural commonality across both settings that has been highlighted in chapter seven is 'Rights Respecting Schools (RRS)' status. In Monkshill School this was coordinated by Nic, DHT. In Eden School, it was coordinated by a class teacher. Although there were clear distinctions in how this was enacted as a cultural form in each case, typical features of Rights Respecting Schools including, for example, badging and branding (such as RRS

banners and flags displayed on school property) and displays of class charters on classroom walls were common to both cases.

Each school displayed the flag at the school entrance. Interview and observational data suggest that it was more embedded in school culture and structure at Monkshill than at Eden, however. Field notes and observations such as figure 13 support this: the suggestion books in the photo detail notes from pupil leadership groups, Pupil Council and the Getting it Right Group notes and minutes for consultation, in a public display for consultation and contribution.
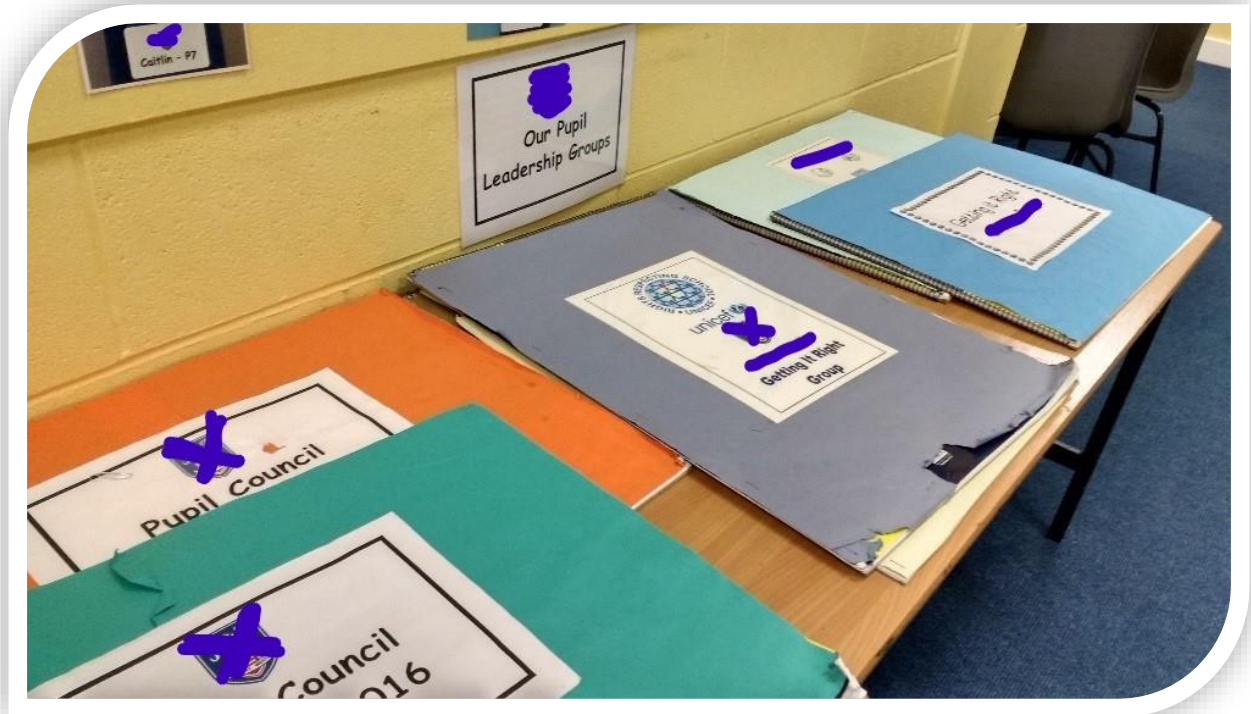
Figure 13: Pupil Leadership Group records, Parent Council and suggestions books in Monkshill School

Visible features of the school climate such as this can often appear as 'window dressing;' displayed as badges of honour but not truly reflected in ethos and interactions of the school. However, the well-used appearance of the documents pictured suggests they may be more than superficially symbolic. Data from interviews and field notes also point towards

a more embedded approach to the values of RRS as being lived and not merely token. Lee, HT, explains:

> We base all we do on the United Nations convention of the rights of the child. There are 48 articles and they cover everything as a child you're entitled to these rights. We've picked out particular ones that you have a right to learn, you have a right to be heard, you have a right to be safe and happy in school.
>
> So, there are a few that we've got core to the school but there's a sort of...at the hub of it all is treating each other with respect and giving people entitlement. The fact that if you are talking you're taking the right for somebody else to be listened to, the right of somebody else to be heard, or to learn. The fact that we are respectful we demonstrate and I'd like to think that Nic and I from the top demonstrate to everybody else how we feel that or we expect the children to interact with each other, how we expect the staff to work with demonstrating how we expect people to work with each other [Lee].

This 'way of being' is reflected in data above but also pervades other relationships and the school culture. Nic explains that the rights and responsibilities from RRS are used as the basis for negotiations when any behavioural problems or conflicts arise. This extract from field notes provide an interesting illustration of the Monkshill behaviour management approach that positions the child as a rights-bearing actor within the system:

> Visit: 17/05/2016. I travel to the school to meet with Nic and do some observations. On arrival at 10.10am, the usual warm welcome is extended and I'm invited to wait in the DHTs' office as Nic is on duty elsewhere. The door is open and I go in. The office is shared between two DHTs – there are two busy, working desks laden with typical deputy head kit – folders, papers, books, and a smaller low table with various other items – tissues, pens etc. There is a stacking box by the wall with an assortment of games, puzzles, construction toys, lego etc. I sit at the low table and wait, self-consciously, leaving the door open wide open so that I'm seen. A child, aged around 5 or 6 comes into the office on his own. I smile and say hello. He looks at me with total disinterest and says nothing. I'm struck by how comfortable he seems in this space, in contrast to me – feeling slightly awkward, a visitor, intruder, in someone's empty office, where no doubt confidential information is stored, shared, spoken about. The child starts looking purposefully through the toys in the box by the wall. He is looking for something specific and he finds what he's looking for, sits down and starts playing contentedly with a mechanics toy. Soon after Nic arrives. He

apologises, we exchange warm greetings as usual, and he checks in with the child. 'You alright there Billy? You can finish that off today' he says. The child looks up and acknowledges him, says something in reply about his toy and carries on playing. Nic tells me in a soft voice: 'He struggles sometimes, hits out, doesn't get support at home. He knows to come here when things get too much in class. There's a few of them do that.' I'm impressed by this behaviour management strategy, the way it allows the child to self-regulate, to feel safe in this 'official' space and how open and democratic the approach makes the space appear. It happens as if it's the most natural thing in the world.

Billy's actions reveal the enactment of his right to feel safe, and the rights of other children around him to learn. Although this was mediated through surface level interactions between Billy, his teacher, and Nic, the interactions were informed by respect – a deeper level hidden mechanism underpinning the behaviour policy. There are complementarities here with other expressions in the data that prioritise children's hidden stories, and show how leadership promotes a protective disposition towards them. Nic expresses some of this when asked about interactions in the staffroom:

> Respondent: I'd like to think it's a safe space for teachers and staff to talk about, particularly the curriculum side. What I'm always wary about is talking about children inappropriately. We would quietly say to people if they are talking about children, not often, but you need to say, right…
>
> Interviewer: What would you say?
>
> Respondent: We use unconditional regard, be careful of judging the children. Remember their story. Because they can be, you know, a right pain in the neck, and you're allowed to voice off about that, oh yeah, but if people are making comments about a child, about their behaviour… I don't want to illustrate it…
>
> Interviewer: I can see what you mean –there's no need for examples.
>
> Respondent: It's just like – they are a pain, you're allowed to say they are a pain in the neck and go AHHHH! And get the feedback but sometimes if it was going over the edge then we'd pick up on that straightaway…..it's safe, it's usually self-policing, but usually if you pick up on something that people said, it could be ANA (classroom assistant) staff, not the teaching staff, just – 'oh, a word,' and it's done in a supportive way [Nic].

There is a protective and respectful disposition towards pupils here that reflects a child-centred approach. These interactions then become part of the ethos, Lee's 'way of being.'

Here analytical dualism allows us to consider school ethos as emergent property of the interplay of components, not an 'unintended consequence' (Archer 1995, p177) of the interactions between the individuals within structures and certain cultural forms. These components stand in 'causal relationships…reliant on agential instigation' (Archer 1995, p180) but only result in emergence when the mechanisms underpinning the relationships between them can be identified. From the above illustration, the interplay between staff, between staff and pupil, the principles underpinning the charter for children's rights and the approach to behaviour management that this informs, allows an ethos to emerge that cannot be attributed to one of these components: it is an emergent property belonging to school as a social system.

RRS in Eden School plays out differently: observations from field notes do not report the same degree of visibility of the RRS agenda, other than the flag and certificate displayed in the school entrance area. My interactions in Eden school were with staff only and took place mostly when pupils were not on site, i.e. after the end of the school day. It was difficult to make observations about how RRS was enacted in the school since the level of visibility experienced was significantly different to Monkshill. Gerry directed me to the member of staff responsible for RRS in the school. I approached the member of staff to seek out information on how RRS is enacted within the school. It was not possible to have an on-site conversation about this, and the lead teacher responsible later emailed me, after some gentle reminders, with information as follows:

> Regular fundraising events are held to raise money for Comfort International where school pupils and staff sponsor a Rwandan baby and teacher. This has allowed pupils the opportunity to promote the right to education, clean water and healthcare on a global level.

> In curricular areas children's rights are implemented into different subject areas.

> S2 Enterprise - pupils work on an activity book in partnership with a charity as part of this, they learn about rights such as the right to healthcare and play, leisure and culture. This project also allows pupils to visit the hospital where they can see first hand how their work at Eden School is helping young people of a similar age.

> S1 RMPS - All S1 pupils are given a lesson on Mary's Meals and this allows young people the chance to see how the proceeds for their non-uniform day helps disadvantaged children.

> S6 Buddies - S6 pupils are trained to be a Buddy to S1 pupils. They are trained by the Scottish Youth Parliament on children's right by participating in a workshop about rights. From this, S6 Buddies deliver the workshop to all S1 through a lesson in PSE. In registration, S6 Buddies will also help the S1's complete a 'Right Here, Right Now' project which allows S1 to explore their rights in more detail [from email correspondence].

The enactment of RRS in Eden has a focus on empirical events and there is less evidence of what ideas are underpinning this agenda. From the extract above, pupils are positioned as differently with regards to the Rights Respecting agenda. They are the recipients of what seems to involve selected aspects of rights as they are incorporated into the school's curriculum across the different stages. On a purely linguistic analysis, the language here signals a different approach: pupils are 'allowed opportunities' 'given lessons' and 'trained.' In Monkshill, the school leaders made unsolicited reference to the influence of RRS in their work, which allowed some deeper analysis of how it informed ethos in the school, but this was not the case in Eden. This is not to say there was no ethos in Eden School, but merely that from analysis, the cultural form of the RRS agenda did not inform it to the same extent as at Monkshill.

8.2 Teacher beliefs

Finding 2: teachers value transformative potential in LR in theory: in reality they confirm what teachers already believe about practice.

What teachers believe about their work is seen as fundamental to understanding their approaches to practice and their chosen courses of professional action (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015). The role of beliefs as a form of culture, and a mechanism for either change or stasis as mediated through social interactions will be examined in this section.

Genuine concern and caring for young people as a consistent belief was evident in the data in both cases. This suggests that many participants from both schools regarded the welfare of their students and their outcomes as an unwavering focus of their work, and went to

some length to express this. There was a strong assumption by almost all participants in both schools that their responsibilities were first and foremost to their students, and that in seeking to improve or adapt their practice, their students' interests are at the heart of their work as teachers. This complements a focus on student learning as an enduring and underlying but largely vague and undefined purpose in much of PLC literature (for example, Hord 1997; Vescio et al. 2008, Lomos, Hofman and Bosker 2011; Fullan and Hargreaves 2012; Harris, Jones and Huffman 2017). In spite of the sense of responsibility to their pupils, this did not translate into a wider collective responsibility, with many focusing on individual accountability, which will be further discussed in chapter nine.

Danny expresses strong beliefs in attributing significant transformational potential of student outcomes through engagement with the LR process:

> the reason we're doing this is because we want to make a difference to the young people. It's because we want to improve the teaching and learning experience for the young people. That is why we're not doing it because we want to create a paper on it, we're not doing it for the sake of it, and we're doing it because we genuinely believe it's going to improve teaching and learning, which is going to have an impact on the young people [Danny].

The belief in improving practices serves as a cultural mechanism that has activated and motivated participants to engage in the work of the PLC. This also provides a purpose for the PLC - a fairly powerful underlying reason, as expressed by Danny, as to why the participants engage with it. These motivations that contribute to the T1 socio-cultural conditioning phase of the M/M cycle (see figure 4, p106) and serve to explain strategic action (Archer 2016, p7). These beliefs also serve as aspirations in a projective way, positioned at the T 4 phase of the process, as teachers strive for ways to bring about improvements that can be discussed and put into practice in a further M/M cycle, shaped as work that they take into practice. In illustrating the interplay between the participants and these beliefs about improvement within the structure of the PLC, data suggest the outcome is more confirmatory and morphostatic than transformational and morphogenic in both cases:

> wouldn't say I learned anything different in the sense that there weren't any kind of new techniques or things to say to 'I must do that' or but I just

think, you know it just consolidates everything for you doesn't it? That everybody's doing like a similar ... has a similar approach and that's something that you can take away that you're doing the same thing [Jude - Eden].

it sometimes gives you a reassurance as well. I think quite a lot of staff like that in the professional reading group and the learning rounds, that they'll see things or will talk about things and they'll feel reassured and 'well actually, I'm doing that so that's okay [Alex].'

Despite this, there are some contradictions here with Allen (2013) who contends that the general aspirations for improvement can overshadow clarity of the PLCs ambition. This was not the case in either school here. In both cases, the schools used a Learning Round to focus on different aspects of pupil and teacher interactions. This boiled down to feedback in both cases, although the original intention at Eden was to focus on teacher-pupil interactions and dialogic teaching. The PLCs in both cases worked to achieve granularity in specifying the practices they wanted to develop and observations they expected to see and discuss in their practice, and in student's learning. There are complementaries however, with Horne and Little (2010) who highlight the importance of discussing accounts of practice, but point out the constraining effects these can have when participants do not abstract the problems to a generalizable level, which would allow them to move to another level of work. In working through the 'endemic tension between 'figuring things out' and 'getting things done'' (Horn and Little 2010, p208) the participants in both settings had difficulty in moving beyond reproduction of existing practices in a morphostatic way.

There is no doubt, however, that the intentions are sincere and that all participants have a strong sense of responsibility towards their students that underscores their engagement in the PLC. It is clear from the data that some participants enjoy a greater degree of agency than others by drawing on these beliefs and the structures they work within to effect changes in the cultures and structures of their workplace environments. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter ten; for the moment, the processes of change in MM cycles will be more fully explored in the following section.

8.3 Cultural forms: creating conditions and interdependency at Eden

Finding: Within PLCs participants hybridise selected ideas with their own existing ones in place of generating new shared practices.

 At Eden school, field notes provide evidence that supports a strong desire on the school leader's to 'change the culture' of the school in relation to professional learning. The LR was one measure Gerry engaged with to try to achieve this, along with other staff initiatives to organise and take part in lesson study. As school leader, Gerry can create and influence socio-cultural conditions within the school as social system at the underlying level of the real in CR terms. This means that conditions need to be in place to support interactions: the conditions at T1 must be in place for the interactions and elaboration at T2 - T3 to take place (see figure 4). These are conditions which are 'shaping the situations in which [agents] find themselves ….supplying good reasons for various courses of action to those in given positions' (Archer 1995, p249). Gerry prioritises using and discussing the value of research literature, and through engaging in reading research, she has created conditions that are intended to foster a change in attitudes and beliefs about professional learning and improvement in the school as she explains:

> I was really keen to try and come up with one or two different models where there wasn't a top-down, hierarchical head teacher watches deputes who watch principal teachers who watch our teachers. I wanted staff to be working a lot more collaborative on it, and I wanted staff to work more in terms of teams and professional learning communities through reading that I'd done. I knew that learning rounds might be a good vehicle for that, along with, I'd also looked at lesson study. We tried to change the approach. That's how I became more familiar with learning rounds, and then having read the research, I realised that my previous experience of it wasn't necessarily the correct experience [Gerry].

Gerry describes how drawing on prior experiences in prior contexts has shaped the present situation to allow for further elaborations of these ideas within a new structure. This is also supported by Dimmock's (2016) suggestion that the leadership role in creating contexts for the circulation of new ideas through engaging with research, is one which 'establishes the organisational and social contexts within which knowledge mobilisation, professional learning and improved practice can be formalised and achieved through research engagement' (Dimmock 2016, p48). Leadership action of this sort can influence a school's

culture by supporting conditions for it and sustaining it (Dimmock 2016), in the work of the PLC and in the school more widely.

In a micro level analysis of the processes within the PLC in Eden school, elaborations resulting from the interplay of the individuals with cultural forms fall into three broad categories. Firstly, some demonstrate a tendency to hybridise new ideas with existing practice and making small adjustments to practice, elaborating a morphogenetic loop. This is illustrated by Ashley, for example who describes small adaptations to practice that occurred as a result of engaging in the PLC:

> I would say yes, getting children more involved in feedback. Not just me dictating what feedback is. It's getting, for example, building success criteria with the kids. So I'm trying to do more of that [Ashley].

Secondly, many hybridised new ideas into existing ones in a way that corresponds to Meirink et al.'s second level of collaboration – the idea of teachers offering mutual 'aid and assistance' which involves a critical engagement with each other's practices'(Meirink et al. 2010, p168). This response is typical in this respect: collaborative working that starts with the sharing of ideas and experiences:

> I suppose it gives you an opportunity to review, reflect, share good practise or different practise, and I would always be keen to embed that into what I'm doing or look to embed good examples or new strategies or good techniques into our practice. You don't get to do that very often and it's really, really a good way of seeing what else goes on in the classroom [Jo].

Thirdly, some participants such as Lindsay consider the process involved in the work of the PLC as more continuous and longer term, allowing for further 'directional influence' (Archer, 1995, p79) upon the system in the development of new questions in T4, which becomes the new T1 in the next M/M cycle. Some participants, such as Viv, deflect responsibility for the next stage of development to the school as a whole:

> But again, this process for me and my colleagues, I don't think is over because I think the school has now to take this forward [Viv].

Although motivations for engaging in the process were strong if not clear, analytical dualism allows us to see that the interplay of cultural forms inside the PLC at Eden resulted in limited

changes. Any changes which were apparent tended to more to reform existing beliefs and practices rather than interrupt or transform them as suggested by Servage (2008) and Owens (2014). In moving to sharing practice in the PLC, participants have already moved beyond the informal, entry-level 'scanning and storytelling' (Meirink et al 2010) phase of collaboration. However, sustained change requires more than aid and assistance. In order to develop this further into the next level of work as these authors suggest, the PLC facilitation move itself onto the next level of work where it might support the emergent development of common ideas, not just the sharing of ideas. Focussing on the co-creation of new emergent common artefacts (such as pedagogical approaches, lesson plans etc.) may enhance collaboration and interdependency and lead to more sustained change, but as these data show, this is unlikely to happen on its own.   There is a loose-tight dilemma to be navigated here that relates to Dufour's (2008) ideas of leadership. Some leadership action is required to facilitate the move to the next level of work while simultaneously refraining from inhibiting the critical conversations necessary for its development.

8.4   Cultural Forms: ideas, professional reading and research at Monkshill

Finding: Elaboration of shared new practices emerged from Monkshill professional reading group. However, the scope of ideas considered was limited as was critical engagement with some cultural forms.

Engagement with reading and research for professional development purposes are typical activities that take place in PLCs (Gore and Bow, 2015). As described in chapter seven, in Monkshill Primary a dedicated, informal professional reading group was established prior to this research taking place. This group met in official collegiate activity meeting time - CAT time. It was scheduled regularly and teachers attended on a voluntary basis and it was well supported as the staffroom noticeboard which the list shows (figure 9). Content was mostly decided by members of the group who put forward suggested titles, articles or papers for advance reading and subsequent discussion in the group. Data considered here relate to a recorded discussion of the group that focused on the issue of formative assessment, based on the text by Shirley Clarke. Data also are drawn from interviews. The group gave consent for the recording to be used and Alex shared it with me as an audio file. This structure in Monkshill and the LR group in Eden High provided a forum for the mediation of ideas in each setting. Analysis in this section will focus on the interplay between participants within

this structure and with cultural forms. In this analysis, it is useful to seek out some antecedents to this particular context and deploy Archer's Explanatory Programme (see chapter six) to analyse the mechanisms that influence events within the professional reading group.

