

## **Professional learning and development partnerships as a vehicle for teacher empowerment in Ireland**

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### **Abstract**

Directly attributable to national policy directives in initial teacher education in the Republic of Ireland over the past two decades, there has been significant research in the area of school-university partnerships. This chapter explores the partnership between two university lecturers and seven early career teachers engaged in a participatory action learning action research study. As a community of practice, the focus was on the domain of leadership for inclusion. The partnership evolved from a need to bridge the theory-practice gap and to prevent a washout of learning from initial teacher education at the university to subsequent professional practice at the school level. It was partially funded by the Teaching Council of Ireland. Project outcomes point to a very effective partnership, whereby teachers were empowered at the individual, community, organisation, and wider [professional](#) levels, whilst also empowering others at each of those levels throughout the wider professional learning and development partnership.

### **Introduction**

Two defining features of teacher education in Ireland<sup>1</sup> centre around the concept of school-university partnerships ([SUPs](#)) and a career-long approach to teacher professional learning and development ([PLD](#)) (Sahlberg, 2019; Teaching Council, 2011, 2013, 2016; Coolahan, 2003). The ‘practice turn’ (Zeichner, 2012) towards an increasing amount of school-based learning in initial teacher education (ITE) programs is framed by policy articulations of ‘partnership’ between higher education institutions (HEIs) and schools. Critically, ‘partnership’ is intended to permeate the full learning continuum of a teacher’s career from ITE to early career and continuing professional

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Ireland in this chapter refer to the Republic of Ireland (26 counties).

development (OECD, 2005; Teaching Council, 2011; Sahlberg et al., 2012; Government of Ireland, 2002a, 2002b). It is therefore not solely the preserve of ITE. This chapter focuses on a partnership between seven early career teachers and two university lecturers who engaged in a participatory action learning action research (PALAR) study. As a community of practice (CoP), their focus was on the domain of leadership for inclusion. It will firstly outline the policy context and support for partnerships in teacher education in Ireland, before going on to describe the goals and expected outcomes of this partnership. The effectiveness of the partnership will be reflected upon adopting O'Driscoll's (2007) framework of What? So What? and Now What? particularly exploring the primary and secondary empowerment outcomes for those directly and indirectly involved throughout the partnership.

### **Policy Context and Support for Partnerships in Teacher Education in Ireland**

'Partnership' in teacher education in Ireland strongly underpins the core professional values outlined in the 'Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers' as evidenced in the terms "professional collegiality, collaboration, sharing and cooperat[ion]" (Teaching Council, 2016), p. 8). "As teachers' learning is as fundamental to their practice as their teaching" (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 6), the values in the code influence teacher practices in ITE and lifelong learning. Within teachers' lifelong learning, teachers' learning is also enhanced within the shared space created by the [SUP school-university](#) partnership, which in the context of this chapter involved HEI lecturers and early career teachers engaging in critical conversations through the adoption of a PALAR CoP model, [which is described later in this chapter](#) (Figure 34). While there is no explicit definition of 'partnership' related to teachers' lifelong learning, there is an explicit emphasis upon collaborative practices throughout the policy framework for teachers' lifelong learning, known as Cosán (an Irish word meaning: pathway) (Teaching Council, 2016). Within Cosán, teacher [professional learning and development](#) is considered to be both formal and informal, personal and professional, collaborative and individual, and school-based and external. The concept of partnership is deliberately framed flexibly to invite and foster innovation and autonomy among the partners in how they build strong collaborative processes of engagement, imagination, and alignment that are fundamental to professional CoPs (Wenger, 1998) and teachers' lifelong

learning. The opportunity for teachers to connect their wider ~~partnership~~ professional learning and development partnerships<sup>PLD</sup> to socially situated and experiential opportunities in their working contexts is also promoted within professional learning and development<sup>PLD</sup> literature (Holland, 2021). Therefore, though schools are increasingly perceived to be sites of learning for all the partners at each stage of the teacher education continuum, the wider spaces within a PLD professional learning and development partnership are increasingly accepted as rich sites for all partners<sup>PLD</sup>, within and beyond the school-university partnership<sup>SUP</sup> (Holland, 2021).