Although the professional reading group is voluntary, informal and open to all staff at Monkshill it represents a structure that is formed and supported by members of the leadership team. Their influences on the group can be traced quite easily in the data. Leslie, a principal teacher, has a key role in the group, although not formalised as a leader within the group, her position as principal teacher has enabled her to influence leadership decisions. She initially provoked the interest in the Shirley Clarke text and her enthusiasm for ideas on formative assessment is considerable:

> Now that we have found Shirley Clarke… we found Dylan Wiliam and then we found Shirley Clarke (laughter) …I mean I think I went to a couple of interviews last year, and Dylan William was just out and I was like – really? I just think he's brilliant. I went to one of his lectures, and I just seen this guy, and I was just like, who is this guy? I had never seen him, I just read his book after that [Leslie].

Field notes from a conversation with DHT, Nic indicate that, on Leslie's suggestion to support the development and embedding of formative assessment as a cultural form in the school, he organised the purchase of Shirley Clarke's 'Outstanding Formative Assessment' (2014) for every member of teaching staff. The reading group allowed a space for the ideas to circulate. Using Archer's EP (see figure 4, p106), we can trace back to the T1 phase of conditioning and see that ideas emanate from a persuasive discourse that is mobilised through encounters and opportunities at local authority level. Leslie and colleague Jordan participated in local authority 'training' on formative assessment where the socio-cultural conditioning took place.

> And I've had the opportunity to do the Assessment is for Learning stuff that we did with the region, Tapestry, myself and another colleague did Cat sessions, take things forward [Jordan].

> Jordan and I were doing the formative assessment training, we did it for 2 years and then we went back for more, just because we really enjoyed it [Leslie].

Interactions at T2 occur through the reading group and structured workshops, led by Leslie and Jordan:

> ..we did that so we led all the workshops for that, [……]I developed it in the school, then in my own classroom, I mean, I really started my classroom, trying things, ehm and then I moved on (Leslie)

Interplay between these individuals and ideas – conditioned by local authority level professional learning groups, mediated by Leslie and Jordan and elaborated through interactions in the school setting in encounters such as the workshops and the reading group. Data do not suggest that and alternative ideas or perspectives on assessment were considered during the reading group or from interviews. Thus, these ideas, and not others, were allowed to percolate (Priestley, 2013) through and around the school system.

Figure 12: Archer's EP (1995, p248)

Structural conditioning of groups

_T1: National/Local/School policy influences: formative assessment__

Group Interaction

T2 __Professional reading discussion_____T3

Group elaboration

Development of new shared practices – photos and feedback sheets

_____*T4*

Figure 14: cultural elaborations at Monkshill

 Elaboration occurring at T3 results from the preceding interplay between the participants with cultural forms and T4 signals the starting point for a new M/M cycle.

Participants engage with the ideas through discussion and consider changes to practice, which would illustrate the next stage in the morphogenetic process. At the empirical level, recorded data from the reading group discussion report that teachers engaged readily, but mostly uncritically with cultural forms. In elaborating the ideas within the context of their practice, participants at Monkshill move beyond the 'scanning and storytelling' (Meirink et

al., 2010) stage and engage in some joint work (Meirink et al. 2010, p 168), as detailed in chapter five. They collectively discuss a shared approach to assessment and explore resources that might allow them to enact some suggested strategies from the text. As an example of this, the reading group discusses existing practice - their use of target sheets for feedback - an artefact that was developed as part of the work of the group. This led to the development of a new, shared practice - taking photos of work for a shared analysis as a focus for feedback. This suggests new practices are elaborated as a result of the group's interactions. Interestingly, some light-hearted comments about a former practice, which is disparaged in the text (swapping jotters for peer feedback), is highlighted as a 'bad habit' [Jordan]. Several discussants in the reading group agree this is a practice they have now abandoned. In the M/M analysis, socio-cultural conditioning gives rise to cultural forms that are adopted and circulated and acted upon within a system, and evidence suggests in this instance, that new practices have been formed in the process.

 In Archer's EP above, T4 would represent the next research question, provoking the starting point for next MM or MS loop, potentially asking 'what if?' questions (Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent 2014); in this instance for example, this might be:

- •What if we considered another way to assess children's work?

- •What if we limit the use of written feedback strategies to creative writing?

- •What if we ask pupils what they think about feedback? This question in fact, led to a further Learning Round in the school.

The requirement for teachers to engage with academic reading for professional development purposes is itself mandated in education policy in Scotland (see Donaldson's call for 'self-evaluation, reflection and inquiry as powerful new tools for professional development' (Donaldson 2010, p96)).. 'Focused professional reading and research; Critical analysis of reading, learning and impact on professional practice' (GTCS, n.d.) are two suggested professional learning activities effectively mandated by the GTCS in the belief that they that might help teachers meet the professional standards, as set out by this regulatory body. Analytical dualism allows us to understand engagement with reading as a cultural form within the M/M explanatory framework as underpinned by deeper influences.

Further participant experiences and interactions with ideas across both groups confirm and vindicate participants' beliefs in specific ways; the nature of these interactions will now be considered in the following phase of analysis.

The Monkshill professional reading group has an important role in circulating, supporting and mediating cultural forms: it aims to provides a collegial, non-hierarchical space within the school but is strongly influenced by leadership in the school and in the local authority, and by dominant and persuasive discourses around practice. Formative assessment is a dominant cultural form in policy discourses nationally, and is also promoted in the local context of Monkshill by leadership through prioritising it in the School Improvement Plan. Some literature critiques PLCs for lacking specific, pedagogic focus (Riveros, Newton and Burgess 2012; Allen 2013) but these cases contradict this - this is not the case in either of these schools. The text chosen for discussion in the above example was suggested by Leslie as a result of her interactions in the external PL opportunity. It provides a pedagogic focus for discussion, and is also championed by Jordan and Alex, who takes a leadership-facilitator role for this professional reading group discussion. Leslie highlights her expertise as a resource which she uses in identifying cultural forms and the opportunities for elaborating them within the reading group:

> I've got a good knowledge, Alex has got a good knowledge, so if we are both talking about these things it encourages other people. So we will lead the professional reading groups, and then, it was funny... it was funny because we did Shirley Clarke and we got 16 folks and then we did one on inspection reports and nobody wanted to come! (laughs) And I thought that was really interesting, I thought, you're learning a great deal about that, but actually, they are more interested in Shirley Clarke, because that's real life sort of things that are happening [Leslie].

There is a slight paradox here that is surfaced when the causal mechanisms are used to explain the interplay within this example. The reading group provides a horizontal structure through and around which the cultural form (ideas on formative assessment), can percolate (Priestley, 2013). The interplay of individuals with a cultural form and a structural form result in the rejection of the cultural form relating overtly to hierarchical structural entities of accountability, such as HMIE. The result is different when the cultural form is changed: they embraced the text relating to formative assessment, on the basis that this is closer to what is familiar to them - the 'real life sort of things that are happening,' according to Leslie.

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Formative assessment procedures are accepted uncritically but they can also serve a performativity agenda, according to Bennett (2011). They are also, according to Dann (2014, p150), being 'reinterpreted' to support other accountability mechanisms such as national assessment policy or the school improvement plan which are in themselves, as data here suggest, a dominant cultural influence on their practice.

Although there is evidence of morphogenesis as a result of engaging with professional reading, there is also evidence of compliance along the lines of 'regimes of truth' (Roegman and Riehl 2015), similar to Clandinin and Connelly's 'rhetoric of conclusions' (1995), both of which can be identified in the data. Some concern instances where teachers submit to external prescriptions of authority over their own, in spite of some efforts on the parts of Kim, Charlie and Sandy to open up alternative perspectives, as will be detailed in the following example, drawn from data from a reading group discussion recording.

The discussion in Monkshill School was guided by six questions derived from the text and set by Alex. An example would be: In class how can we ensure feedback is effective, and not given too late to ensure improvements could be made? As facilitator, Alex also asked some 'devil's advocate' questions to stimulate and provoke participants' responses. In advancing some of these provocations, Alex, (in interview) seeks to stimulate different thinking about practice, but is aware that she might wish to go further in this regard than her colleagues:

> it's actually leading us to discuss a more diverse range of issues in the reading rather than getting side-tracked or the first thing that we brought up and snowballing from there….we would just have a bank of questions in the middle. A range of different topics, some of them quite thought provoking or quite contentious. I could easily have rocked the boat. Generally, I found at those sessions, everybody was engaged and they all had something to say. Whether it was positive or maybe a bit more down the moany route [Alex].

Alex suggests attempts at extending the dialogue to a more critical level, but seems to stop short, in declaring '*I could quite easily have rocked the boat*' but did not go quite that far.

For some participants the rhetoric of conclusions (Clandinin and Connelly 1995) was clear as they anchored ideas from practice to examples in the text. Some complementarities between different cultural forms were apparent, as some participants, such as Leslie for example, drew on ideas from other sources to extend the discussion on forms of feedback.

Generally, the group focused discussion on their understandings of the main concepts in the selected text but did not critically question any assumptions they may have made about it.

There are other indications in the data that ideas about teaching change in name only. Leslie, again, relates how some 'new learning' she describes above reinforces cultural forms from her (T1) initial teacher education experience:

> Respondent:…I think I had been reading a lot of Carol Dweck's things, and the growth mind-set, so we kind of moved, seemed to be moving up a pace, a stage on that but it kind of all makes sense, although I always believe that I've always been a growth mindset person, but I just didn't know that research, but I …that was never mentioned at [university] 20 years ago, there was no Carol Dweck…..no, but there was always positive teaching, I remember positive teaching in the classroom and stuff, that was a basis of a lot ….
>
> Interviewer: Right, and has that endured?
>
> Respondent: Aye, definitely, I mean each of these authors have just reinforced exactly what I think was the positive-ness……[Leslie]

For Leslie, in this illustration, interplay with cultural forms is not generative or transformative, but maintains the status quo in morphostasis.

The group shared and justified their practices to each other in exchanges and they support and reinforce each other's ideas and in this way ideas are homogenised (Vescio, Ross & Adams 2008,Owen 2014, Watson 2014, Stickney 2015) and feed a morphostatic loop. Some identify contradictions between their practice and ideas under discussion. Jordan questions his use of praise in feedback - he is reminded of how, in previous years, this was a feature of his practice. Now he feels he has 'taken a backwards step….when I hear myself today…' Jordan questions why this is and the others are quick to explain the apparent contradiction: a list of possible reasons are given by other participants that detail some material conditions that influence Jordan's agency, including:

> 'it's the time of year; it's just that we get tired; it's the numbers, movement, lack of space; the computer sometimes doesn't work; the blinds don't shut… all these things add to your frustration (general agreement across the group)' [several participants]

In this way, alternative possibilities or challenges to the original idea (praise) are closed down as the discussion turns bizarrely towards alternative ways of 'bringing in lines.' Critical questions are deflected in favour of a more 'congenial' conversation (Cranston 2009; Dufour 2004) The reading group encourages dialogue about ideas, but the discussion serves an end in itself as the possibility for a more critical conversation is closed down. In a further example, in response to a question about mechanisms for feedback in the classroom, Charlie attempts to introduce an alternative perspective to the discussion in asking 'What do the children think?' He is side-lined as further discussion of instrumental strategies and techniques for recording feedback for pupils in practice ensues. Resistance to adopting this practice is expressed when Kim, who was the only participant to express frustration at the end during a discussion on feedback on writing, highlights a tension. In pushing back on the accepted idea that the group should adopt the suggestions being discussed, Kim is unsupportive. She claims 'it will [add to work load], though, something has to go (said with emphasis). What goes?' The group sidesteps this question and any elaboration of this idea is closed down; the resistance to the prevailing discourse is quashed. Complementarities with Fendler's (2008) notion of enforced cohesion highlights Kim's isolation here where group cohesiveness is privileged over collegial discussion. A desire to maintain consensus and avoid what Cranston (2009, p12) identifies as 'uncomfortable conversations' prevails. A further illustration of this occurs when Sandy disagrees with some of the suggestions about praise and stickers, referring to an alternative system involving 'learning powers.' He invokes a degree of resistance to the received idea under discussion, and invites some sceptical exploration of collective pedagogic truths, but the idea is not elaborated. In keeping with Stickney's (2015, p507) notion of 'informed dissensus;' the 'rush to alignment' (Stickney 2015, p507) neutralises critical and political explorations of individual's own pedagogic truths.

These interactions capture the resistance to, and challenges involved in seeking out transformation of practice through professional discussion in PLCs. In Servage's (2008) terms, these examples illustrate reformative and not transformative powers. In relation to formative assessment as a regulated cultural form, new practices were generated but critique and alternative perspectives were largely absent from the discussion, thus limiting the potential for transformation. Interestingly however, some individuals contradict this

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idea in both settings: Muir, Danny, Sam, Sandy and Alex all seek alternative perspectives and individually make use of research as a resource that enables some transformation, which will be discussed in chapter ten.

8.5   Reading and research at Eden

Finding: Creating the conditions for epistemic resources requires more than making them available. The potential of research as an epistemic resource in PLCs requires leadership facilitation, in some form, in order to be fully realised.

In Eden High School, the PLC engaged in reading groups in a different way. As part of the facilitated process to support their LR, one of the twilight Continuing Professional Learning (CPL) sessions was dedicated to reading (data in the form of audio recording of this was not possible) I, and the lead facilitator who conducted the themed –focus discussion on dialogic teaching selected relevant readings (and in the case of dialogic teaching, some video clips) for shared discussion. Feedback as dialogue in the classroom and some literature discussing the practice and processes involved in observational rounds provided the reading content for the PLC. This was a more structured form of engagement as it was part of the facilitation process set up in the school to support the implementation of their LR. This arrangement corresponded slightly more closely to Dimmock's (2016) ideas on research knowledge as well as tacit teacher knowledge being signalled as valued by school leaders, and serving as an essential initial step to becoming a research-engaged school. Additionally, as mentioned previously, Gerry and I both identified and uploaded selected supplementary texts we felt were appropriate into a shared online community that had been created by Gerry. Although participants exercised choice, albeit guided by leadership, in Monkshill School, in Eden School the participants did not identify or choose texts as cultural forms: these were made available to them in a structure not of their making. It was striking in both settings how limited participants were in identifying ideas, texts, cultural forms that were relevant to them beyond policy prescriptions.

As mentioned above, Gerry was enthusiastic to change the culture at Eden school to one where relationships were prized and a research-informed ethos prevailed.   She describes a 'conversion' experience to academic reading and research, as a result of engagement in Masters' level learning through the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH):

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That's when I would probably say until that point (SQH) in terms of
research and having an interest in it and I was one of these people, like I
said, like I've not got the time to be able to do it, too busy. Then when I
started to do it, I realised the importance of it. I started to think, you know
what, I want more…. courses of universities would actually be a really good
thing to do in this school, I think, just because of your knowledge and
research and I suppose the level of knowledge and detail that you can
bring into a school. I always thought that would be a real opportunity,
particularly with learning and teaching, to tap into some sort of university
expertise [Gerry].

There was a keen sense that Gerry wanted to create conditions that allowed for the free-flow of research and theory as cultural forms in the whole school, not the collaborative PL structures in place. To further support this Gerry freed-up other structural forms, such as the working time agreement to allow all staff more freedom of choice over how they used their 35 hours contractual professional learning time (this will be further discussed in chapter nine). However, creating the conditions alone only goes some way to supporting transformation, as Wilson (2016) and Charner-Laird, Ippolito and Dobbs (2016) suggest. Ideas such as those presented in the online space require mediation to allow them to flow so that participants can engage with them:

Collaborative structures, alone, are unlikely to produce results, particularly
if they are mandated and created without attention to the need for
facilitation. Instead, schools and school districts must consider the vital
role that leaders, who are already embedded within school contexts, can
play in spearheading these groups (Charner-Laird, Ippolito and Dobbs
(2016, p994)

Gerry's role as school leader is highly significant here, but the analysis of this aligns more closely with structure, and will be discussed in chapter nine.

 Although participants were keen to find out about learning rounds at Eden, pro-active engagement with the research material at Eden was not evident from the data. Interplay between participants and the ideas within the online community structure mainly occurred as directed by facilitators and usually only when invited to complete a task, such as adding names to particular twilight sessions or responding to emails. This led to the online area serving more as a method of communication and repository rather than a mechanism to facilitate the free flow of ideas. Therefore, although structures were in place and reading

material was made available to allow ideas to circulate among participants there was a general (but not unanimous) reluctance on the part of participants to engage, acknowledge or register their engagement in the shared online community. Some participants such as Morgan resisted engagement with reading, and Ashley did not value the opportunity:

> I would say in terms of the reading side, I wasn't as committed, but the whole process, I was more committed to that [Ashley].

However, not all participants rejected the ideas. Although most tended more to engage with reading passively, Pat suggests there was progressive engagement over time for her in an incremental way but competing priorities created barriers to engagement:

> I think the more you kind of sent out the articles and what not, the more reading I did at home or thinking about my own practice and then, obviously, volunteering to become involved in the day. I would say as the process went on, I became more and more committed. Obviously, the articles were very helpful. Again, we don't always get time to look at these kind of things when we're planning lessons and marking [Pat].

It was clear that two orientations emerged in Eden School in this regard. Participants such as Lindsay, Sam, Danny, Chris and Viv valued reading and engaged readily with it. These participants had previously engaged, or were in the processed of advanced study at Master's level. As noted, Lindsay, for example, held Chartered Teacher status. Some others engaged more passively, citing, as Pat does, barriers that inhibit their interplay such as planning and marking, or Ashley who did not engage at all, thus limiting the possibilities of further elaboration and transformation.

Sam, an experienced teacher who had also participated in an authority-wide PLC, illustrates how interplay with the ideas in literature does not elaborate immediate changes in practices. This aligns with Lindsay, another research enthusiast who saw the need for a longer term perspective to open up an interim space for elaboration and development of the ideas to occur:

> It was actually from the research readings, I think, more than the actual process of the Learning Round, where the different types of interaction and the different types of feedback…. I suppose as well, looking at that. So, yes, I think I am now talking to people that's kind of in my head and I'm aware of it. So, yes, but I need to expand on it. I need to do more with it [Sam].

Sian, a newly qualified teacher, reported that reading and related conversations exerted some influence on deeper thinking about practice. Lindsay, also an experienced teacher, reported that they too valued the engagement with literature quite significantly…

> I saw it as an easy way to enhance my professional learning. I found the initial reading very interesting. It was probably the best reading I've done since I've did reading for the chartered teacher programme, which doesn't exist anymore.

For Viv, however, expectations were different – Viv articulates a connection between the professional reading, her leadership role and her own development:

> I think for me certainly having the middle leadership at the moment, I'm looking to expand my professional development through academic reading [Viv].

Danny reports a more significant impact; he draws on reading as a cultural form and sees its potential to develop and improve his own knowledge morphogenetically, illustrating how different individual interactions with cultural forms can suggest different potential outcomes:

> And through engaging in that professional reading, I feel as though I developed a much stronger understanding …. and that's been really, really important, in terms of the way we've had to take a non-judgmental voice, and that was my professional learning experience [Danny].

Danny goes further than most participants in espousing a belief in the importance of research in practice with reference to partnership working. His engagement with research through reading, not as Servage (2007) suggests, to reinforce existing beliefs, rather seeking transformation. This reflects Stickney's (2015, p497) proposition that the '*warrantability* (emphasis in original) of various pedagogical assertions' using theory, classroom evidence and research is part of the work that should take place in PLCs, more actively and intentionally encouraging the scrutiny of knowledge claims:

> I think it's pushing the gap between academic theory and practice in a practical setting. I really see value in it. I think that we should be using the expertise of university more to improve learning teaching. I think we should be looking at academic research more. I think we need to think of

ways of engaging staff with academic research, and continuing for people
to look at academic reading to improve and inform a practice, and improve
their understanding [Danny].

The manner of engagement with these ideas is clearly a site of tension or contradiction in beliefs about teachers in the data. Some participants use reading and research as a theoretical resource, others engage little, and others again such as Pat or Lindsay express interest but engage passively. None explicitly expresses dissatisfaction or seeks cultural alternatives that might offer a purely practically focused reading resource, but Danny's excerpt below expresses this assumption of others, highlighting a further tension:

> These sorts of things where it's underpinned by research, but it's actually
> giving staff something that they could quite easily take and try in a lesson,
> as opposed to the theory behind each of the different types of feedback. I
> think staff would be more willing to engage with that, and they would see
> more value in it, whereas, it just depends what type of person it is. I
> wouldn't have any issue with reading about the theory of feedback and I
> would probably find it quite interesting, but I know that if we were trying
> to encourage staff on a wider scale to do that, that they would much
> prefer something tangible and practical to come out of it [Danny].

There are differences in the ways staff in each school engaged with professional reading and inconsistencies in data may account for this, as a recording of the professional reading group was made in Monkshill, but not in Eden. Nonetheless, all participants were interviewed and asked their views on professional reading. What is noticeable from the Eden data is that with the exception of Sam, rarely did the participants make reference to the content or ideas within the readings they used in their PLC. Some valued the reading as part of the LR process, some actively engaged with it for their own interest or development, but did not explicitly articulate or demonstrate any further moves to independently discuss, experiment with, integrate or ultimately reject the ideas in relation to their own practice.

As also noted in the context of Monkshill, the reading aimed to provide each PLC with ideas that could circulate to feed their discussions about practice; the items selected for reading related to the focus for the LR which staff had negotiated. In both settings the ideas were mandated to greater or lesser degrees. At the empirical level, ideas were mediated in discussion in both settings. Data report that, in the main, participant experiences in the reading groups point to general acceptance of the ideas presented in the literature and a

lack of critical engagement with them pointing to complementarities with critical views on PLCs as posited by Cranston (2009); Maloney & Konza (2011), Allen (2013), and Owen (2014). These authors suggest the more challenging work of robust and critical conversations that consider a wider range of perspectives is largely avoided in PLCs, resulting, in most cases, in the a missed opportunity to elaborate new cultural forms and practices.

Reading and research represent a significant cultural form in this study, as had been discussed above. Although individuals' interactions highlight some tensions in the differences in motivation, choice and degrees of engagement with it, data suggest that it was under-used as an epistemic resource and required more robust promotion and facilitation and critical interrogation on the part of school leaders, or those who assumed a leadership position in the PLCs, if it is to realise its potential as an epistemic resource at the centre of socio-cultural change processes at the heart of the PLC.

8.6   Theory and practice at Monkshill

Finding: PLC participants use theory to reinforce existing ideas, limiting opportunities for extending practice.

Data indicate that research in and of practice is a significant cultural form for some of the participants in Monkshill to advance their professional learning. Sandy is the most research-engaged participant but data from Muir, Alex, Leslie and Charlie also suggest that they regularly engage with educational research and value its importance in their practice and professional learning. These participants all demonstrate understanding of the importance of research in Godfrey's (2016) terms of 'modelling a researching and knowledge construction approach to learning' (p311).

These engagements do not always result in new cultural elaborations however. As noted on page 171, Leslie's account of her encounters with research illustrate how new ideas can be used to reinforce long-standing existing practices and beliefs in a morphostatic loop.

Engagement with theory is a prevailing essential in Webster-Wright's (2009) view of any authentic PL that exhorts educators to challenge their assumptions. This is in order to effect 'a shift in the conceptualization of, and support for learning, from continually developing professionals to supporting authentic PL' (Webster-Wright 2009, p728). Data exemplify this in the excerpt from Sandy below, who highlights a tension in technical, uncritical adopting of cultural forms, which runs the risk of reinforcing existing practices as above, and also morphostatically resulting in little change. Sandy expresses awareness of the need to use deeper knowledge that may result as an emergent property of the reading group, giving greater potential to promote morphogenetic changes in practice:

> I do think that sometimes, (with emphasis) you can sort of pay of lip-service to this and that is what's going on a little bit in that everybody's saying 'oh growth mindset this, growth mindset that but we need to look into it a little bit deeper and maybe…,

> …and reading, I'm very,… at the moment I feel like I've done quite a lot of reading and quite a lot of research about the Visible Learning and Growth Mindset and I feel like I know where I'm going with that and I've now got quite interested in Jo Bowler, who is a professor from Stanford University, and she is a professor in education in Maths, and she works, actually quite closely with Carol Dweck, and I'm particularly interested in maths, partly because it's a School Improvement Plan priority but mainly because I don't think maths is being taught very well, at the moment, and that's something I'd be really interested in having… a …you know…. A little bit of influence in the way it goes forward.

> It's because they have run with what is currently good research (said with emphasis) about what works, you know to, to improve children's learning basically [Sandy].

Sandy is different to most Monkshill participants in this regard. He identifies some tensions in engagement with research as a cultural form. On the one hand, he is aware that superficial engagement with research effects little change and results in stasis. On the other hand, through notes shared by Sandy, there is little evidence of critical engagement with these sources. Some sources used in his practitioner enquiry have been contested in how they present research (see Rømer 2019 and Eacott 2017 for a critique of the work of Hattie, for example). There is further tension in the positioning of practitioner enquiry both as a cultural form, as an expectation of GTCS standards for professional learning (CLPL) and as a way of extending and enhancing teachers' knowledge about practice (Humes 2014) by

drawing on a range of sources that may include research. However complementarities between the interview data and field notes (26/02/2017) do indicate a focus on shared problem-solving and planning, which implies that teachers exchange experiences, ideas and methods aimed at developing shared innovative teaching practices (appendix v: field notes 26/02/2017).

Observations in Sandy's class confirm translation of his research engagement has elaborated practice. This is achieved through Sandy's engagement with cultural forms, but not in the context of the PLC however. Alternative structures are at play here: relationships outwith the school, with previous colleagues, and with the Educational Psychologist colleagues set conditions for these interactions, which play out in Sandy's classroom practice. Analytical dualism exposes the multi-layered nature of reality as Sandy experiences it. Further discussion of Sandy's agency in this interaction will follow in the next chapter.

8.7 Culture: a summary

Using Archer's explanatory programme as an analytical tool, this chapter has separated out significant cultural forms in the data that are at work in the PLC systems. Ideas about teachers' practice are guided by a clear sense of concern for their students. Dominant discourses at macro-level strongly condition leadership and teacher beliefs about practice almost to the exclusion of any alternative epistemologies. Teachers select and mediate ideas through their interactions in their PLCs. Participants in both settings moved beyond the scanning and storytelling stage of interdependency and demonstrated some examples of the next level of 'aid and assistance' in engaging in discussion of each other's practice (Meirink et al. 2010, p164). For transformation of practice to result from elaborations within the PLCs, they need to be sites of joint work, and work to move beyond these lower order collegial interactions and engage more critically with theory to extend their practices. Leadership encounters with cultural forms can provide directions of travel for future elaborations, such as the role of educational research and reading in Eden School. Leadership beliefs and engagement with cultural forms such as RRS support the emergence of a strong ethos at Monkshill School.

9 Structure

The PLCs offer a structure for teachers in this study to engage, interact and pursue aspects of their professional learning. As discussed in chapter three, the notion of professional learning is determined by deeper mechanisms – ideas held in policy structures of accountability. This analysis offers a response and some insight into RQ 3: What structural factors are at play within PLCs an in what ways do they enable and inhibit the social practices within PLCs?

The previous chapter presented the significant cultural forms that influence and create conditions for interactions to take place between the individuals and their contexts in each school. As Analytical Dualism involves the close examination of the interplay between individuals, cultural and structural forms, this chapter will focus on structural forms that emerged in analysis of the data. In keeping with the Analytical Dualism model, structures in the data will be considered as simultaneously analytically distinct entities but also as elements that combine in complex interplay with cultural forms and the individuals within these social systems. This interplay illuminates the constraints and enablements that condition the actions of participants, how they are positioned in roles in relation to each other and in relation to deeper structures that mould their actions. This chapter will focus on analysing structure within the social systems of the PLC in each school.

Revisiting structure

As outlined in chapter five, structures pertain to relationships within open social systems. In seeking to identify structural forms and emergent properties through interview data and field notes, a set of themes emerged in the data responding to relational structures at meso (national/local authority level) and micro (school level). This distinction will be used to structure the analysis that follows. I will offer an analysis of themes, dealing firstly with relationships and their effects as structural forms in as they act upon, and are shaped by actors in the PLCs in the two schools using the meso/micro typology to further distinguish causal structural mechanisms identified in the data.

9.1 Relationships – micro-level

Finding: emergent security in relationships along vertical and horizontal axes enables PLC formation

At the outset, it seems important to reiterate that relationships on horizontal and vertical dimensions in both settings appear to be positive. In Monkshill, staff frequently make reference to being happy in the school, and similar to Eden, staff turnover appears to be low, which at the least, indicates stability within each setting. Micro-level relationships are clearly important at Monkshill school and also at Eden. A question of scale comes into play when analysing relationships with regards to the PLC work going on in each setting and adds to some asymmetry in the cases. For example, due to the size of Monkshill school, micro-level relationships within the school as a whole are difficult to distinguish from relationships inside the PLCs (the Professional Reading Group and the Learning Round) and at Eden, micro-level relationships tend to function as an extension of departmental structures.

In Monkshill, existing relationships create and support the conditions that allow the PLC to function rather than the PLC being the vehicle for the development of collegial relationships (Lee and Louis, 2019). Here relationships at micro-level function both horizontally, through social connections and stage partner relationships and vertically, through the hierarchical structure in the school. Stage-partner relationships are highly valued by most of the respondents and these support a horizontal structure for professional relationships where shared work can take place:

> I work really closely with my stage partner in P7 and we do pretty much everything together (laughs), you know, we plan together, we often get the children together and we ask them to plan topics and things like that – get al.l the ideas from the children and then go away and look at what is manageable, and we also try as much as possible to try to share with the P6s as we are quite close to them anyway, and that's quite nice for them to know as well cause it means that we're not repeating what might be happening in 6, and we are sharing good ideas and things like that, and that just happens naturally at most stages, .., I think that some people are more confident than others at doing that. Me and my stage partner are both very open and want to share all the time. Obviously in a big staff like this, not everybody is like that, but on the whole, and it's very much encouraged by management at staff meetings and particularly at the start of the year, it's always emphasised, please plan together it helps with a consistent approach to your teaching [Jordan].

When trying to reach understanding about what might support such relationships, Rowan suggests a sense of security that underpins his horizontal and vertical relationships:

> It's a very, I feel, open management that I would go to Lee in a moment or I'd go to Nic if I had anything that I was worried about or I would go to a colleague. There's never a place that you can't think…there's never a place that you can't think, 'Oh, I shouldn't really say that. I maybe should know that already.' That kind of thing, I would just openly say, 'I'll go and speak to somebody' if I was worried. I think we've got a good culture there. I think people when they come into the school they say it's got a friendly vibe. I don't know what they pick up on, but it's a friendly staffroom. Nobody has a specific seat or cup [Rowan].

Relationships are frequently characterised as 'open' in Monkshill. Staff seem to respect and feel well supported by leadership - a condition of successful PLCs that aligns with identified literature (Brodie 2019, Hord 2004, Stoll et.al. 2006). In this respect, leadership support is sometimes cited as benevolent technical provisioning of time, space and resources, but a deeper analysis shows that participants at Monkshill feel their ideas are valued by leadership. They are comfortable about sharing them openly and are not concerned about exposing vulnerabilities or honest beliefs, which according to Hallam et al. (2015) occurs when relationships in PLCs are focused on building trust – Cranston (2009) suggests that trust provides bonds that hold the structure together. Security is an emergent property from leadership interactions with staff, as Rowan suggests above and Charlie further supports:

> I genuinely believe that we are… nobody is too vulnerable that they keep things to themselves, so that the children will come first. So, I suppose it is the rights respecting ethos, and the fact that we do have the LR and the fact that I was able to say, actually, the LR wasn't great for that wee boy because of whatever, rather than just towing the partly line and we are willing to speak our own minds, but in a respectful way [Charlie].

A CR analysis requires us to go beyond empiricism however in order to uncover the nature of reality and the deeper mechanisms at play that create the conditions allowing these relationships to develop and be sustained over time. Charlie suggests the rights respecting ethos of the school has an influence here. Jordan's testimony provides some insights in this regard, which although still reported data (therefore, empirical), point towards deeper

structural factors that allow relationships to develop. The accountability structure of review and development, Professional Review and Development (PRD):

> Interviewer: And why do they have that respect then?
>
> Respondent: Because of decisions they've made before that have benefitted our school, and have pulled us right up; because they do ask for our opinion, because you do get quality feedback from them. I feel very strongly that they give us quality feedback …. like for example your PRD, …how you're getting on, what strengths or areas you'd like to develop, and they'd always encourage that and yeah, it's just the way that they treat us, and the openness and the way we are made to feel valued well, most of the time. It's not always perfect, we all have our mumps and groans, about things, but it's just like that. I know that I feel that way, I don't know that everybody feels that way, but I think in general, we are a fairly happy school and that does come from leadership a lot of the time [Jordan].

The data here suggests that Jordan feels supported in the PRD process, and that it does not fully subscribe to the dominant managerialist perspective of professionalism (Kennedy 2007), but that the developmental purpose of the process is foregrounded in the conversation between Jordan and Nic or Lee. Nonetheless, the process is clearly focused on individual development and accountability and it falls short of providing an opportunity to focus on collective accountability (Kennedy 2007) or mutual accountability (Noguera and Noguera 2018). Here, the process is not used to ensure managerial accountability is evidenced. Jordan suggests that through dialogue and feedback relationships are developed which then further results in security in individuals as an emergent property through the interaction the structure provides. Additionally, in this analysis, conditions are created that support positive horizontal and vertical relationships in the school, and the strength of these could be what enables the formation PLC formation in Monkshill, in both their professional reading group and their LR.

9.2   School structures

Finding: Introducing new structures and creating the conditions for new PLC structures alone does not change relationships or practice: leadership action is required to support and enable a relational move from congenial to collegial relationships.

Change processes are navigated differently in each setting and the data tell a different story when looking more closely at how the work of PLCs plays out in each school. In considering general patterns of change, previous experiences of PLCs encountered barriers to effective change:

> We have had teaching learning communities in the past which were very successful, and gave the opportunity ... Good opportunities to share practice. But everything folded. I think Curriculum for Excellence has been responsible for that in many ways because of the impact we have. There's so much…..so much time has been spent on curriculum, on qualifications, on devising new qualifications and then rearranging with SQA [Chris].

Underlying, competing cultural and structural mechanisms (new curriculum, qualifications authority) have put pressure on the schools system. Chris sees this as the reason for previous failed attempts at TLCs. Sam supports a different view of improvement interventions as 'things to try out,' but also with little lasting effect:

> Respondent: Even although the other teachers in the department weren't part of a TLC, they embraced some of the techniques that were on and we built them into our plans as well.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, thank you.
>
> Respondent: Then this kind of fizzled out a wee bit, which ... I still use the techniques and strategies that I learned through that. It's a bit of a shame. Then Cooperative Learning came in and there was another thing to try out [Sam].

The data here suggest the school was trapped in repeated morphostatic cycles, using a similar structure and different cultural forms but not achieving any sustained change.

The structures of leadership and subject departments, determined relationships in Eden school. Departments were grouped by geographical areas in the school, roughly along cognate subjects in a faculty arrangement, although a formal faculty structure was not in place. Leadership roles provided a hierarchical structure in both cases, but as mentioned in chapter six, any surface-level comparison would suggest that cases are considered in a context-independent way, which is to overlook the rich and complex reality (Flybjerg 2005) case study methodology can provide.

Structurally, leadership is organised in similar, standard ways with senior leadership teams of different sizes in each setting, supported by middle leadership and patterns of relationships based around subjects (in Eden) and stages (in Monkshill). Additional formal structures like the Learning and Teaching Working Group (LTWG) and the departmental structure in Eden school were much more to the fore. The LTWG guided learning and teaching policy in the school, including the broad parameters of professional learning. Subject departments tended to 'atomise' groups of staff in subject-oriented groups and determined relationships to a significant extent: many participants made reference to the limitation this structure placed on their opportunities to cross-fertilize ideas in exchanges with colleagues from different departments. School leader Gerry was clear in her intentions to try to minimise the effects of invisible walls within the school, having already established that prior conditions reinforced them:

> ..one of the things that people said to me when I arrived here was there was very little opportunity for people to work together. They worked in silos. They felt that they were just very much within their department [Gerry –field notes].

This was less evident at Monkshill where PLC formation was more open due to issues of scale and the lack of departmental structure. Across both cases, some of the participants performed leadership roles in the school. In the case of Eden, the formal leadership roles among participants were performed by Gerry and Chris. Other leadership roles were performed by Viv, as a middle-leader and principal teacher for senior stages. Danny was a new recruit to the school on a temporary contract, but took a leadership role in supporting the LR in the school as he was active in the school's LTWG. It could be proposed that these four individuals were structurally part of an 'elite' group within the school occupying roles

that shaped events. The LTWG cut across the dominant departmental structure of the school, and in doing so, served to partially disrupt the vertical flow of power, reconfiguring some relationships and roles for some key individuals.

Head teacher Gerry has positive impressions of relationships across the school on various dimensions: between staff and between staff and pupils:

> I think our relationships are really, really positive in our school. I think the staff care. I think there's good teacher-pupil relationships, I think there's good pupil-pupil relationships, I think there's good teacher-teacher relationships, and because of that, I think it's a nice place to work. People quite enjoy coming into work. When they come here, they tend not to go anywhere else, they're quite happy to stay here. A lot of the people who are here have been here for a long time, because it's a nice environment to work in, and I think the overall impression of everyone in the school is that the staff generally care about the kids, and they would happily get involved with anything that they thought would make that situation better [Gerry].

Good relationships are important for the functioning of any structure. It has been noted that the departmental structure of a large secondary school can present a barrier to relationships and lead to isolation, as Gerry alludes to above. Good relationships may enable collegial relationships, but Gerry's description of relationships above is more aligned with Cranston's (2009) idea of congeniality as opposed to collegiality. The structure and work of the PLC, in part, involves enabling a relational move from congenial conversations to more uncomfortable or critical conversations as suggested by Cranston (2009), Maloney & Konza (2011), Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) and Noguera and Noguera (2018). Congenial relationships seem to be prized above collegial relationships, and this finding complements the finding concerning participant interactions in the analysis of the mediation of cultural forms in chapter eight.

Staff impressions reveal that the dominance of the subject department structure leaves some participants feeling 'just so isolated [Pat] and 'very department-oriented' [Ashley]. In contrast to Monkshill, some staff saw participation in the LR as having potential to form new relationships, but this was more of a possibility, not a reality. For example, Coryn a relatively new member of staff, valued the opportunity the LR gave her to start building relationships:

Most useful was just a dialogue with professionals, and I think it's also just to do with the culture that you get to have, with staying at your base, with your department. So… I'm a big believer in getting across the school, and that made it successful for me even on ... We don't identify best practice. What I'll take away from it is a building of relationships [Coryn].

Pat, as a long-standing member of staff, also saw the LR as a starting point for building relationships:

I've got to speaking more with teachers that I maybe hadn't even spoken to properly before. I think it'll definitely be positive for building relationships in the school. Yeah. Absolutely [Pat].

Jo also reflected on the experience and saw some potential for developing relationships:

I wouldn't say it's changed a lot for me yet, but I can maybe see with how we work with it in school there might be changes to how I teach or how I provide feedback or how I ... Maybe if I'm working with a probationer or something along those lines. So I think it's still a wee bit early to see, but I anticipate there is likelihood maybe some changes... [Jo].

This is not to say that generally participants were at odds with Gerry's perception that relationships were positive. However, there was evidence of a tension between congeniality and collegiality as described by Cranston (2009) and Dufour (2004) that can present a barrier to transformation of practice. For some members of staff, they were comfortable with existing relationships and the LR did not provide a new structure for different relationships. Generally, across both cases however, there was a conflation of community and consensus, as identified by Cranston (2009), even when this direction of travel may be misguided. This idea will be further elaborated in chapter ten.

Generally, across both cases, some respondents reported that relationships did not change as a result of the work in the LR. Viv, a keen supporter of the LR and a member of the elite leadership team shared a view that reflects this:

I think we have a very, very positive relationship across the staff. And I don't feel that this is relationship wise impacted it anyway. Everybody's very open. And although we don't really have observations going on across departments we know that the doors open regardless. So if you wanted to go in and see what somebody else is doing, if I'm teaching something in geography that I feel there might be a link to modern studies, I know I can

always go in and see anyway. So the relationship element of it and the support network has always been strong. So I don't think this has emphasised it in any way [Viv].