The policy position is clear in Ireland; teachers are increasingly viewed as ‘teachers of teachers’ (Coolahan, 2013, Teaching Council, 2020; Sahlberg, 2019; Government of Ireland, 2002a) and experienced teachers are recognised as school-based teacher educators for the purposes of school placement (Teaching Council, 2013; 2019). Similarly, all teachers are considered leaders within the Cosán Framework (Teaching Council, 2016); leaders of their classrooms, their learning and that of their colleagues, through for example ITE and induction mentoring. This is also evident in the recent policy documents from the Centre of School Leadership (CSL) (2019) in Ireland who are placing increasing emphasis on teachers as leaders. It is worth noting also that a policy commitment in Ireland to the development of reflective practitioners is, in our view, the golden thread that weaves partnership, professional learning and development<sup>PLD</sup> and leadership that creates the potential for unique continuum-wide tapestries of collaboration in teacher learning. In the process, visible expression is given to a strong feature of teacher education policy and practice in Ireland, namely, an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) in how and with whom teachers learn. Schools as researching sites for student teachers, HEIs and schools in SUPschool-university partnerships is increasingly being promoted in Ireland (Teaching Council, 2020; Holland, 2021) and support for the development of school-HEI partnerships in the area of research is one of the top three priorities in ITE (Teaching Council, 2019; Department of Education, 2021).

Research is considered to be at the partnership heart of lifelong teaching and learning as reflected in the Teaching Council’s Research Strategy (2015), and realised through the Teaching Council’s (2021a) CROÍ (Collaboration and Research for Ongoing Innovation) Research Series, which supports teachers’ access to research and online resources, hosting research events and conferences, along with funding teachers to carry out research. One such funding scheme is the John Coolahan Research Support Framework which “places a strong emphasis on research

activities that strengthen the links between research, policy and practice, and on collaboration among teachers, and between teachers and other educational researchers” (Teaching Council, 2021b, p. i). The [school-university partnershipSUP](#) being reported on in this chapter was partially funded by the Teaching Council John Coolahan Research Support Framework. The recently published online resource entitled: *‘Using Research in Our School’*, further reinforces the Teaching Council’s (2021c) vision for how boundary crossing partnerships can realise the symbiotic potential of merging research and leadership activities.

The model of partnership in teacher education in Ireland is slowly moving from a restricted HEI-led work placement model (Conway et al., 2009) to a more complementary-type model (Furlong et al., 2000) whereby teachers and HEI partners recognise the distinctive sets of knowledge, competences and dispositions that each brings to the collaborative ‘hybrid space’ (Zeichner, 2010). In this chapter we argue that such partnerships, amongst early career teachers and universities, adopting a ‘PALAR CoP’ model of [professional learning developmentPLD](#) (Holland, 2021) can prevent the early career socialisation impact of ‘praxis shock’ (Veenman, 1989) and washout of teacher education (Zeichner, 1987). In turn, this provides the rich humanising terrain for the lived interrogation of the practices and thinking and the collective pursuit of new scholarly-informed knowledge as each partner works through being-in-partnership. The partnership approach is therefore one that reciprocates a mutuality of trust, builds confidence and “facilitates professional conversational engagement between all partners” (Teaching Council, 2019, p. 7). Critically, it is one that constantly interrogates and questions. This commitment to inquiry is, in our view, the essence of an accountable, professional community of learners, of practice, and of knowledge-building; it is at the heart of ‘partnership’ in teacher education in Ireland. As Cochran-Smith (2006, p. 42) asserts:

unless underlying ideals, ideologies, and values (about for example the purposes of schooling, the knowledge that is most worthwhile for the next generation, and the meaning of a democratic society) are debated along with the ‘evidence’, we will make little progress in understanding the politics of teacher education.

The politics of partnership in teacher education invariably involves debates around teacher educator identity and the teaching-self. As Alexander (1995, p. 22) cogently remarks, “the central

factor in professional development is the kind of person the teacher is". In the Irish context, this chapter explores how it is mediated in a partnership context.

Currently, there are no formal qualifications or pathways in Ireland to certify a successful transition from 'teacher' to 'teacher educator' giving credence to the stance that teacher educators belong to a 'hidden profession' (European Commission, 2013). In Ireland, there is a distinct absence of financial or other awards for practising teachers who take on mentoring roles in teacher education, (Hall et al., 2018). Similarly, until the publication of Céim (Teaching Council, 2020), practitioner inquiry was not meaningfully encouraged or facilitated throughout the continuum phases (Glenn et al., 2012). Moreover, teacher leadership development processes, especially for early career teachers, have also been under-developed (King and Holland, [2022 under review](#)). We argue that it is the actual experience of HEIs and schools collaborating in various ways and through an array of processes (Martin, 2011; Donnelly et al., 2019) that provides both the educative context and the evidence for successful partnerships that are learning-oriented.