This stance is supported by Jo and Ashley, and most emphatically by Jude, in the following exchange:

Interviewer: Okay now think about your working relationships have they changed in any way as a result of the learning round?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Not at all.

Respondent: Not at all [Jude].

 The LTWG and the departmental structure served to condition relationships quite significantly. In spite of the attempts by Gerry and the elite leadership team to introduce new structures with the intention of changing relationships, and in spite of evidence to suggest participants saw possibilities of new structural forms, little changed in the relational dynamics within the school structure.

The departmental structure supports Servage's (2009) concern about insularity or exclusionary arrangements in relationships in PLCs, as this was seen as the default structure with which participants identified. However, in both schools there was a suggestion that Cranston's (2009) and DuFour's (2004) proposition of congeniality dominating staff relationships at the expense of more critically challenging relationships held some truth. Cranston suggests that awareness on the part of school leadership of the need to move PLCs beyond congeniality is essential, if they are to become places of trust and risk-taking that 'allow and provide occasions for the kind of disagreement and disequilibrium that comes with critical questioning and debates of best practices' (Cranston 2009, p18). However, Gerry recognised that congenial relationships may be an essential starting point for more collegial relationships but there is a risk the former might also undermine the latter if they become entrenched. Gerry described staff as working previously in 'silos,' where staff were comfortable in these relationships. Tension arises when seeking to move beyond congeniality within departments to restructuring relationships into a form that might focus less on congeniality, but be more conducive to critical questioning that is essential for

transformation to occur, according to Cranston (2009) and Dufour (2004). Although the LR provided a new structure for different relationships to form, it did not meet expectations to enable a shift from congenial relationship to collegial relationships that might better enable transformation. Alex in Monkshill succeeded in generating some critical conversations to a degree. The role of the facilitator within the structure of the PLC is key here. As facilitator at Eden School, I had responsibilities in this respect and critical conversations formed part of the preparation leading up to the LR. However, there was a tension between protecting and extending the existing congenial relationships across the school in order to allow a space for collegial relationships to potentially emerge. Although there were some, further opportunities for critical conversations to become part of the routine of the LR work would be potentially beneficial (see appendix v – day 3, 4 and 6 provided these opportunities). Lastly, in hindsight, expectations that the participants themselves might be prepared to step into such conversations was perhaps unrealistic, given the stage of relational developments in the school.

9.3 Roles

Findings:

> *1: Leadership move to blur the lines between mandatory and voluntary participation in the PLCs, however no resistance to participation is evident.*
>
> *2: PLCs reinforce existing middle leadership structures in schools and do not 'flatten hierarchies.'*

In pursuing professional learning within different PLC structures, participants exercised and adopted roles in LRs in both Monkshill Primary and Eden as participant or leader. In each setting, participation was encouraged was open and non-exclusionary. By this, they were free to subscribe to the PLC in each setting, no staff were discouraged or excluded, but there were some incentives and caveats. School leadership in each case did not formally mandate membership within the PLC in both cases, but did exercise some power to encourage participation at different times and in different ways. For example, in Monkshill, the material resource of the reading text was purchased for each member of staff, which served to incentivise, but not mandate participation in the professional reading group. There was nonetheless an expectation that all staff would participate in the LR however. In Eden, an institutional structure of working groups was in place (the LTWG) and the

expectation that all staff had to participate in one of three working groups, was accepted by all staff. These structures offered opportunities for interactions to support the development of ideas the teachers had identified and for relationships to form. Data below illustrate how the groups come into being in Monkshill: Alex, a principal teacher, had a key role within the Monkshill group, and outlines the multiple dimensions of her rationale for taking a leadership role in the LR in this lengthy extract:

> Interviewer: You're the main driver of learning rounds here. Why is that? What is it about it that makes you want to be the one that leads it in this school?
>
> Respondent: I offered originally and it was years ago when we did the first session. I was in the nursery and they wanted to focus on personalised learning, which I was really interested in. But, because I wasn't in the school and I felt I was a good person to lead it because I wasn't involved. I wasn't in the staff room at break, I wasn't in the staff room at lunchtime, I was independent, I wasn't going to be in involved in going round and observing. I wasn't going to pre-judge anything. It meant I was within the school but an outsider if you see what I mean? I thought it would be quite interesting.
>
> Also, I've got really quite strong beliefs in what education should be and the experiences children should have. For my own development, I thought it would maybe make me listen to why others think what they think if that makes sense? I was really quite good at going, "No. Actually, if you did it that way," or, "No. This way is actually will give you better results."
>
> I wasn't as good at listening to others and why they would actually do things the way they were doing them. I thought it would personally help me and then professionally help the school. From being an outsider observing or listening to the comments.
>
> Interviewer: That insider, outsider idea... *(Note - Alex was a member of staff in the nursery, outside the main building)* I see,...that's why you ended up--
>
> Respondent: That's why I ended up doing it, yes. Then, because I was a chartered teacher, I am-- We thought, "Well, that would be a quite good focus for your charter teacher part, to keep the standards for your charter teacher [Alex].

A combination of factors are at play to allow Alex to position herself as leader in the LR (she also takes some informal leadership in the professional reading group). Individual

accountability to the underlying structure of standards of Chartered Teacher, although no longer in existence (see chapter three), is one among several factors. Alex's role as principal teacher and lead nursery teacher in the annexed building to the main school sets her at a distance as an 'outsider' to the main social structure of the school and she positions this as advantageous. She identifies personal developmental benefits. The underlying factors supporting this role lean largely into individual accountability mechanisms, exemplifying the individual/mutual accountability conflict that can occur when PLC structures bump up against regulatory mechanisms for individual accountability. This will be further explored in the next section.

Muir demonstrated motivation for participating in the PLCs at Monkshill. In the Professional Reading group, she picked out the opportunity it offers of discussion through interplay with broad cultural forms within education generally, when describing ways of interacting collegially within the school:

> Professional reading on a Friday afternoon….. you're picking a topic and reading around it, so you're having a good discussion…. They've been quite good…from the point of view….I mean, there's been a few that have been really interesting…. not infant based. It's good to get out of your own area and talk about a few other things, maybe like the whole of the school or just education in general [Muir].

There is a sense of value in participation in the PLC and Muir sees it as an opportunity to broaden her 'horizon of observation' (Little 2003) as illustrated above. Voluntary participation and non-compulsion in collaborative structures set these PLCs apart from mandated professional learning practices, which fall within the less productive and heavily critiqued category of 'contrived collegiality' (Datnow 2009; Hargreaves 1994, 2012). In general, the data from Monkshill contradicts the arguments made about mandated participation: participants showed little resistance but still showed enthusiasm. Danny explains how participation occurs at Eden:

> So, they must be involved in some sort of collaborative observation, and I think that that sends a message that that stuff is important, and you need that. I think those messages coming from the head teacher, the deputy head teacher, the senior leadership team, it then sets a tone for the school. And that is really important, if they value it then staff value it. We get more buy-in staff we then start to see change, I feel.

And it's not imposed on anyone in terms of that it's the expectation that everyone's involved in one or the other. It was never imposed, it was always supportive in terms of time from the working time agreement was put aside to make sure that staff weren't having to give up time after school. There was a number of measures I think the senior leadership team put in place to help staff get involved in it, to make it easier for staff to get involved in it.

I feel as though if they hadn't given that much time and resources to it, then it maybe wouldn't have been as successful as I feel it was. And obviously, the view is that we continue to use learning rounds and lesson study to keep improving, and I think getting it right the first time is really, really important, because it then sets a tone for what's going to come, and if people had a bad experience with it, then you would find it tough to get buy-in for the next few. And I think having that message that it is important, but it's voluntary. That's really important [Danny].

Danny acknowledges that school leaders have created conditions (Stoll et al 2005; Hallam et al., 2015) to enable their PLCs to take place. This involves expressing support through resourcing and provisioning of time. Danny interprets the provisioning of this level of material support as a strong endorsement of the processes involved in their PLCs. This characterises Wilson's (2016) technical and cultural factors laid down by leadership as conditions from which PLCs are expected to develop. Participants at Eden school PLCs are navigating a carefully laid pathway between mandated and voluntary participation and between autonomy and constraint within the Working Time Agreement. Individual accountability here is shaped into alignment within wider structures – school improvement, regulatory standards and contractual obligations through participant engagement in a PLC. The voluntary nature of participation is heavily caveated, but again, the data show no resistance to participation.

A different pattern of participation has emerged at Monkshill, where there has been a shift over time from voluntary to mandatory participation:

but I think the other change that other people will tell you about – it doesn't bother me at all - you could be part of it or not, so there was a choice, some people chose not to do it for whatever reason, and no questions asked…… and that was fine so that's completely gone. So if there was someone out there who felt it was very stressful or whatever, then that opportunity for opt out has gone (laughs) [Muir].

In a surface-level analysis the PLC structure in both settings accommodates the 'loose-tight' power balance as described by DuFour (2007b). Leadership actions shape the structure, but in stepping out of the interactions inside the LR, they leave space for internal relationships and participant interactions to unfold. A loose-tight balance might soften the grip of vertical accountability in the structure (Stoll et al. 2006, Vescio, Ross & Adams 2008, Owens 2014, Watson 2014, Ellis et al. 2015, Roegman & Riehl 2015) and ensure that it is not relinquished entirely to a horizontal form for the structure. This might manifest in aligning the work of the PLC to be grounded in the school's improvement agenda, for example.

The Professional Reading group at Monkshill in contrast, is voluntary, but here it can be seen from previous discussion in that the choice of text is influenced in both cases by wider institutional structures. Reading material, as well as colleagues, facilitators and videos, are detailed PLCs by Christ, Arya and Chui (2017) as resources which have potential to influence 'desired PLC outcomes – i.e. teacher learning, application of this learning to instruction, and student learning' (ibid, p96) with varying reported effects. Participation at Monkshill in this regard reflects that identified by Stickney (2015, p490), occurring when ''co-operation turns into co-optation'' (ibid), and teachers are positioned in the PLC facing both ways as agents of change, but subjected to mandatory participation in the process, which, to greater or lesser extents is evidenced in both cases here.

9.4   Accountability – individual or collective?

Finding:

1. *Low-interdependency activities such as uncritical sharing of practice inhibit deeper structural and cultural change. They reinforce and privilege individual accountability over mutual accountability.*

2. *A sense of mutual accountability must be explicitly articulated and understood to be effective in wider change processes.*

There was a clear sense in the data that participants felt strongly about accountability to their pupils and, as detailed in chapter eight, showed genuine concern for them and the outcomes they might achieve. Interplay within the structures in each case suggests vertical

system compliance accountability in response to wider accountability agendas, rather than collective or mutual accountability is at play. Sam from Eden illustrates this:

> Well, I think they're trying to improve learning and teaching in the school. I think through that they're trying to raise attainment. They're trying to improve attainment, which is a national improvement framework priority [Sam].

And Nic, from Monkshill explains the way in which responses to pressure from wider structures shape the school priorities and the work of the PLC:

> curriculum pressures, changing the curriculum, the changing expectations, from government, from authorities. We have got to grips with CfE as we understand it to possibly greater extent, and now you've got the NIF and greater expectations of testing and the levels of attainment where the children should be…….[Nic].

A fault line could be identified between collective and individual accountability, signalling complementarities with Kennedy's (2016) highlighting of the conflicts to be navigated in this respect when teachers consider accountability in PLCs. Although the aims of PLCs may reflect a shared endeavour and a vague sense of collective responsibility (Hargreaves and O'Connor 2018), some underlying accountability mechanisms can be detected when participants are asked about what connections they might identify between the LR, professional learning and their practice. Participants see themselves as a continuous and individual improvement project; they have been conditioned in ways identified by Ball (2003), Connell (2009) and Holloway and Brass (2018) that feeds into a performative, managerial understanding of professionalism. Many participants identify the wider aim of raising attainment as an individual responsibility. Chris, senior leader at Eden, perhaps more strongly reflects Holloway and Brass's (2018, p378) idea of the 'performative teacher' connecting student improvement more directly with individual performativity:

> I was always more in the kind of, well, it was important to me that my pupils did well in my class, that was important, it was important that I got good results at SQA and so on [Chris].

Lindsay, Ashley and Pat from Eden, reflected an individualised, self-evaluative perspective which places them along with most others on the individual accountability side of the fault line:

> For me, it was just a discussion and I think, looking inward to myself, you think you're really good at things and then when you actually think about what you're doing and evaluate your own practise ... For me, it was probably looking inwards and evaluating myself [Pat].

For Morgan, a probationary teacher at the time, the link between the LR and her perception of individual improvement was strong:

> For me professionally, again, it comes back to my opportunity to develop as a teacher. Being able to see other people, put other things into practice that I might not have came (sic) across before. It might even be something just as simple as an order of how someone else does it that I can take and give better experiences to pupils [Morgan].

At Monkshill School, Sandy emphatically prioritises individual improvement over a more collective sense of accountability in a previous experience of another version of PLC- a learning trio, which she experienced in a previous school:

> Well at my previous school, I was at [another school] until before Christmas, … we'd done the trio but it was for something that was on the school improvement plan (SIP) and all the teachers had to go and observe, I can't remember… I think it was feedback or something in maths, and we had to go and observe something specifically and then report to our trio, and then I think the management had a listen in to what we found, what had gone on. And that was OK, [pause] *but* (with emphasis) we really wanted to focus for *ourselves* on something which we thought was a problem in our specific classrooms, because maybe, you know, as a whole, yes, it's really important to take forward all the things on the SIP, and to have consistency among the school, but you have your own little niggles in your classroom that *you* want to address, and I don't think there is really a way of doing that at the moment. So I thought that if we did the same set up, but instead of the management setting the agenda we set our own agenda, eh, that that would be something that we would find useful, and we all did really find it useful….. I didn't really feel that what we were addressing was….I felt was a priority *in my class* (with emphasis), it was a school priority (yes, uhuh) but you know I didn't really feel that that was a big priority individually, whereas you know, if you set your own agenda you can address a little niggle [Sandy].

Sam at Eden is interesting in this regard as she straddles the dividing line between individual and collective accountability. She articulates a questioning and individual search for improvement to bring about better student outcomes:

Is there something I can do in the classroom that can better my practise, that can better my delivery, that can improve the pupils' experience and understanding of what you're trying to teach them? I think, for me, that's the core of it all. Anything that comes out like this that you feel is worthwhile and is going to help raise attainment, if you like, then for me, that is very important [Sam].

Sam also makes reference to a collective sense of responsibility, which is absent in most of the other participants:

I mean the school's job is to provide the best for their pupils. I think these experiences should do that. Also, to try and achieve across the teaching staff a kind of commonality, if you like, that *we all* (said with emphasis) buy into this and *we all* think that it's an important way to improve our pupils' experience [Sam].

As highlighted in chapter eight, Danny's belief in this regard reflects a more systemic awareness and commitment to a collective sense of school-wide accountability, attributing imagined transformational potential of these outcomes to engagement with the LR process:

The reason we're doing this is because we want to make a difference to the young people. It's because we want to improve the teaching and learning experience for the young people [Danny].

This view is not shared universally across the group however. Lindsay's response illustrates this:

But yeah, so it made me think about what can I do here that might be a little bit different. Not for people to see, but for me to do. What have I not done? What should I do? So I did something that I've never done before [Lindsay].

Coryn also supports a hesitant commitment to identifying any resulting changes beyond the individual level:

I suppose just now I would say it's too early to tell. So at this stage, I would say perhaps unsuccessful in that I'm not sure what ... You know, I'd say I've already spoken to people about best practice, but we've not kind of sat down and had the findings of that yet. So my hope is that it will be successful and I'll get a lot out of it, but I suppose we're still in an intermediary stage, I feel right now anyway [Coryn].

Jude, once again gives a negative response in clear terms:

Interviewer: Has it resulted in anything new in the school?

Respondent: I don't think it has yet.

Interviewer: Right…..

Respondent: I think once we've had the opportunity to sit down and really spend some time on what we're going to do with the results. I think it will. I think people have the ambition for it to, and would like to see it have an impact. But at the moment, I don't think it's had anything new in the school [Jude].

Pursuing means of professional personal improvement at an individual level is not problematic in itself. Indeed this is mandated by regulatory structures teachers must respond to, as highlighted in chapter four's discussion of professional standards. The tension arises when we shine a light into participants' views on outcomes of the LR, and examine the various competing factors at play. Accountability mechanisms shape individual ontologies, define identities (Holloway and Brass 2018) and render the purpose of professional learning highly personal. This is at odds with espoused wider purposes of collaborative endeavours, such as PLCS, LR, or learning trios, as can be seen in much of the popular and influential literature on the subject (for example: Stoll et al. 2006, Hargreaves and Fulllan 2015, Harris Jones and Huffman 2017). Additionally, using a PLC structure in seeking to fulfil accountability measures through a focus on individualised 'trading good practice' [Pat, Eden], is paradoxical and reports directly to a superficial 'makeover' as suggested by Vongalis-Macrow (2007). It also supports what Watson terms the ''pedagogisation' of practice: the processing of complex problems for the consumption by learners' (Watson 2010, in Watson 2014, p18). In the quest for self-improvement through these collaborative structures in this research project, participants may have traded bite-size classroom practice items which have limited effects individually, but which ultimately obscured the wider, more collective and critical aim the LRs set out to achieve. From the leadership perspective, for Gerry, at Eden, this was:

school improvement…an opportunity for collaboration…an opportunity for people to go and enquire and try things and take risks [Gerry].

And for Alex at Monkshill:

> For all the staff to be focused on that one aspect of learning and to get a chance to look, and to listen to each other, or to listen to what's going on around the school. It's just like, 'Let's take a wee step back, breathe and actually see what is going on [Alex].

Data suggest that although participants are open to changes in practices, they are happy in the 'trading' [Pat] of practices much along the lines of Meirink's (2010) lower-order aid and assistance level of the interdependency taxonomy, and do not share Danny's, Gerry's and Alex's and other authority figures' wider vision. Their interactions at T2 –T3 may provide them with an opportunity to attend to their own 'circle of need' (Stickney 2015, p505) but this is problematic in two ways. Firstly, individual accountability is foregrounded at the expense of collective accountability. This is not problematic of itself but runs counter to some of the collaborative aims of PLCs. Secondly, the 'trading' of ideas or the individual pursuit of addressing personal 'niggles' with practice without critical extrapolation to the 'bigger picture' of wider theory, or interrogation of participants' own pedagogic truths, limits the transformational power of such practices. This is, in part, because as a practice, it feeds into an individual accountability agenda whereby participants collect and exchange resources for their own consumption and deeper, more systemic level changes, resulting from elaborated cultural or structural forms, is inhibited. A sense of collective or mutual accountability for the PLC, as suggested by Connell (2009), Kennedy (2016) and Noguera and Noguera (2018) that might lead to:

- a wider changes across the system as a whole and

- a clearer sense of responsibility to supporting mutual development of each other's practices (Meirink e al 2010),

has only been articulated by a very small number of participants, and as such, limits possibilities for change.

9.5   Macro –level relationships local and national structures

Finding: Interplay with local authority structures causes divergent effects for PL. In rejecting it, new collaborative relationships can be elaborated. Otherwise it serves a regulatory and not developmental purpose.

One significant divergence in the data across both settings is the interplay and influence of relationships at macro level with external individuals or organisations. Formal structures of accountability determine, to a significant extent, the relationships that staff in schools, especially in leadership roles, maintain with their local authorities. In both settings, data suggest that there is a regulatory relationship with the local authority, based mainly on matters concerned with logistics, management, the supply of resources; the analysis of attainment data or the providing of training or professional learning courses in fulfilment of contractual obligations with regards to the 35-hour working time agreement (Scottish Executive 2000).

The relationship with the local authority at Eden School did not feature in any significant way in the data; other than senior leadership staff, little mention is made of the local authority having influence on relationships or practice by teacher participants. From field notes and observations, it is clear that a regulatory accountability relationship does exist, suggesting Halstead's (1994, in Sachs 2016) and Talbert's (2010) system compliance and control forms of accountability. Reporting and self-evaluation processes are mentioned, but participants do not explicitly articulate their relationship with the Local Authority either positively, negatively or neutrally. The interplay between agents and this structure reflects regulatory compliance (Sachs, 2015), where interactions with the structure seem to shape agents' courses of action, through adherence to procedures, for example, but participants are positioned passively in regards to this structure. Gerry expresses the one-dimensional nature of this interaction which is at odds with Donaldson's (2010) exhortations of the extended professional and expert practitioner, taking responsibility for their own development:

> staff go to external courses, right, and do stuff, through the Council. But, there would be nobody we would have coming in to work the staff directly [Gerry].

At Monkshill School, however, a different picture emerges. Almost all participants make reference to the influence of the local authority and resources it provides, or fails to provide, but this is not often in positive terms. In a neat illustration of regulatory accountability, Muir identifies epistemic insufficiencies in the professional learning offering the LA provides. She calls for more expansive, 'big-picture' thinking, which is an essential

ingredient for effective practice in PLCS according to Tam (2015). In the following exchange, Muir details how ideas circulated through professional learning opportunities from the local authority seem to promote more of a compliance agenda as suggested above. At best, if teachers interact with these forms, through elaboration they might guide or support teachers in a controlled use of resources or policy such as Glow, (the national Intranet for Scottish schools). At worst, they are enforcing compliance, limiting ideas, diminishing agency and regulating practices:

> Respondent: So I don't think there is anything within (this LA)…there is nothing in (this LA) that is wide enough …people at universities that are, studying on…they are doing the theory about it …they're not… (this LA) isn't big enough – the CPD in (this LA) isn't big enough, – they will maybe instruct you to teach certain things, but they are not looking at the big picture of education.
>
> Interviewer: So what are they looking at?
>
> Respondent: They are looking at things like how to run your P1 class; looking at things like, how do you transfer nursery into P1 – that's where I've been this year – it's looking at how you use Glow…. but they don't give you a bigger view with what's happening within, you know, the science of education, you know,… about how the brain works [Muir].

Muir rejects the cultural form provided by the LA and the relationship to support it and seeks new relationships to elaborate new cultural forms through her engagement with MOOCs, as was detailed in the previous chapter. These insights from Muir's data also stand in relation to RQ3: I will return to a further analysis of this in chapter ten. Muir is not alone in rejecting the relationship with the LA. Charlie presents a contradiction where influences are reversed. Charlie seeks resources and support from the LA, but ends up being used as a resource to provide support to it:

> Well, I don't get any support at that level, well they do have some [subject] in-service days. Historically a lot of those at regional level have been asking us about strategic planning, not the other way around, not the advisers giving us any ideas about strategic planning, so very often we are in a catch 22, so if we go to those in-service days, they have to be absolutely pertinent, otherwise what we are missing in school, you just get further behind what is going on in school. So they were doing a reading development, and the question is do I go to the regional support or do I stay in school and know what I am doing in my school. Now, absolutely, I

am crying out for [subject] support, but the number of times we go and it is us supporting them…[Charlie].

Although these negative experiences have been reported, these interactions with this structure have not resulted in stasis or entrenchment. What is interesting is that for Muir and Charlie, that rather than paralysing participants and diminishing agency resulting in morphostasis, they seem to have been galvanised into action, organising to pursue their own interests. In acting back on this structure by rejecting it, the negative interplay between LA, participants and resources has resulted in the elaboration of necessary but new cultural forms and practices. This is further supported by class teacher, Rowan, who identifies collaborative working as an emergent property in the extract below:

I think because the authority have taken away a lot of what would have been literacy leads back then or numeracy leads, all these posts have gone. You would have had somebody in the authority that would have supported you through that. Now we don't, so as a school, you have to get together and collaborate together. You're forced into saying, 'Well, there's nothing out there, so we're going to have to figure it out ourselves.' Even though you're frustrated that somebody else over yonder is figuring out themselves, somebody in [another LA] figuring out themselves, it does force you to have to work collaboratively [Rowan].

Data from Monkshill school leaders also support this finding. Nic shows how a perceived lack of support in cultural or material forms provides a further opportunity for staff to subvert the hierarchical relationship with the LA and promotes collective action:

In our authority, that has not been a strength in the past, - it's getting more structured now, in the last year, year and a half, but prior to that there was nothing, no curricular development, no feedback on how well we were doing, so we were kind of working on our own wits. Quite fortunate that we have quite a lot of people here that we can bounce off, the staff, I'm talking about, our self- evaluation, we are also fortunate that we have schools outwith our own authority and we work with them, and go and see them and fortunately, again, Lee, very much, is looking outwards because we couldn't look to the LA to get support. And that's big….[Nic].

Interesting patterns of interplay are seen to develop here. The data suggest that the LA structure had weak powers and capacity to influence participants at Monkshill School, and was rejected by some participants. This facilitated both inward and outward turns that enabled the staff to seek out new cultural forms and in doing so, draw on their own

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resources and work collaboratively to develop lateral relationships, as Rowan explains above. The result in this case was the emergence of collaborative working. At the same time, however, an outward turn is also enabled as Nic describes: new interactions with other schools are develop and new structures are elaborated. Muir also illustrates an outward turn as a result of interactions (T2 –T3) with the LA that lead to the emergence of new ideas through engagement with the Mooc. Rejecting this structure leads to emergence of collaborative working and development of new relationships (T4). Relationships are also elaborated in Sandy's interactions with former colleagues. These relationships are valued to a greater degree than the relationship with the LA in Monkshill. Through analysis, it can be seen that hierarchical structures, such as LAs can have strong or weak influences on participants. Structured as nested hierarchies (Scott, 2000) enable or constrain agency. In acting back on the structure by rejecting it at T2-T3 interactions, the causal effects of agents with the authority structure, give rise to newly elaborated practices and relationships (T4), or as in Sandy's case, reinvigorate old ones, enabling in both cases possibilities for transformation. At Eden, however, a more regulatory relationship with the LA reinforces existing arrangements rather than changing them, suggesting morphostasis. In both cases, and by diverse means, the same structural form creates divergent effects in each setting.

9.6 School structures: Leadership

Finding: there is a leadership paradox in PLCs. Beyond the loose-tight dilemma, leaders need to balance their epistemic contribution to the PLC with the disequilibrium their role in it might bring. Leadership absence does not automatically facilitate a horizontal redistribution of power and existing vertical hierarchical structures serve as default.

School leadership is part of the nested structural arrangement (Scott, 2000) within a relational hierarchy that extends from school pupils and staff, to local authority and further, to national structures of governance. Lines of accountability move back and forth along these connections in mostly vertical ways. The analysis of school leadership is essential in a number of ways in a CR study. Leadership channels power: it can be embodied through humans performing in roles, but essentially only its effects are observable (Kempster and Parry, 2011). Therefore, to examine its influence and the ways in which it enables or constrains practices requires consideration of it as a causal mechanism within a social

system. It is also simultaneously contingent on, and generative of, the context in which it exists. How these understandings of leadership in the cases of Eden and Monkshill School will be examined in the following section.

9.7   Features of leadership: power and positioning

There are interesting complementarities in the data about how school leaders mediate the PLC structures in their schools. There is no doubt that, as noted in chapter seven, school leaders in both settings are widely respected. Relationships appear to be congenial and, from the data that is reported, there is no reported animosity or resistance on the part of the staff to leadership actions. Pat, at Eden typifies many respondents' positive views of the senior leadership team:

> I think, obviously, senior leadership is a big part of what makes Eden go. I
> think we are very lucky that we've got very effective leaders [Pat].

Rowan wants to make a point of his appreciation of the shared decision-making and consultative nature of leadership at Monkshill:

> I would just emphasise that we don't really ever do anything where you
> are just told you've got to do it – very rarely, yes, decisions have to be
> made, but most of the time you're made to feel like we are part of it – part
> of that decision making process [Rowan].

Some tensions arise when leadership positioning in relation to PLCs is examined. School leaders in both settings saw part of the purpose of PLCS to provide opportunities for teacher-led PL. Both head teachers regarded their presence in each PLC as problematic in creating some disequilibrium in relationships, as Lee explains:

> And, I have nothing to do…. the collaborative, the professional reading
> groups on a Friday, occasionally, maybe I go along to it. I find it very
> interesting. I think it changes the dynamics a bit. Again, with the learning
> rounds, me not being there, Nic not being there, changes the dynamics in
> a positive way that they can really talk about things [Lee].

Gerry at Eden is more explicit in removing herself and seeking to distribute power laterally across the staff group:

> So, I've slowly over your time here, slowly just take myself back as it's gone
> on and on and on, to the point where I just, it was actually perfect for me

not being here, to be honest with you, when it took place. That actually worked out fine, it worked out quite well, because I was quite glad I wasn't here when it was taking place [Gerry].

Having created favourable conditions for the PLC, both leaders make the assumption that this will result in a re-distribution of power which is in keeping with a large amount of literature on structure and leadership in PLCs (Charner-Laird Ippolito and Dobbs 2016, Harris and Jones 2006, Harris 2010, for example). Tensions arise however concerning leadership presence and absence in the process, and associated interpretations of how this affects the flow of power in the PLC. As discussed in chapter five, the PLC is understood as a potential vehicle for distributed leadership (Harris and Jones 2010, Spillane 2006, Temperley et al. 2007) and a democratic alternative to a traditional conceptualisation of leadership as directive and authoritarian. In this study it was put to work by school leaders as a structural form, aiming to support school-wide improvement and provide an opportunity for the development of horizontal relationships and the 'empowering' of teachers. Both head teachers distance themselves from the PLC, identifying that a reason for their withdrawal is to create a space for others to move into:

> I also just slowly started to remove myself from the sessions in the evening as well, because I felt like the staff were taking it on at that point too, and I was not required at that point. That's why I did it. [Gerry].

Lee at Monkshill also sees more advantages in her absence from PLC work that attendance:

> Interviewer: We're just focusing on learning rounds here. What do you think makes that process work in the school?

> Respondent: Not being led by the management. Alex leads it. I think the fact that Alex is leading it makes it more open, makes it more...less monitoring. In the sense that it's a collegiate approach...I think Alex leading that gives it the strength. It's not the head teachers and the deputy heads saying that we've got to do this [Lee].

Although well intentioned on the part of leadership, this is problematic. Power was not officially delegated in either setting. Both school leaders seemed to tacitly realise that over-exertive leadership and practices of micro-management are detrimental to the functioning of the PLC, as argued by Hallam et al (2015) and Mifsud (2017). PLCs in both settings are positioned to encourage a form of teacher/ distributed leadership and in doing so, leaders at Eden and Monkshill schools are navigating DuFour's (2004) loose-tight dilemma. From

data above, their non-participation aims to loosen hierarchical authority sufficiently to allow a more distributed version of authority to emerge, but withdrawing entirely leans into the 'loose' end of Dufour's analogy and does not causally enable this. Instead, it positions the PLC as ontologically distinct from the school leaders. In their absence, the PLCs default to middle leaders within the structure as proxy leaders (Datnow 2012), which maintains existing hierarchies and lines of accountability. The exception in the Eden case is Danny, a non-tenured teacher at time of research, who will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Secondly, there is an assumption that because attention has been given to creating conducive conditions, collegial relationships will emerge. Although this is important, as Timperley (2007) points out, creating conditions alone is insufficient for effective functioning of PLCs. Navigating the loose-tight dilemma in power-sharing through distributed leadership or another mechanism requires some degree of leadership authority and decision making, whether by the school leader or another. It requires that the horizontal and vertical axes of relationships are held in careful balance. It does not assume absence of leadership, in whichever manifestation, in the PLC.

9.8   Structure: a summary

Again, using Archer's explanatory programme as an analytical tool, this chapter has separated out significant structural forms in the data that are at work in the PLC systems.

Emergent security in relationships along vertical and horizontal axes enables PLC formation at micro level but relationships can become stuck in congeniality. This can limit possibilities for change, if relational moves and alternative critical perspectives that might support critical engagement, are not in place to nudge them towards collegiality.

Participants engage enthusiastically in PLCs even although lines are blurred between voluntary and mandated participation. They mostly engage in ways that reinforce and privilege individual accountability over mutual accountability and a sense of collective identity and mutual responsibility is limited. Existing leadership structures are reinforced by PLCs. The role of school leaders in PLCs is problematic and data highlight contradictions in their engagement with PLCs. School leaders show keen support for PLCs in their settings through provisioning time and resources to facilitate them. However, in seeking to use them

to promote a form of distributed leadership or teacher 'empowerment', they remove themselves and consequently elide any role that they might have in the PLC. Any relational or epistemic contribution that they might make to the PLC is therefore lost.

Finally, analysis of relationships with the wider structure of the LA reveal divergent effects. Under adversity, interplay with one local authority served as a catalyst and elaborated a range of new relationships and collaborative working. Otherwise, it elaborates a regulatory and not a developmental purpose.

10 Agency

Finding: Agency in PLCs is complex and can be navigated along either primary, corporate, or lateral lines. Lateral agents need to be redirected to harness their agency and its effects for the benefit of the collective PLC structure. Primary agents can, and should, be supported to become corporate agents. Corporate agents have potential to strategise and articulate collective purposes and needs in relation to structures and available cultural forms and by doing so, open possibilities for mutual, not individual accountability.

As discussed in chapter six, agency, as a feature of analytical dualism, is proposed as the capacity for humans to act in and upon their environment - the socio-cultural world. It is not action in or of itself and it cannot be analytically isolated from the domains of structure and culture that make up the socio-cultural world, but like these, is analytically separable through analytical dualism. An analysis of agency in relation to the cases in this study will ensue in order to address RQ 3: What individual factors are at play within PLCs and in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

10.1 Primary agents on the stormy sea

Archer's definition of primary agents categorises them in opposition to corporate agents as lacking collective organisation, and people 'to whom things happen' (Archer 1995, p260). Individuals can move between the two categories – these are not fixed characteristics and neither do primary agents lack agency. Brodin reiterates that the passive acceptance of policies or practices does not spell the absence of agency and describes this as 'agentic achievements [that]… need to be understood as such in relation to particular social and material conditions and relations of power' (Brodin 2019, p3). Analysis of the data does not suggest that participants are lacking collective organisation – at a basic level, their participation in the structure of their PLCs itself requires a degree of collective organisation. However, a number of participants' experiences in PLCs reflect that things do, in fact, happen to them and an element of passivity is evident across both cases. Interplay between participants in the LR and leadership at Eden, for example supports this:

> I think it's even more important because without school leadership,
> working to bring in bodies from outside to make us sit up and pay
> attention to our practice. We wouldn't necessarily seek out opportunities,
> I think it's even more important that leadership do this on our behalf
> because I've never heard of learning rounds. I wouldn't have known they

existed. I wouldn't have possibly searched for something that caused me a few, a little bit of extra work will it. So it came from leadership, so I think it's even more important that they do that for us [Lindsay].

This is further supported by Ashley:

> Senior management team, or senior leadership, sorry. They've been really good at taking this process from beginnings, taking it right through to the end. It's not just something that was kinda put into place. It was spoken about at INSET days, and so on [Ashley].

Both Lindsay and Ashley accept the LR passively as an initiative and invest school leadership with responsibility for it and notably, not themselves. These participants do not see themselves as having a say in the organisation of the LR as a structure. Neither do they actively resist opportunities to engage. This positions them as primary agents, and as such, this they have limited their agency from the beginning of the process. At Monkshill School, although the LR process had been established for a longer time, Muir recognises a gradual erosion of agency that is reflected in the nature of participation, which has changed since her earlier versions of the process:

> Going back to the first one – it was more formal, I would have said, so we all sat down, we decided what the focus was going to be , there no managerial input, it was very much as a staff we decided what do we want to look at and then as a staff we went and did the LR over 2 days – it was very much a formal, someone will come and take your class, and you will come out and do the LR and then you will discuss it and that … and it's kept that structure to a certain extent, and then the second one was a bit like that and then the third one was slightly different and them, ...the major difference, I would say, is that we no longer get to chose what the focus is, ehm you could argue that's good or bad, to be honest. LR are there to be adapted – we had to adapt it anyway it's a high school thing… but I think the other change that other people will tell you about – it doesn't bother me at all - you could be part of it or not, so there was a choice, some people chose not to do it for whatever reason, and no questions asked…… and that was fine so that's completely gone. So if there was someone out there who felt it was very stressful or whatever, then that opportunity for opt out has gone (laughs) [Muir].

Many participants in this study acknowledge that change in education generally is inevitable and it is something that they are prepared to accept as part of their professional lives and practice. Acceptance of the inevitability of change in the form of innovations (such as the LR) or interventions (such as national initiatives) is evident in the data. Rowan expresses the

situation in dramatic terms, as overcome by a sense of powerlessness in attempting to chart a course of action in the face of relentless encounters with macro and meso level interventions:

> You just have to appreciate the teaching as ... It's a stormy sea. Whilst you're focusing on something at that point, something else is just going to have to be let go and you'll come to that crest of the wave sometime soon, but you don't know when that might be. You feel like you're going to focus, that you want to get to… because this new intervention's come in. You think, "Oh, I'll deal with that ... I'll ride that wave, but then another wave crashes in from the side and you think, "I'm never going to get to that." I think the stress of the job and interventions, that's both school based ones because we do always want to be seen to be doing the best for the children, but these interventions are always a response to a national agenda usually, or a local authority one [Rowan].

In the wider context of each school both Chris and Nic, school leaders in each setting made reference in similar terms to the on-going cyclical nature of this sort of change. Nic expresses the same relentlessness as Rowan in describing how staff are expected to deal with the constant cycles policy change:

> So, that's fine but what you have to now look at are numeracy progressions. What this tests is… you are seeing holes in their standards of numeracy. We need to think what is happening ... there is pressure brought on because we are putting in progressions that we've looked at and said, this might work. People are trying to follow them, they are needing upskilled in terms of the teaching so we are having to put that in and so people are getting input on that, trying new things…..finding holes and we are trying to revisit it, but all of a sudden numeracy will fall off next year … reading will come in again, so we'll have to look at that, so it's always changing… [Nic].

This relates to practice in general and not PLCs in particular, but highlights how the subordination of primary agents allows the structural forms of policy at local authority and national level to be perpetuated and disempowers individuals in the process. The cultural resources available to them are also limited as no alternatives are offered – Nic details numeracy and reading as priorities on which the school must focus. In Archer's terms, they are not strategically involved, cannot shape the structures or cultures that mould their actions and their agency too is limited. However, they do not resist the processes.

10.2 Corporate agents

In this section, I will recast three of the participants who may now be familiar to the reader in three vignettes that illustrate primary and corporate agency. In an extension to this theory, I will suggest that an agential manoeuvre in a lateral way helps to reconcile the tension between individual and collective agency in the PLC. Archer defines corporate agents as follows:

> those who are aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organised in order to get it, can engage or in concerted action to re-shape or retain the structural or cultural feature in question (Archer 1995, p258).

Participating in PLCs does not of itself identify corporate agents, but at the very least, in taking part in the PLC participants have self-organised to make a response, in some form, whether articulated or otherwise, to their socio-cultural situation. In earlier analysis, we have encountered some corporate agents already, who shape their contexts for action. In this section, I will revisit some of their data to analyse the means by which they achieve this.

The importance of mutual accountability in the PLC has been discussed in chapter nine. Here, it relates to how PLC participants might self-organise to articulate their shared interests within their contexts. I have already highlighted how individual accountability can be reinforced in certain interactions in the PLC. Here, analysis shows a way by which individuals might use emergent agency to support shared interests and foster mutual accountability.

I have already examined in chapter nine how Muir highlights limitations in the cultural context for PL at local authority level and sees to widen the horizon of observation, but finds it wanting. In doing so, Muir highlights a tension between cultural requirement and structural provision. Muir resists being shaped by the available cultural form and elaborates new experiences beyond it - in a morphogenetic loop resulting from engagement with MOOCS:

> I've done a few courses through MOOCs I find that a lot of the things organised by the council are not really for me, It seems to be something to mark off your hours, and I've not really seen the point in that [Muir].

Seeking out experiences where teachers can engage with 'ideas, theory and the practice of others to extend professional learning beyond the immediate context of the school or district' (McMahon et al. 2015, p171) exemplifies how elaboration of new cultural forms can take place at the level of the individual, as in the case of Muir and also Sandy (see below). In this interaction Muir rejects both the meso-level structural form of the LA and the cultural offerings it provides for PL and in doing so identifies a new relationship with the online platform and the ideas in the MOOC. The formation of this new relationship (structure), and the engagement with new ideas (culture) external to the context and the interplay between both open up possibilities for Muir to develop new practices through the hybridisation of these ideas into existing practice.