### **What? So What? and Now What?**

Given the significance of reflexivity and inquiry in teacher education in Ireland, this chapter will now adopt O'Driscoll (2007)'s framework of *What? So What? and Now What?*, to reflect upon the effectiveness of the SUP involving the HEI and school partners across the PLD partnership.

#### ***What?***

Firstly, we will explore the *What* in relation to the details and goals of the partnership. This chapter explores a SUP between seven early career teachers and two HEI lecturers over a three-year period (2017-2020). The teachers had undertaken a major specialism in special and inclusive education as part of their ITE between 2012 and 2016. The major specialism had six modules in total including a module on collaborative practice in 2015 and a module on leadership for inclusion in 2016, both led by the first author. All students in the specialism (n=25) were invited to be part of a PALAR CoP on completion of their degree. Seven teachers elected to get involved.

Though the goals of this partnership evolved overtime, those related to this paper were agreed by the HEI lecturers and later verified by the teachers. The academics were cognisant of preventing the early career socialisation impact of ‘praxis shock’ (Veenman, 1989) and washout of teacher education (Zeichner, 1987). They wished to facilitate the teachers’ [professional learning and development](#)PLD to enable them to stay close to their moral values (King, 2019) of inclusion. They also intended to narrow the theory-practice gap (Korthagen, 2010) related to inclusion, which is particularly evident for new and early career teachers in Ireland (Hick et al., 2017). In particular, the focus was on developing the six facets of equity for inclusion (Grudnoff et al., 2017) and to support teachers in overcoming barriers to applying their learning in their own contexts (Holland, 2021).

Central to a CoP model of [professional learning and development](#)PLD is community members agreeing on the ‘domain’ (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015), in this case ‘leadership for inclusion’. Therefore, the goals and hopes for the LIn-CoP were explored and added to at the beginning of each of the eight workshops to ensure the [professional learning and development](#)PLD was meeting the needs of the teachers. The online ‘Trello’ platform was used to record these hopes and goals along with target-setting action plans (TSAPs) and reflections during and between workshop meetings.

While CoPs have the potential to be transformative (Kennedy, 2014) little research exists as to how they support growth, in this instance, growth of various identities e.g., teacher, researcher, leader, [and personal aspects](#) (Poekert et al., 2016). In line with Swennen et al. (2010), we understand teacher educators as having multiple identities ranging from classroom teacher to HEI tutor to “those who actively facilitate the (formal) learning of student teachers and teachers” (European Commission, 2013, p. 8). This all points to a suggestion that there are multiple teacher identities as one progresses from being a student teacher to becoming a lifelong learner. These identities include ‘student teacher’, ‘teacher’, ‘teacher educator’, ‘researcher’, and ‘leader’. The aim of this research was to explore the potential, which [school-university partnerships](#) SUPs have for empowering early career teachers’ multiple identities.

However, such growth across various complex spaces requires a [professional learning and development-PLD](#) model that supports reflection, inquiry and critical action (Watts et al., 2011) leading to the ~~participatory action learning and research~~ (PALAR) strategy being adopted as a framework ~~for within~~ the LIn-CoP. **The PALAR LIn-CoP members engaged in the cyclical process of reflecting, planning, acting, and reflecting as individuals (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015) and as a community (Holland, 2021).** Noteworthy in this LIn-CoP were the co-adaptive processes which allowed for the partnership to evolve over time with teachers engaging and growing in a personalised and participant driven way, [as is illustrated in the TSAP example below:-](#)