Sandy also side steps the structure of the current LA to engage beyond his context by drawing on relationships in his previous context that allowed contrasting conditions to form. This has had a significant influence on his practice, and merits some closer scrutiny. Sandy describes how historical interactions in a previous structural system (previous school in another neighbouring local authority), have exerted causal influence and opened up the new opportunity. This allows him to engage with new cultural forms allowing elaboration of new practices in a new context. Sandy's Practitioner Enquiry described below is a cultural emergent property of this interplay, resulting from the specific structural and cultural antecedents that have 'exert[ed] conditional influence on agency (Archer 1995, p184); the external relationships upon which the PE was contingent are captured in the data below:

> I do think that *sometimes*, (with emphasis) you can sort of pay of lip-
> service to this and that is what's going on a little bit in that everybody's
> saying 'oh growth mindset this, growth mindset that but we need to look
> into it a little bit deeper and   maybe see, I did a practitioner enquiry,
> assessing the impact of (I can give you a copy of it if you want).. growth
> mindset particularly on girls, when they are put into sets... By doing that,
> there was a difference, in the approach, in the mindset of the girls, I
> remember that were in the study, so that, I brought that from [another
> authority], mainly, I worked with the educational psychologists there when
> I was doing support for learning, and she was the one that got me
> interested in that, she was the one taking it forward in [other authority],
> so I do follow what they are doing in [other authority], I follow them on
> twitter (I follow them on twitter!) and I've got contacts with [other
> authority] and my practitioner enquiry(PE) was done with [other
> authority].., yeah, I didn't do it in [this authority], but they allowed me to
> do the Practitioner Enquiry in [other authority] [Sandy].

Participants perform the role of corporate agent here, up to a certain point. They know what they want and they organise strategically to get it. Their agency is elaborated through resistance of structural and cultural forms shaping their context and they seek new forms outside of it to satisfy their wants. This is interesting in the light of the preceding discussion on individual accountability. If we make the assumption that ontologically, collective action is essential to the PLC and corporate agents, who can articulate their interests and are in the best position to shape this. The analysis above shows what tensions and missed opportunities occur when individuals divert their attention on to individual trajectories. In manoeuvring out of the PLC structure in a lateral way, they reach outwards and elaborate new cultural forms outside the PLC structure and transformation is only elaborated at an individual level. If they could redirect their actions back into the PLC, potential for change as a 'corpus' might have better chance of being achieved, and may potentially lead to stronger sense of mutual, not individual accountability.

Danny at Eden was perhaps most emphatic in strategically organising as a corporate agent. As a leader in the horizontal dimension, he is an outlier in the school structure, the PLC structure and in this study, being the only unpromoted member of staff in either case to take a leadership role in any form of PLC. He enacts more closely than anyone the idealised form of teacher leadership that is presented in theory (e.g. Harris and Jones (2010) Yashinka, 2017 and Charner-Laird, Ippolito and Dobbs (2016). Danny articulates vested interests of the PLC and shaping future practice, as he expresses here:

> And from that, we're hoping to share the best practice and maybe do some CLPL and make some recommendations for practice. But more than that, we were discussing how we're going to support staff to make changes to practice, so for instance if we were saying that we would like to see more feedback which encourages pupils to self-regulate, then if that may be one of the recommendations then we need to think about what processes we want to put in place to help staff change their practice and to do that [Danny].

In contrast to Muir and Sandy in the analysis above, Danny articulates aims for the PLC in system-level elaborations, which lean into the wider systemic change processes:

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> And I think where the discussion is now heading is how exactly are we going to implement that change? How are we going to support classroom teachers to use feedback more effectively, is it going to be more learning rounds, are we going to do more observations, are we going to do CLPL sessions where it's maybe one teacher who we thought ... Doesn't have to be somebody who was in the involvement, who knows, but it could be a teacher who we think gives effective feedback or who's confident that they're giving effective feedback, to maybe lead a session for all our staff [Danny].

Finally, Danny articulates a strategic vision for the PLC that allows it to gain traction by looking inwards and leveraging existing structures such as the LTWG, and simultaneously reaching outwards for cultural forms from external sources (academic, professional reading), aiming for significant transformation:

> ..as I said, the learning and teaching committee, the purpose of that is to have a more strategic way for colleagues to learn from each other. And I think that learning rounds and lesson study, we are now engaging in learning in a much more strategic way. And it's underpinned by professional lead-in, by academic research, it's ... It's much more robust, maybe, than previously.

Archer (1995) theorises that that while corporate agents shape the structures and cultures that all agents inhabit, the elaboration of agency within a given social system requires a reduction of primary agents and a complementary increase in corporate agents. This rebalancing arises as primary agents in the system desist from 'atomistic reaction or uncoordinated co-action' (Archer 1995, p265). Within the same system, corporate agents articulate the vested interests of the group, confront any problems that emerge, elaborate further collective interests and act back on the structural and cultural conditions to transform and remodel them. It is not suggested that this promotes homogeneity among agents. Rather the 'co-existence of plurality of corporate agents' (Archer 1995, p264) is encouraged, with recognition that the expression of divergent interests may result in disequilibrium which is welcomed, as it allows new ideas to be critically questioned, negotiated, reconfigured and elaborated as part of the collective vested interests of the group.

10.3 Agency- a summary

In taking strategic action as a corporate agent, Danny illustrates the possibilities that may emerge for sustained transformation of the PLC to take place. This may additionally be supported if the PLC can accommodate corporate agents, who can harness the contribution of lateral agents, such as Muir and Sandy, and help them redirect their individual, cultural elaborations back towards the collective 'corpus' instead of stepping out of the PLC to elaborate new cultural forms. In accommodating diversity of voices and positioning this as disequilibrium something to be encouraged, a space can be made for critical questioning to become an essential part of the collective work of the PLC. This can be problematic, as I have illustrated in earlier analysis. The silencing of critical voices in the PLC is questioned by Watson (2014); Servage (2009) and Fendler (2006) and in transforming ideas, some practices are jettisoned: 'Change requires a measure of self-critique since it is based on a rejection of what has been accepted as sound professional conduct so far, in order to accommodate a different idea about the 'right way to go about things'' (Reeves and I'Anson 2014, p254). Being open to disequilibrium and greater diversity of practices and voices in the PLC might allow for Riveros, Burgess and Newton's (2012) call for a more honest analysis that embraces failure in PLCs and the avoidance of Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) rhetorical echo chamber, the 'rhetoric of conclusions.'

Finally, both corporate and lateral agents here engage in what Reeves and I'Anson refer to as the 'Janus like quality' (Reeves and I'Anson 2014, p254) of facing two ways. They look outwards for forms of knowledge that might be 'recontextualised' when brought back inside the network or structure to mobilise others, which these authors suggest is critical to changing practice. Through reaching out, redirecting and recontextualising cultural forms in elaborations inside the PLC, corporate and lateral agents align structural and cultural forms by means of their agency to achieve transformation.

11 Implications, reflections and conclusion.

In this final chapter, I will summarise the themes that have developed in this thesis. I will present implications drawn from the foregoing analysis. I will reflect on the potential contribution that this work makes and any future pathways for practice, policy and research that it has carved out in the professional learning landscape. I will also consider its limitations, and by way of drawing the final curtain on this thesis, offer a brief, autobiographical reflection on my experience of the research and writing processes that brought it to fruition.

I introduced my study in chapter two with an outline of its overall aim which was to shine a light inside the 'black box' of the PLC by examining structural, cultural and individual factors that may illuminate the hidden mechanisms that support processes and interactions inside them, that are often ignored. I aimed to address this problem through the research questions which were:

- In what ways are PLCs understood and valued as a professional learning activity?

- What cultural factors are at play within PLCs and in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

- What structural factors are at play within PLCs and in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

- What individual factors are at play within PLCs and in what ways do they enable and inhibit the practices within PLCs?

- What outcomes can be identified through this process (for example changes in individual attitudes, or changes to school structures and culture?)

I offered a brief rationale to explain the study's significance and outlined my own positioning in the study.

In chapter three, I offered an overview of the broad landscape and policy context that is underpinning education in Scotland, focusing in on the specific structures of policy that have

shaped the context for teacher professional learning, and have carved out space for the various versions of the PLC to take root, and in doing so opens up the ground for the research questions to be addressed. Chapter four extends this discussion by a closer examination of the idea of professionalism as a cultural form and how it has become embedded in teachers' identity. This chapter also discusses how the idea of professionalism has been adopted into accountability mechanisms that in turn shape the available cultural resources for teachers' professional learning and therefore, also, their agency.

In chapter five a detailed, critical discussion of the dominant idea of the PLC unfolds and offers a response to the first exploratory research question: In what ways are PLCs understood and valued as a professional learning activity? The critical discussion considers definitions, assumptions, roles, leadership, agency and limitations of PLCs in literature and identifies that they are rarely presented in a negative light in the literature and hold a persuasive appeal. However, challenges are identified in the need to accommodate critical questioning and challenging conversations. Tensions concerning leadership internally and within school structures are also identified. Some careful navigation of the loose-tight dilemma of agency and control is discussed in this respect.

 Chapter six outlines the methodological dimensions of this qualitative study, including the theoretical framework and orientation of the study, with a justification for the approach. The features of the morphogenetic approach are explained in relation to the study as they offer a means of accessing the hidden mechanisms 'under the skin' of the surface-level presentation of the PLC. Some literature on case study methodology is reviewed here to support the methodology and the approach to the semi-structured interview, which aimed to dig more deeply into participants' experiences is explained. The schedule for data gathering in the two schools explains the study's chronology. A narrative that sheds light on some problematic aspects of participant recruitment, and the ethical dimensions of the research are discussed.

Chapters seven through to ten offer responses to the research questions two, three and four. Chapter seven presents a descriptive account of two cases – Monkshill and Eden schools. This chapter uses data from field notes and initial interview questions to paint a rich picture of the context for research and sets the scene for deeper analysis to follow.

Chapters eight, nine and ten mine the data more deeply and examine participants' encounters with features of culture and structure inside the PLC, and how agency results from these. I also analyse the ways in which these interactions elaborate practice, in reproductive or transformative ways.

The implications as they arise for practice, policy and research in the light of the analysis of data make a response to the final research question concerning potential outcomes and changes in practice: What outcomes can be identified through this process (for example changes in individual attitudes, or changes to school structures and culture)?. Four main themes are identified here and the implications of them are discussed in relation to practice and leadership. The themes are:

- mutual accountability not individual accountability

- tension in expectations and reality

- Epistemic resources are under-used in LR

- Outcome: Leadership meet dilemmas in PLCs

Finally, analytical dualism provides a springboard for future work, as M/M cycles use outcomes from interactions at stages T2 and T3 as the starting point for further interactions and elaborations in the T4 stage. Archer refers to this as the next research question, so this provides a basis for considering the next stage of work and how PLCs might be re-articulated in the light of these findings.

11.1 Theme one: individual accountability not mutual accountability

A key finding in the data shows that most of the participants prize a sense of individual improvement in their practice over any sense of collective endeavour. Strong accountability structures are in place that shape teachers' ideas about their professional learning needs – teachers are labouring under heavy expectations in this regard. The collaborative structure of the LR is ultimately used for teachers to achieve a means of personal improvement of their practice. In early stages of development, it is seen as a mechanism for breaking down the 'silos' of subject departments that beset large secondary schools such as Eden. This is not problematic in itself. In fact, this could be putting a structure such as a LR to good use if

it is part of a framework that supports an incrementally developing sense of purpose. Corporate agents have a role to play in this in harnessing lateral agents to redirect the epistemic resources they seek outside the PLC structure back towards it, for collective elaboration. This could be aligned with Meirink et al.'s (2010) taxonomy of interdependency in collaborative work. Opportunities for informal scanning and storytelling allow congenial relationships at a very basic level to develop and provide opportunities for informal conversation about practice, which was something that many participants at Eden were searching for. Jude worked in a seldom-visited area of the school and this alone reinforced her isolation. Distance from her base to the staffroom was considerable and the staffroom was seldom used anyway as subject bases were preferred. An opportunity to begin the process of developing congenial relationships would address this isolation. I highlighted in analysis in chapter nine how Pat saw the LR as an opportunity for trading practice – a low interdependency activity but as an interim, one that may help to develop security in relationships. This was highlighted as important for successful collaboration in chapter nine. Meirink et al (2010) classify collaborative work as sharing with or without discussion: sharing with discussion about pedagogical experimentation achieves greater interdependency and this could be encouraged. The work of the LR needs to be focused on a collective improvement achieved through joint work, which only very few participants identified. Gerry held this as a vision for the LR, but in stepping out of the LR missed the opportunity to model this ambition. Using these insights to pose a speculative 'what if?' question (Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent 2014) to these identified outcomes allows me to move towards a possibility at T4 in this M/M cycle – what might be the next level of work and how might this aspect of LR be rearticulated?

- What if the behaviours supporting mutual accountability were explicitly articulated in relation to the shared work of the LR?

- What if the LR adapted a taxonomy to allow mutual accountability through the incremental development of interdependency as part of its work?

11.2 Theme two: tension in expectations and reality

The findings concerning cultural forms highlight a contradiction in teacher beliefs about improving practice in PLCs. Teachers take seriously their responsibilities to their pupils and their responsibility to seek ways to improve their practice in the service of pupil outcomes. Ultimately, learning rounds, like many versions of PLCs have strong appeal and are undertaken with good intentions as a collective endeavour that is supported by policy, mandated by authority and is focused on improving teachers' classroom practices. In Eden school there was overwhelming enthusiasm for learning about the LR process. In Monkshill, teachers had adapted and honed the process to suit their context but in both schools, analysis explored how motivation to take part generally reflected expectations that did not align with the original purposes of LR. Their purpose is to fill the gap that arises when a critical discussion of relevant theory and data from observations of practice occurs, and results in the negotiated conceptualisation of what that practice should look like in that particular setting. This aligns with Meirink et. al.'s (2010) aspiration of the shared outcome of 'joint work.' There are dangers as well in using prescribed, de-contextualised 'plug-in and install' versions of PLCs without paying due attention to developing a conducive culture for shared learning, as Hairon and Dimmock (2012) illustrate, but this was not the case in either of these schools. Both schools approached their work thoughtfully. However, tensions arise when teacher beliefs about the process are focused more on the lower-level exchanging of ideas, and how participants expressly use the LR to achieve this purpose. This was more notable with participants at Eden school, for whom at a simple level, the scale of the school and its geography inhibited even congenial relationships. Some staff members simply did not know each other on a personal level and collaborative work offered an opportunity to change this. At Monkshill school, although they were practised in LR and had adapted the model to their context, some of the principles had been lost. The resulting tension between expectations and reality has consequences as practices are confirmed, and not transformed. To open up further possibilities at the next level of work within the M/M approach, the following considerations might be made, which invite a reimagining of the LR in practice:

- What if participants in LRs expressed their beliefs in a negotiated 'pedagogic truth' (Stickney 2015) that reflected the purpose and expectation of their work at the outset?

- What if expectations of what the PLC or LR might achieve was always the result of a negotiated model of practice that is drawn from theory and observed practices in the setting?

- What if the LR was not used as a site *for* the development of collegial relationships but instead as a site to strengthen existing collegial relationships that pre-exist the LR?

11.3 Theme three: Epistemic resources are under-used in LR

Cultural forms such as academic reading or research are carriers of knowledge and ideas in the PLCs in both schools. In Eden school, these were introduced and mobilised in PLCs by school leaders and rarely, did participants actively seek these out. In Monkshill, the reading group served to supplement the work of the LR. The pedagogic focus for each LR had been negotiated by each group respectively so the theme was chosen by participants to address an area of their practice in each case. Engagement with reading was inconsistent in spite of availability of a range of academic sources at Eden. Chapter eight details that although some interested participants reported they enjoyed the readings, these tended to be participants who were invested in the LR process, usually aligned in the leadership structure or already engaged in advanced studies such as Viv, Lindsay or Danny, who has subsequently started advanced study. Unpromoted teacher participants generally showed little interest in academic reading at Eden and the observational work of the LR was valued more highly by most participants. However, this is only part of the work of enquiry in the LR. A facilitated reading session led, by an expert practitioner colleague was arranged to discuss dialogic teaching, that was to be the focus of the LR and a lively discussion ensued but this happened only once. When left without outside facilitation, the Eden group did not pursue any theory-based discussion. . This is in line with the findings of Hairon and Dimmock (2012), who point out that a lack of knowledge –based evidence as a focus in the PLC can lead to its demise. Charner, Ippolito and Dodds (2016) highlight the importance of a facilitator to guide and support the development of ideas and 'deftly creating and upholding the structures needed to move those ideas forward' (p995). The structure in and of itself is insufficient to encourage the circulation of knowledge as a resource. The challenge in this is making academic resources not only available but also accessible in balancing out the requirements

of teacher leaders in PLCs, whether embedded in school hierarchies or not, to facilitate discussions on theory, or to draw on outside resources to help with this facilitation.

Further possibilities for the next level of work in re-articulating the LR might include:

- What if exploring theory was the work of the LR at the early stages of its development?

- What if a key role in the LR each time was assigned to a participant to break down the big ideas behind the area of focus and facilitate discussion?

- What if polemic perspectives were critically considered as part of this work that enabled all participants to negotiate a theoretically – grounded stance on the matter that all could subscribe to?

11.4 Theme four: Leadership dilemmas in PLCs

A finding in the data concerns the role of school leadership in the LR. Leadership figures are caught in the horns of the loose-tight dilemma in relation to LR and to PLCs in general, and it is a problematic place to be. The head teachers in both schools stepped back from the PLCs, one more gradually than the other, and eventually stepped out altogether. Chris at Eden was the only deputy head teacher to be involved. The LR occupied a lateral dimension as a distributed leadership structure, and reinforced hierarchical structures by relying heavily on middle school leaders for facilitation in both cases: Alex, Leslie, Danny, Viv and Chris. This created enough distance for the heads to have arms'-length involvement, leaving the internal working to participants. The school leaders' role in both cases was focused on resourcing more than facilitating, which is problematic. By stepping back, they loosened the reins that allowed Danny and Alex to step up. Both were very conscious not to step in too far, and in fact stepped out entirely. However in doing this they forgo the opportunity to take a more substantive role (Brodin 2019) and develop an epistemology for the PLC in offering some intellectual stimulation (Voelkel and Chrispeels 2017). They might consider their role is contributing to 'big picture thinking' and a clearer system-wide perspective as expressed by Tam (2015). Their role may possibly be to reconfigure hierarchies in being present as they share 'power with' their staff community. Lastly their presence might allow

them to engage dialogically with participants in 'team–principal dialogue to develop a shared vision and mental model of the PLC work' (Voelkel and Chrispeels 2017, p446). Perhaps leaders might model collaborative learning in simply learning alongside them.

- What if leadership in PLCs was not aligned along existing structures but based on pedagogical interests of staff on a changing basis?

- What if head teachers sat alongside teachers as learners in PLCs?

- What if head teachers brought their knowledge and helped the PLC to raise its horizon of observation by contributing a system-level view?

11.5 Future direction for research

This study is far from exhaustive and findings highlight that there are many possible future directs for research in this area that may guide approaches to LR and PLCs for teachers, school leaders or policy makers. I will present four possible directions this might take. Firstly, as a case study, the study focused attention inwards to the practices within PLCs and the mechanisms supporting them. This was achieved by drawing data from participant accounts of the process and observations relating to their experiences of one LR in the case of Eden, and slightly more in the case of Monkshill. It identified tensions in participant expectations and reality, but it did not examine the reality of the next level of work – the T4 stage of M/M cycles. Research into what the PLCs in question achieved in terms of outcomes would allow an understanding of ways in which the participants translated their LR and PLC experiences into practice. This would add granularity to the question of expectations and reality in PLCs. It is beyond the scope of this study to report on the post-script of either cases, however, one outcome for participants at Eden school was the development of a different structure and means of participating in PLCs that was led by participant interest groups. Further investigation of the link between participant experience and eventual outcomes from LR and PLCs would add to understanding of possibilities and realities in this practice.

Secondly, the main source of data was from interviews with participants and as such gave insights into their experiences as self-reported data in the accounts they shared, but cannot

account for any reported inaccuracies. Additionally, as a singular experience, they reflect a moment in time, and the subjectivities that participants experienced at that particular time. A different research approach would yield different data, and an ethnographic approach might offer possibilities in this respect, especially as the depth ontology of CR research lends itself to this approach. Rees and Gatenby (2014) detail that CR provides 'connective tissue' (p132) between participants' observable subjective experiences beyond their reporting of them, and their structural origins. Ethnographic research in schools makes significant demands of school communities as well as participants and would not have been appropriate here or possible for me to use as an approach here. However, the benefits of combining ethnographic research with CR depth ontology holds some promise for a more detailed understanding of the relationship between personal subjectivities and the origins of the social structures shaping them.

Thirdly, the study highlighted how accountability structures shape participants' need for individual improvement in PLCs and privilege this over a sense of mutual accountability. The study connected this to Meirink et al.'s (2010) taxonomy of collaborative work. Further research into nature of collaborative work conducted in PLCs that is framed around this taxonomy, might yield interesting results and a deeper understanding of how mutual accountability might be structured and achieved through collaborative work in all forms of PLCs.

Fourthly, the study has shown the complexities of the role of head teachers in PLCs. Head teachers have a difficult path to navigate in relation to PLCs and many tensions to balance concerning their positioning in them. Beyond the loose-tight dilemma and the technical supports (Wilson 2016) that they provide, this study has shown how they might have a role in modelling collaborative learning and make an epistemic contribution to the PLC, bearing in mind the pathway they carefully need to tread in considering possibilities of participants' enactment of agency. Further research into how head teachers navigate these complexities is required. A narrative enquiry (Clandinin 2006) would allow them to tell their story and shed further light into learning, leadership, motivation and ambition of school leaders in their lived experience of PLCs as they navigate this tension.

Finally, for policy, some consideration of teacher preparation for collaborative professional learning might advance participant understanding and experiences in PLCs. There are implications for existing teachers and for ITE in this regard. The nature of ITE and its structure leads students inexorably to achievement of the necessary gateway standard for entry to the profession, the SFR, with its strong focus on individual accountability. Current experiences in the global pandemic of 2020 have redirected students towards professional learning in the absence of practicum experiences. Introducing mutual accountability as a concept that students might explore, experiment with in practicum, in on-campus experiences or in PL might open up possibilities for developing and sustaining PLCs in practice.

11.6 Reflection

Reflecting in the final stages of this process brings me to consider the limitations of this work, and its role in 'shaping' me, as a researcher and educator. I do not wish to indulge in Woolcot's 'litany of limitations' (Woolcot 1990, in Silverman 2013, p376) tempting though it is, but it would be negligent to elide any consideration of where improvements might have been made, or of any events, chance happenings or design faults that have shaped this study.

I have already explained in chapter six the difficulties in recruiting participants for this study and do not wish to revisit the problem here, but it had consequences. The cases were asymmetrical and, as such, there was imbalance in many aspects of the study, which have been detailed in foregoing chapters. To summarise these imbalances, observation was straightforward at Monkshill School. I had access to the whole building and adults and children moved freely through it. The staff room was a lively welcoming place. At Eden School, I was rarely there in the presence of pupils. The staffroom was rarely used, and on the occasion I visited it was occupied only by a small group of visiting specialists. Staff interactions took place behind closed doors in bases as I explained in chapter six, and were inaccessible to me, not through any hostility, but merely because my legitimacy as a researcher was recognised only by the participants I got to know. Many of the staff in the school did not know me and had no reason to, therefore it is unreasonable to expect them to accommodate my intrusion into their shared spaces. This limited the nature of any

observations I could make however. This asymmetry presented challenges, but also an opportunity in the case of Eden school to reflect more deeply on the nature of the partnership work that was carried out. A more straightforward alignment between the cases, that is two primary settings or two secondary settings, might have made for a more robust study, but as my accounts of recruitment demonstrate, I was in no position to be selective and, as Clerke and Hopwood (2014) observe, asymmetry in research can be productive as well as problematic.

The nature of case study is, by definition, not generalizable and many may consider this to be a significant limitation of this study. However, I support Flyvbjerg's (2005) stance in this; that is, that generalisability is over-rated. In synthesis, a case-study that is framed within a Critical Realist ontology can explore examples in a heavily context-dependent way and offer a depth of analyse that yields valuable insights other methodologies may not achieve.

At this stage of the process, I have a different, and clearer, view of my sense of researcher identity and my positionality in the research process. In hindsight, this might have been more thoroughly explored. I could have better anticipated the struggles detailed by Thomson and Gunter (2011) involved in shifting between various 'fluid researcher identities' (ibid, p25), such as: enabler of change, facilitator, 'provider of expert advice' (ibid) supporter of school leadership and university teacher. This inhibited my engagement in Eden school, where my role as all of these identities conflicted with my intention to share a process with the participants that ultimately they would own.

I started this project with a supportive stance towards the enriching power of teacher-led collaborative PLCs to transform teachers' practices but with a sceptical stance towards such practices that provide decontextualized, formulaic templates, used in a 'plug-in' or 'install' manner as suggested by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018). I have amplified these stances in the course of this research. My experiences have confirmed for me that teachers can and must make the processes their own. I have concluded through this research process that pathologising teachers' practices using observation can raise problematic questions about objectifying teachers and how epistemologies are developed. My Master's research into LR suggested that familiarity with the processes and protocols of LR was lacking in practice, as was the theoretical reasoning supporting them. Conversely, over-reliance on such templates

and protocols can have equally limiting effects as fascination with the novelty of some protocols for collaborative engagement can eclipse the importance of the inquiry work at stake.

Throughout the process, my sense of researcher legitimacy caused problems for me. Many people I encountered showed keen interest in my work but as an educator, I am also aware that pressures on teachers' time squeezes many non-teaching activities to the margins of their priorities. I was always mindful, perhaps over-mindful, not to 'get in the way' or to take up too much of their time. Working as a solo researcher, essentially pursuing the research for career-interest and without the heft of a funders' objective and resources behind me, possibly compounded this insecurity. Pursuing the study alongside full-time employment also presented its challenges. However, in spite of these shortcomings, there are gains to be made with this research. Through case-study, it has highlighted the complexities involved in change processes as they play out in different contexts and accommodate different roles and contingencies. Consideration of depth ontology casts collaborative professional learning in a new light, and offers a means of deepening our understanding of these experiences. Finally, it offers possibilities of how this work might be reimagined, with alternative structures and logics to support it. Ultimately, when all has been considered, this research has been achieved and it is now part of my history. I stand as its storyteller.

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13 Appendices

13.1 Appendix i: Participant information sheet

Participant information sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research project into Professional Learning Commuities as part of my PhD study at the University of Stirling.

Before you decide it is important for you to be aware of the purpose of the research and what it may involve. Please take some time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with colleagues if you wish. Please also get in touch with me directly if there is anything further you'd like information on. Take time to make your decision and thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

I am a lecturer in education at the University of the West of Scotland and PhD student at the University of Stirling and my contact details are as follows:

Catriona Oates, School of Education
University of the West of Scotland,
Ayr Campus
KA8 0SR
Mob: 07941 154534
Email: Catriona.oates@uws.ac.uk

Title of the research:

Understanding the processes and effects of models of collaborative teacher professional learning.

What is the aim of the research?

This study aims to help us understand more about the processes and effects of small teacher professional learning communities when they engage in different models of professional development, and how that works within the current context of Curriculum for Excellence.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because information was circulated about this project and your school leaders have agreed to my request and invited me to further discussions about it.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

Deciding to take part will involve the following:

1. Observations of the PLC process in action (this will also involve audio recordings of planning and debrief discussions).
2. An initial interview where you will be asked about what led you to take part in the PLC; what you think about professional learning; how that relates to the current context of Curriculum for Excellence and what are and have been the main influences on your professional learning in your career to date. There will also be a relational mapping exercise at this stage to help me work out who or what is important to you in the PLC's process and in your professional learning; how relationships function within the school

and how these may affect your work. You'll be given plenty time to do this and the chance to ask questions.

3. There will be a second interview about 3 months after the initial one where I will ask you about how (if at all) the ideas that were decided as next steps in the TLC have developed .

4. After 6 months, I will invite participants to a group interview to review the TLC and discuss what changes might have taken place in people's ideas about teaching and learning, their own professional learning, and their relationships within the group. We will revisit the relational mapping task for this.

What happens to the data?

I will look at the information you provide and analyse it to give me an idea of what sort of things are happening in PLCs. The data will be written up for my thesis. Neither you, your school nor local authority will ever be named. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. If you'd like a copy of the transcripts or the final publication that can be arranged. The data may be used for secondary analysis after this study is complete. That means I may go back to them at some point and analyse them in a different way to provide a different understanding of TLCs than that which is the focus of this study.

How is confidentiality maintained?

As well as being anonymised all data are to be kept securely on an encrypted external storage

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As well as being anonymised all data are to be kept securely on an encrypted external storage device. Any paper copies of transcripts will be destroyed after use. My supervisors, Professor Mark Priestley and Dr John I'Anson will have access to the data.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide if you want to take part. If you do want to take part you can keep this information sheet and you will be given a consent form to sign. If you decide to take part you can withdraw at any time without needing to give a reason, and you can make a request to have your data removed from the study.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

You will not be paid for taking part in this research study and you will incur no costs if you agree to do so.

What is the duration of the research?

The research will not last longer than a period of 6 months and during that time I will have contact with you on up to 3 occasions, not including the observations.

Will the outcomes of this research be published?

Yes, the research will be published as a doctoral thesis and stored electronically in the University of Stirling's publications database. There may also be subsequent papers redrafting aspects of the work in the thesis which might be submitted to journals for publication.

In the highly unlikely event of something going wrong, and you would like to make a complaint you may contact the school's director of post graduate research, who is not directly involved in this research process:

Professor Sam Punch
School of Social Sciences
University of Stirling
Stirling FK9 4LA

s.v.punch@stir.ac.uk

If there is anything you would like to discuss about this study please do not hesitate to contact me using the contact details provided. If you would rather talk to someone else about this, please contact my supervisor:

Professor Mark Priestley
School of Education
University of Stirling
Stirling FK9 4LA
Tel. +44 (0)1786 466272

13.2 Appendix ii: Participant consent form

Learning Rounds Study

Consent Form

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Initials here:

1. I confirm that I have read the information about this study and have had the opportunity to consider it and ask questions about it. Any questions have been answered satisfactorily. ☑

2. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason. ☑

3. I understand that interviews and discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed. ☑

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes. ☑

5. I agree that any data may be used for academic publications other than the final thesis. ☑

I agree to take part in this project.

13.3 Appendix iii: Interview schedule

Interview schedule

Learning Round Project
Interview Reference Number:
 Participants will be welcomed and thanked for agreeing to take part in interview in the introduction. I will explain that the interview will be structured around the three main themes (outlined below) and that their answers will be treated with confidentiality among project staff for the purpose of deepening knowledge and understanding around the LR experience. The transcribed data will be used in any resulting publications, All responses will remain anonymous.

——————— Page Break ———————

Body of Interview
> What is your role in the school? How many years teaching? Have you worked in any other role before teaching? How would you describe your role in the LR?

Questions about the context of LR
Where does the LR project fit in with your work in terms of
> Practice?
> Professional learning?

Questions about the Purpose of LR
How did you see the purpose of the LR?
> Is it important for you personally to do a LR? In what ways?
> Is it important for the school? Why? In what ways?
> Is it important for school leadership? Why? In what ways?
> Is it important for the students? Why? In what ways?
> Is it important for anyone else? Who and why?

Questions about the focus of the LR

> How did you find the process of deciding what it would be?

> Does it relate to your own priorities?

Questions about your experience of the LR

What was your motivation to do it?

What did you hope it might achieve?

What ideas do you think of when you think of LR?

Which of these are most important to you?

How strongly committed to the LR did you feel?

What were you happy about during the process?

What were you not so happy about?

Was it a successful or unsuccessful experience for you?

> Why-what things (people; ideas; resources; relationships; spaces, anything...) helped make it/ didn't help make it work?

> Did anything make it difficult or less successful for you?

What was most/least useful to you about the LR?

> Thinking about your working relationships – have they changed in any way as a result of the LR?

> Thinking about your practice (the curriculum; your teaching approaches in the classroom) has it changed in any way?

Have your ideas about any aspects of your work or your working relationships changed in any way since you did the LR?

Has this LR resulted in anything new?

Has it changed the way things work?

Thinking about your practice (the curriculum, your teaching approaches in the classroom) has it changed in any way?

Have your ideas about any aspects of your work or your working relationships changed in any way since you did the LR?

Has this LR resulted in anything new?

Has it changed the way things work?

Has it created new problems?

What threats and opportunities lie ahead for this project in your school?

Closing
Thank you very much for taking the time to answer my questions, it's been good to talk to you about this. If there is anything else you'd like to say you can always contact me by email.

13.4 Appendix iv: Nvivo codes

Nodes

Name	Files	References
⊞ barrier or constraint	8	14
⊞ Culture	14	34
Agency and licence	11	27
collaboration	18	43
Dialogue or discussion	16	25
Done to...	8	13
External CPD	7	7
Feedback	12	20
⊞ Individualism....Collectivism	8	21
Leadership action	6	14
Limitations of LR	15	42
⊞ Practice	16	52
⊞ Structure	22	96
Tension	12	19
Trust	1	2
Uncertainty	4	5

Drag selection here to code to a new node

In   Nodes

13.5 Appendix v: LR timetable at Eden

What is the duration of the research?

The research will last through the course of this academic session (2017-18) and during that time we will work together on a minimum of seven occasions, including the timetable as set out here and including an interview, should you volunteer to be interviewed:

Meeting 1: Initial introduction– scoping exercise with staff 15th Aug 2017
Meeting 2: Working through possibilities– discussion of Learning Rounds methodology 20th Sept 3.30pm
Meeting 3: Supporting planning -identifying problem of practice: preliminary discussion of focus for observation: Identifying literature to support PL 13th October (11am-12pm TBC)
Meeting 4: Developing a descriptive voice: practice with videoclips; discussion of literature (reading group) 27th November 3.30pm
Meeting 5: Supporting implementation: Carry out Learning Round and Debrief T2 2018 TBA
Meeting 6: What next? Analysis of outcomes; identifying next steps and next problem of practice. T3 2018 TBA
.Interviews will take place after this final meeting.

13.6 Appendix vi: sample interview transcripts

13.6.1 Sample transcript excerpt: Eden

Interviewer: For the purposes of the interview, this is Wednesday, March 28th 2018. Can you just start by telling me what your role is in the school?

Respondent: I am 0.2 acting principle teacher of history-

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: ... which essentially means I'm job share with another member of staff. She does four days and I do one.

Interviewer: Oh, okay and how many years teaching have you been?

Respondent: Oh, now I qualified in 2008 and I've been here since 2009.

Interviewer: All right. Okay. So, have you always been a teacher-

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ... or were you-

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: You've always been a teacher?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, so that's about ... That's eight years. Yeah. No, ten years-

Respondent: Nearly 10 years-

Interviewer: Nearly 10 years-

Respondent: Nearly 10-

Interviewer: Okay and what was your role in the learning round?

Respondent: I was a teacher. I taught a lesson with my advanced higher class.

Interviewer: Yeah. That's right. I remember in that case and did you manage to attend all of the meetings or how many-

Respondent: No. There was one afterschool meeting I wasn't able to attend. It was one that was on a Monday-

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: ... I don't work on Monday and I couldn't get [crosstalk 00:00:52], so I missed that one, but apart from that, yes.

Interviewer: Right. Okay, so you're attending most of them. That's great. Okay. That's lovely. Now, so if you think about learning round project, where does it fit in with you in terms of your own practise and your own professional learning? How do you see it as kind of making up the picture of your professional end-

Respondent: As I said, I've been teaching now for a number of years and I've tried lots and lots of different initiatives to improve my classroom practise and I'm kind of at the stage in my career when I was looking for something different-

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: ... so when I heard about this, it really interested me-

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: ... and I think more and more, as the years go on, I think we're finding time is incredibly difficult, especially in the classroom. We've got classes of 30. I know you saw a class of 10, but that's not always ... I'll actually-

Interviewer: No. It isn't.

Respondent: ... We can afford and I think when we heard it was going to be feedback and that was decided, that again really kind of called out to me because when you've got a class of 30, you don't have a lot of time to go around and give personal feedback to each pupil, so I thought it would be really interesting to hear how other teachers across the school do it.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay and so that would be for your practise, I guess-

Respondent: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Interviewer: ... for your professional learning. Has there been any way in which it's made a contribution to your professional learning?

Respondent: Of course. Yeah, it has. I think collaborative learning's been important throughout the project. I've enjoyed working with other teachers from other departments in the short exercises we did in the meetings because, again, when you're in your own classroom and your own department, you're not hearing ideas from others, so I think sort of trading good practise was really interesting and to hear different points of view. Obviously, the articles were very helpful. Again, we don't always get time to look at these kind of things when we're planning lessons and marking, so yeah. I think it was a really positive experience.

Interviewer: Okay. Is it important for you? Do you think it's important for you, for the school, for leadership, for the students?

Respondent: I think it's incredibly important. I know we're never going to achieve consistency across the school, but what I think is becoming evident is that the pupils are maybe not getting as much from feedback as they should be and I think, perhaps as teachers, we me might've been a little bit unaware of that and I think bringing that to light has been incredibly important. Obviously, Joan and Betty were involved with you at deciding on the focus, so they clearly recognised that it was an issue. So, I think it's good that it's gonna come from the top, but it's not been Joan and Betty that have been making the changes-

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: ... it's been us as a staff who have been involved and I think that's important as well, but I think ultimately, it's about how we teach the pupils. I think it needs to be them that ultimately benefit from it-

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: ... and I hope that they will.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yep. Okay, so you talked about the focus there. Did you find ... Now, we worked on the focus over a few of the sessions and in the workshops. How did you find that process of working towards this decision we're gonna be looking at, aspects of feedback?

Respondent: It was interesting because not everybody could obviously agree. There were a lot of people in the room and, actually, it wasn't feedback that I personally had wanted to look at. I think it was differentiation or ... I can't remember what it was initially, but the more it was discussed and it was almost as if you could feel the room shifting towards the idea of feedback the more the kind of pros and cons ... What are you doing? I think it became evident that that was a natural choice, but I think that took time. I think it wasn't evident when we first started talking about it, but as it went on, I think everybody you could feel getting on board with it.

Interviewer: Okay. Oh gosh, that's interesting. I wonder of what do you think? It's really difficult, but is it anything you think that made this sway? Is there anything that kind of ... any moments or-

Respondent: For me, it was-

Interviewer: ... I don't know if it changed the side or not.

Respondent: For me, it was just a discussion and I think looking inward to myself. You think you're really good at things and then when you actually think about what you're doing and evaluate your own practise ... For me, it was probably looking inwards and evaluating myself.

13.6.2 Sample transcript excerpt: Monkshill

Interviewer: **For the purposes of the tape, this is Thursday 15ᵗʰ February.** So can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your professional biography?

Jordan: Okay, so I went straight from school to primary teaching at MH and did the B.Ed there, I helped a lot at primary schools in my 6ᵗʰ year, so I was never quite sure if I wanted to do it, but I always enjoyed it, reading stories, playing with the little ones, doing playground games with them and stuff. So I went into uni and was pretty sure I was doing the right thing, pretty sure, then half way thru uni I had a bit of a blip during a nursery placement, I wasn't quite sure if the younger ones were my thing, ehm and then it started to click into place and then into 4ᵗʰ year.

So I did a probation year in E at PF primary and then after that I applied to all regions, (I'm originally from…my family are based in CS) and I ended up getting interviewed here …there were 2 jobs going….so I go offered a job here, it wasn't full time permanent, so I took the job in P3 which was maybe not permanent .. I swithered a bit, but I took it and then by the March it was made permanent and I got was interviewed for the permanent post and I got the permanent post and that's been me here ever since, I've been here 10 years (laughs) ad I didn't know the pupils at all, I didn't know the town, I didn't know the area, it was all very new to me, I still lived in E for the 1ˢᵗ 6 years of being here, but I've just been *incredibly happy* here (said with emphasis), it's just the.. it's a very positive school; everyone is very friendly, parents always comment on that, how very welcoming we are. I felt welcomed as a team member very early on. I've changed a lot I think – I started off at infants, kinda, the P3s and 4s and I, you know, the first few years of teaching you're just finding your feet anyway. I think I was definitely someone who likes to try new things but I'm also someone who is quite easily led, I'd just sort of, do what other teachers were recommending. Then a couple of years in I just found my confidence, found my feet with a p5 class, and I just started to really spread my wings and I just *absolutely love* (said with emphasis) working here – I've had lots of good opportunities working here, for example, ehm, I really like dancing, I started a dance club with someone who doesn't work here anymore, and we started it with a P3 class, and I've just kept it going. So whichever stage I teach, I do a dance club with them, and I've been doing that for about 8 years, so it's kind of like a hobby, but I get to make it part of my job, you know. And I've had the opportunity to do the Assessment is for Learning stuff that we did with the region, Tapestry, myself and another colleague did Cat sessions, take things forward, yeah, I just I'm absurdly happy in my job. Very very happy CT I feel I get to know the children so well.