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Figure 1. TSAP Example

**Target Setting & Action Planning - To Reach 'Leadership' Core Goals for Equity and Inclusion**

**Teacher's Name:** Sarah

<p><b>Describe your core leadership goal and what might happen if you reach this goal (e.g. the ends):</b></p> <p>Supporting new staff at work. To take part in more CPD in regards to SEN and to develop my leadership skills.</p>
<p><b>Describe the core leadership goal problem (e.g. the cause/s of the problem and effects):</b></p> <p>Opportunities to show interest/ initiatives when AP posts are responsible/ have implemented different strategies. Waiting for CPD course to begin- have not received start date yet. Have completed a survey to share what areas we would like support with. Covid restrictions- not sure if course is online. Time during the school day- course is after work.</p>
<p><b>Explain what have you already tried (explain if it worked / not &amp; why):</b></p> <p>Reflected on idea of positive strategies on Jamboard from previous group session. Helped me focus. Email to confirm interest in 8 week Focus on intention- inquisitive and have showed interest in survey. On committee to explore WSE recommendation- how to have a whole school approach.</p>
<p><b>Describe the proposed strategy/ies for reaching your core leadership goal and list actions in sequential order (e.g. the means):</b></p> <p>-Reflection on steps taken with group during last session. -Ways/ resources to include whole school approach for WSE recommendation. -Expressed interest to take part in NCSE course in connection with DDLETB - 8 sessions on SEN. With colleagues from work- collaboration and discussion on how best to implement practices in school. -To use and include the new information in my daily routine and share with others.</p>
<p><b>Reflect on outcomes (positive or otherwise) - feel free to include photos etc of evidence:</b></p> <p>Answered survey to share areas that we would like the course to include. Course has yet to start. Thinking of other ways to get more involved and volunteer in school activities- especially in Term 2.</p>

Whilst figure 1 above illustrates growth 'as' a leader, the following quote highlights that the teachers, at different points and to varying degrees, also opted to focus upon their growth through other aspects, including teacher and researcher: "I feel that when I can tell others about the research we have done together in this group, I am being respected as a researcher and not just a teacher and worker. I have learned to approach my challenges with a curious mind and look for solutions in collaboration with others rather than just looking for quick fixes in the moment. Looking at the bigger picture while addressing specific issues has become part of my practice as a result of taking part in this action research"

Figure 2. 'Researcher Growth' Reflective Post on Trello Board

I feel that when I can tell others about the research we have done together in this group, I am being respected as a researcher and not just a teacher and worker. I have learned to approach my challenges with a curious mind and look for solutions in collaboration with others rather than just looking for quick fixes in the moment. Looking at the bigger picture while addressing specific issues has become part of my practice as a result of taking part in this action research.

~~This was evident in terms of their growth at various times with some focusing on growth as a leader and others focusing on growth as a researcher or teacher.~~

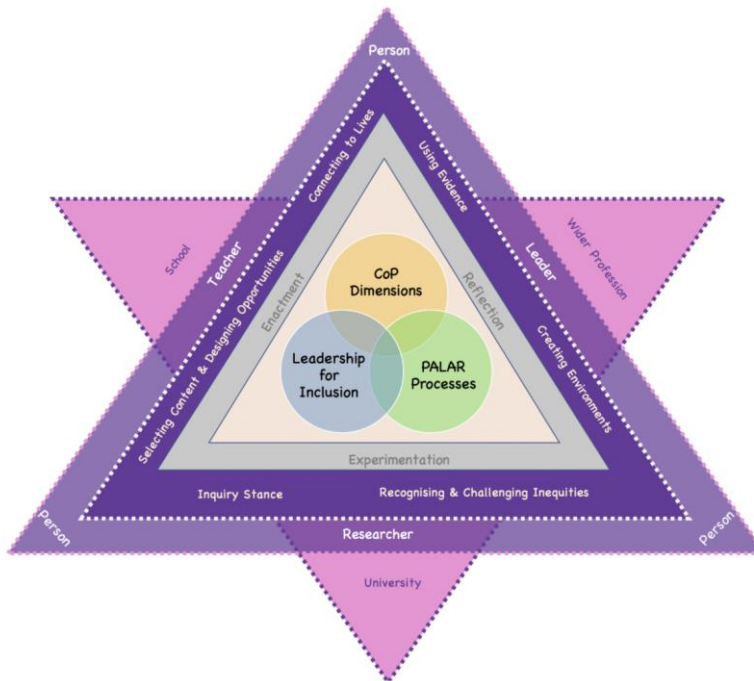
Figure 3+ illustrates the elements, processes, facets for inclusion, teacher identities and school-university partnership spaces; providing a focused snapshot of the model as relevant to the scope of this chapter. It is important to acknowledge that, in focusing upon how the model caters for partnership development, all aspects of the wider model are not included.

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Figure 3+ - PALAR LIn-CoP Framework for PLD





This chapter will now outline the *So What* in terms of empowerment at various empowerment levels for a variety of partners.