Interviewer: Is it easy for you to try new things?

Jordan: Yes - dipping our toes in the growth mindset stuff – do you want to do it too/
yes it is – mgmt. say, just have a go, it's easy to try new things, it's never frowned upon Give smeting a go…

Interviewer: So going back to what you said before about it being a really welcoming school…what makes that happen?

Jordan: Top down a really, strong management team leadership – KR for example, he's been on a big journey with the school, cause when I first came here, we'd had a bad inspection a very bad inspection and a bit of a to do with the HT who had to leave us, so then KR, well he took us on for a couple of years and we all grew together, we were really almost rock bottom and we all moved forward, and it was very much everyone together. And then S came in and she continued that work and we've all gone on this journey together and that's been a very big part of, well for me it is

anyway – I was brand new when it happened so I didn't really know why (with emphasis) we were doing so badly as a school (laughs) but we all suddenly, rose to the top together and yeah…

13.7 Appendix vii: Sample of field notes

Observation notes: School 2

School 2 is a large primary school in a mid-sized market town in rural Scotland. The school role is 413 pupils + 70 in the nursery. It is a two stream primary school with 17 FT teaching staff, 3 SMT and 1 visiting PE specialist and 1 FTE SfL teachers and 5 support auxiliaries. Staff role is 17FTE. It has a SMID indicator of 8.

There is a clear focus in the school on the UN Children's Charter. The school has won Rights Respecting School stage two status. This is clearly a priority for the work of the school and is visible in children's work in books wall displays, welcome books (see figures 1 &2) and attention to pupil voice –this is frequently referenced

discussion with school colleagues too.

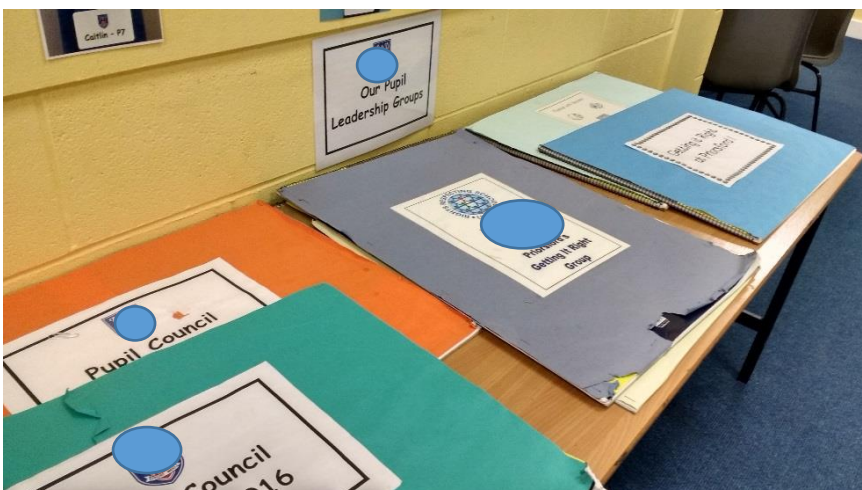*Fig 15: Wall display of the school charter based on UNCRC*

Fig 12: pupil leadership groups: Pupil Council and the Getting it Right Group notes and minutes for contribution and consultation

Professional Learning is well supported by SMT in the school. There is a professional reading group which is based this year on Shirley Clarke's 'Outstanding Formative Assessment' this text has been issued to all staff by SMT. There is a schedule of meetings for discussion which staff sign up for. These meetings take place in staff development time, usually Monday afternoons.

LR has been taking place in the school since 2010. This is an ongoing feature of staff development in the school. All teachers take part. All LR have been recorded since the beginning. Four took place in 2010 and since then, two in 2011, and one in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015. One is scheduled to run in session 2015-16. This was originally to take place in November 2015, it has since been postponed to February 2016 and further pushed back to May 2016. In November preparation for an annual Christmas faire overtook priority resulting in the first delay. In February, some staff absences meant that it could not go ahead, and it was finally planned and took place in May, on 11th and 18th.

18/03/2016

There was a bake sale for Sports Relief day when I was in school. General chat at lunchtime was around this. I have made two visits to the school. Firstly to discuss the possibility of research in the school and find out the school and its priorities, improvement aims etc. from the DHT. I found out names of staff who would potentially be interested in the research project at this time and spoke to some staff at lunchtime. There was a reasonable degree of interest in this but teachers were busy chatting having lunch. I introduced myself and a bit about the project and one small group expressed their enthusiasm for LR. I was in negotiations with the local authority about approval to conduct the research, so wasn't yet in a position to record any conversations in a way that would be ethically compatible with my study. Ethical approval was granted by the LA granted and I returned to the school on 17 March with participant information sheets, contact cards and cakes. I used this time to identify potential participants, and get a feel for the culture of the school. The photographs were taken on that day. No-one came forward as a potential participant, but I was able to talk briefly with the lead PT (DA) who was working in the nursery which runs to a different schedule for lunch and breaks. This meant she was not available at the same time as other staff over lunch, but I managed to speak to her and she said she would try to encourage some interest.

12/05/2016

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I was able to visit the school as I was in the area on a placement visit. Crossed wires, a period of absence due to illness on the part of the DHT who was keeping me informed, and a text message that seemed to go astray meant that I missed the briefing meeting and notice of a collegiate session for planning the LR. Other commitments made it impossible for me to be there for these meetings, but I was able to attend part two of the LR which takes place on Weds 18th May.

The first part of the LR had taken place on the day before my visit. I was able to have a full debrief and discussion with DA about it.

LR 11/05/2016

Professional Development work in collegiate sessions in the school have been focusing on formative assessment. The focus of the LR had emerged from an annual pupil survey based on HGIOS 4, asking pupil opinion of various aspects of their experience in school, including teaching and learning matters, organisational matters and some practical matters. HIGIOS 4 is a framework for self-evaluation of schools based on three main areas of practice: leadership, learning provision and success and achievement (Education Scotland, 2015) The statement that returned the lowest response from pupils stated that 'my teacher talks to me regularly about how to improve my work.' A low percentage (19%) of responses from pupils were positive (see survey results). Given that a lot of professional development work was being invested in formative assessment, this gave rise for some questions on how pupils understood and experienced feedback on their work, an what practices staff were deploying in giving feedback. Therefore the SMT chose feedback as the focus of the LR.

Going by standard LR protocols, this is usually a negotiated aspect of the LR which arises out of staff discussion. This LR also broke other conventions in that in keeping with its focus on pupil voice and status as a rights respecting school, it included some P5/6 pupils in the observation groups. There have been very few other instances of this happening. Anecdotally I can remember one instance which was previously reported by a colleague of LR in a secondary school involving pupils. The report was not positive; the pupils felt that their contributions to discussions were limited and they quickly got bored in observations.

These pupils were randomly selected (on an equal gender split) from the P5/6 registers. The P5/6 (age 9/10) cohort was targeted as they will be continuing in school in the next session and may be able to make a contribution to any future work, whereas P7 children are leaving imminently. They formed observation groups of three, in twos with one teacher. There was no preliminary briefing for the staff as feedback had been a key feature of their PD work in the professional reading group, but

notes were recorded from a discussion with the children, about their understandings of feedback in learning. These notes were collated. See figure 3. The pupils were also introduced to the idea of observation in class as an exercise in focusing on one aspect of what is going on, and what expectations were for the task. They were paired up and allocated to a teacher to form an observing trio.
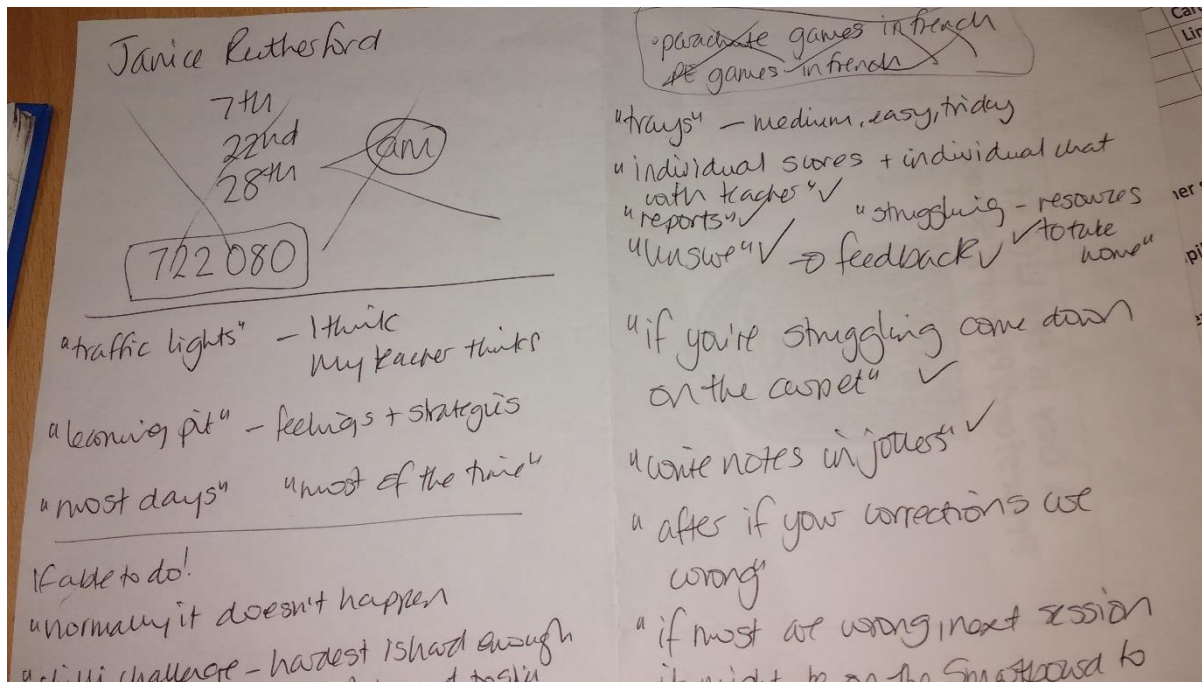

Figure 16: group 1(pupils) understandings of feedback. Pre-observation

The pre-observation notes from the pupil briefing indicate a deficit understanding of feedback; the children associate feedback with 'being stuck; 'of things being 'wrong' or only necessary if you need help. They associated it with mistake, with needing support and only useful when they considered themselves or others as 'struggling' (see figs 3 &4). The children themselves struggled to find language they were comfortable using which described peers identified as needing support. Given the degree of emphasis on formative assessment which has occupied most of the collegial sessions in the school, this is at odds with the work teachers' had been doing, so involving pupil voice highlighted a disconnect and opened up a useful seam for discussion in the LR.

Figure17: group 2 (pupils) understandings of feedback pre-observation.

The observations were carried out in an unstructured way, allowing trios to 'roam' around a fixed number of classrooms over three sessions in the morning for up to 20 minutes at a time to. They made their observations focussing on what feedback was taking place, asking their peers what teachers did or said to help them improve their work. Those involved in the observations then met and had a post observation debrief that was facilitated by DA. The comments made during the debrief revealed some unexpected insights from the children and a more positive response from staff than was expected.
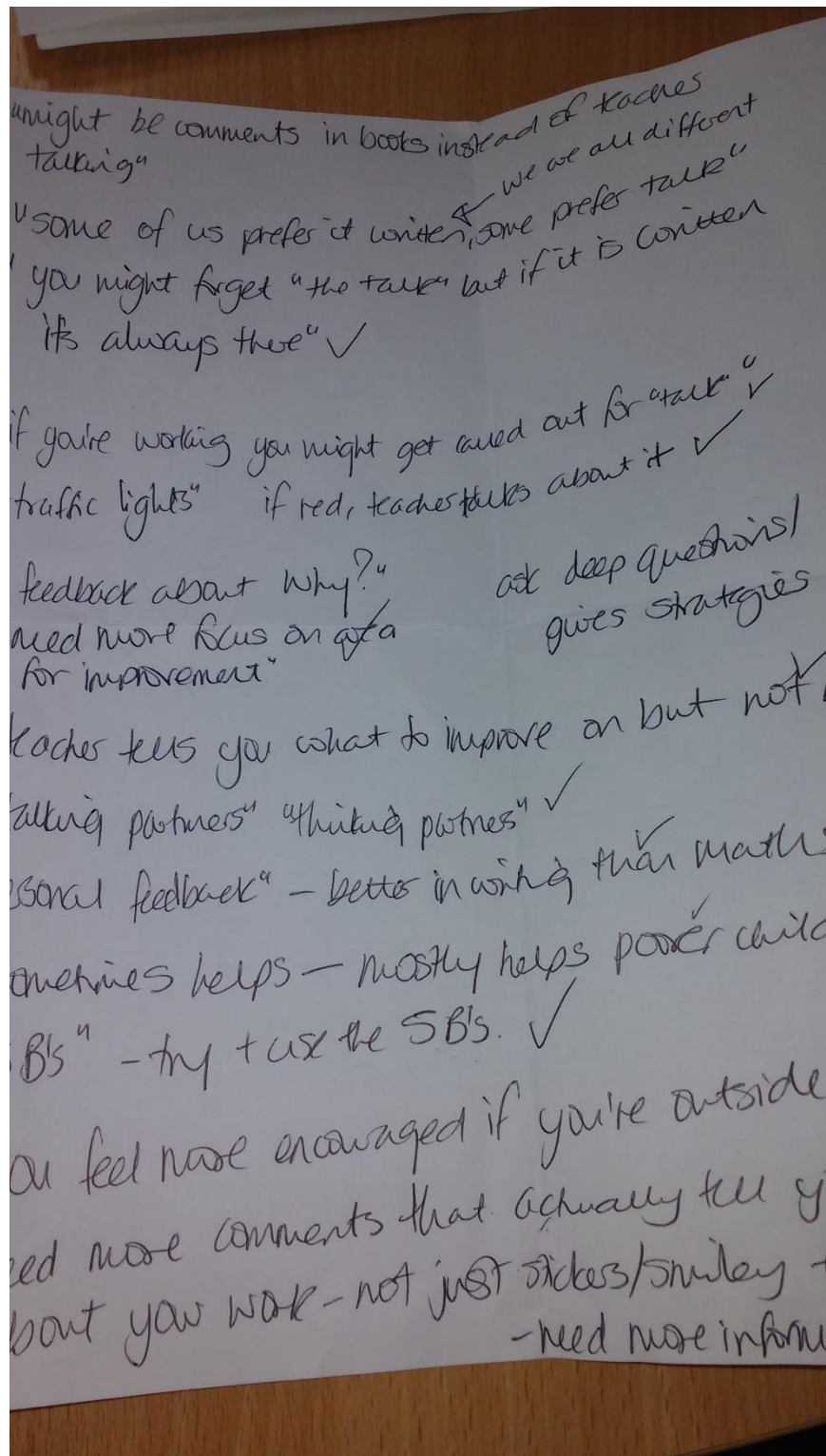
Staff reactions.

Alex reported that prior to the LR staff were 'dragging their feet' and not enthusiastic about taking part. As there is no voluntary participation, LR in this school involves all staff. After the observation

part of the process, staff reported a renewed enthusiasm for the process which they attributed to the pupils' participation. Several interesting observations were made:

1. The renewed enthusiasm for the process seemed to come from the introduction of pupil participation. Staff reported that it helped them 'see things from the pupil point of view.'

2. Staff admitted they were surprised both at the way the observing pupils engaged readily in the process and at the insights they recorded.

3. Staff were surprised at the extent to which the pupils (aged 9/10) could take part in relatively high level discussion. Again, they were not expecting this.

4. Some participating teachers thought that dialogue about feedback and improving work was more honest between pupil-pupil than it was between pupil-staff, the assumption being that pupils sometimes tend to respond in the way they think a teacher wants them to.

5. In the debrief discussion observations from staff and pupils were recorded in the same way – there was no coding for staff/pupils (see fig. 5). Pupils could expand on the ideas they wanted to contribute and they found this helpful in developing their understanding of feedback processes.

6. The use of stickers as a methods for positive reinforcement was discussed having been observed by pupils. Some pupils questioned the worth of stickers as the felt pupils focused on the sticker at the expense of the comment. This proved to be a rich seam of discussion, as staff were divided on the issue.

7. Pupils expressed enthusiasm for taking part in future LR.

Further work will involve the participant pupils reporting the findings to their peers, and the agreed next steps and recommendations will be fed into the School Improvement planning process.
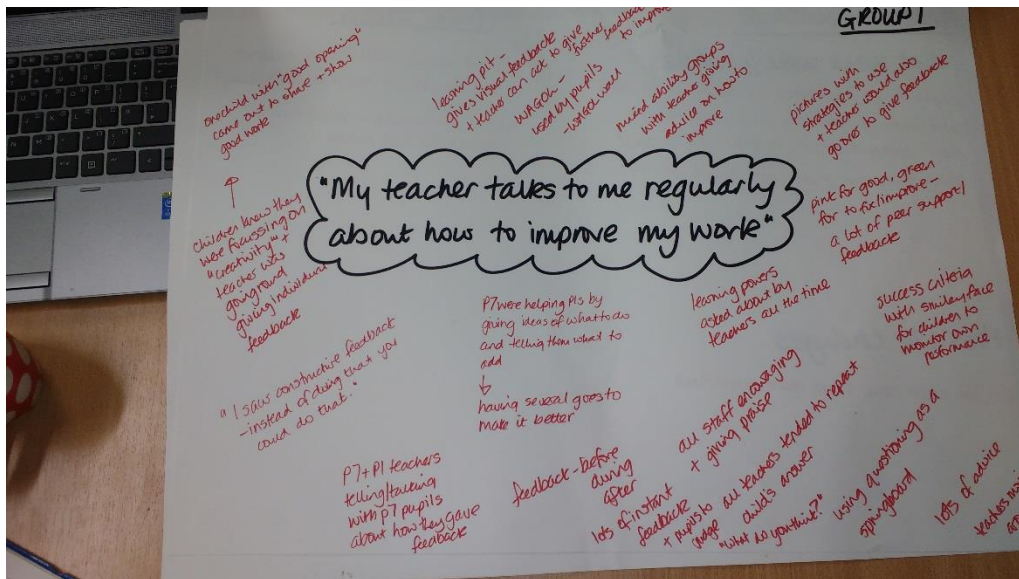
Fig 18:

example of post-observation summary discussion from LR1

LR 18/05/2016

I joined part two of this LR process on 18/05/2016. This took place over a morning and was structured in two parts. I arrived as the group had gathered in the school study room to briefly listen to the briefing by DA who outlined the process for the morning, which was as follows:

- 4 teachers were each grouped with 2 P5/6 pupils to form trios
- They could observe any class except for the classes of the teachers involved in the LR which were being covered by colleagues or supply teachers
- Observations too place between 9-10am then everyone returned to the study room for feedback until 10.30am
- A second group of 4 teachers and 8 pupils repeated the same process between 11-12, feedback 11-12.30pm

During the first part of the morning I accompanied some of the groups on their observations. JW was one of the teachers who had been mentioned to me as someone who might be interested in my research. She has been working on a Masters' Professional Enquiry project. I chose to accompany her trio first. JW spent a few minutes preparing the two pupils in her trio before they started, asking: 'What do you know about what we are doing?' and 'what is feedback? When they children gave satisfactory answers they went to observe PE in the hall. The lesson in the hall was taken by a specialist PE teacher and involved a series of fitness stations for the children to rotate around. The pupils asked a few pupils in the class about feedback from the teacher and noted different aspects of

feedback for improvement that they saw. They had a serious approach to the task and took lots of notes. Sandy asked them about a demonstration by the PE teacher – 'is that feedback?' and then led a discussion about modelling with the pair. This raised a question for me**: is this LR a PL experience for staff or are they seeing it as an instructional opportunity for the children?**

The pupils were identifying opportunities for improvement through a range of interactions including teachers' questions, modelling, direct exchanges with pupils in class based on questions such as:

- Do you get told how to improve your work?
- Does your teacher ever say that your work has improved?
- Do you ever get written comments on your work?

Moving around the school pupils hold doors open for each other and thank each other politely.

Observing pupils identify peer and self- assessment in action, and notice some Learning Intentions written up on a board. They ask how these help improve work. They note down star writer boards as positive feedback, note traffic lights, Mr Men stickers and discuss the 'tickled pink' and 'go for green' highlights that teachers use as feedback on written work.

Education Scotland, 2015. How Good is our School? 4th edition. [Accessed online on 17/05/2016 http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/HGIOS4_tcm4-870533.pdf]F