### ***So What?***

This chapter answers a call to more thoroughly capture how a PALAR LIn-CoP professional learning and development~~PLD~~ model can facilitate teachers to *be* empowered at the individual, community, organisational and wider professional levels, whilst also enabling them to empower others at each of these levels (Holland, 2021). Therefore, this work expands upon how partnerships can be effectively developed for all partners of the continuum, within and beyond the school-university partnership~~SUP~~.

## Individual Empowerment

From a partnership perspective, Holland (2021) maintains that individual empowerment acts as a crucial prerequisite for empowerment *at* and *for* the community (CoP), organisational (HEI or school) and wider professional levels. As such, the PALAR LIn-CoP partnership initially centred its [professional learning and development](#) processes and activities upon facilitating individual psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000). We were cognisant that teachers' openness to self-identify and to share themselves as a resource for others within a partnership was contingent upon the degree to which they felt like experts (Dworski-Riggs & Day Langhout, 2016). Therefore, the LIn-CoP prioritised the knowledge and skills [professional learning and development](#) required for the teachers to feel individually empowered (Liden et al., 2000) as leaders for inclusion.

Whilst the LIn-CoP partnership was prepared for and encouraging of teachers' growth as organisational leaders and researchers, it honoured teachers' initial salient priorities for growth, predominantly as inclusive teachers and as teacher leaders for inclusion (see King & Holland, [2022 under review](#)). Such a commitment led to a central construct of psychological empowerment being developed: *competence* (Liden et al., 2000). With the hectic and varied demands of the school day, the teachers expressed how important it was that the LIn-CoP's dimensions of domain, practice and community were used as a vehicle to prevent not only the washout of 'leadership for inclusion' [professional learning and development](#) at the ITE phase, but also to further empower them as leaders for inclusion at the remaining continuum stages. As per cognitive and situated cognition perspectives (Van Kruiningen, 2013), community activities and processes were used "as a driving force and anchoring framework for" (Huang et al., 2011, p. 1201) connecting their LIn [professional learning and development](#) to the real world (Donnelly et al., 2019). Whilst external expertise, in this case by the two HEI teacher educators, is often considered to boost a CoP's progress (King & Feeley, 2014), the teachers also valued the collaborative-directive (Dworski-Riggs & Day Langhout, 2010) facilitative (Poekert, 2011) style which promoted their sense of democracy, agency and autonomy (Holland, 2021). **The following personalised and participant driven processes empowered the teachers to discover their own richness of knowledge and skills more deeply (Ruechakul et al., 2015): agenda and priority setting; problem and solution identification; context specific critical action target setting; celebration and preparing to present and presenting.**

~~Figure 4 below shows how~~ For example, the teachers engaged in the ‘presentation’ process at a national conference for teachers, academics and other education stakeholders. ~~These PALAR processes assisted the teachers to realise their expertise over time (Dworski Riggs & Day Langhout, 2010) and gifted them with a sense of permission to feel confident and competent (Holland, 2021).~~

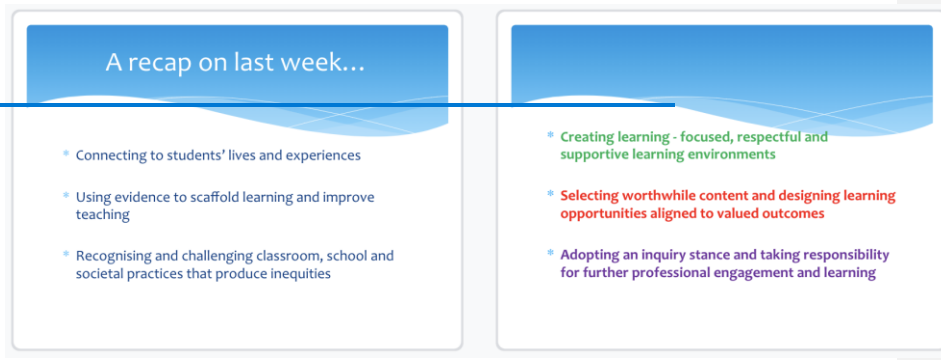
~~Figure 4. Example of ‘Presentation’ Process: Slide from Presentation for IATSE Conference~~

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~~Another example of teachers ‘presenting’ includes that with student teachers in a Higher Education institute (see Figure 5).~~

~~Figure 5. Example of ‘Presentation’ Process: Slide from ‘Teachers In Residence’ Presentation to Student Teachers~~



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An example of teachers 'celebrating' their work took place at the national FEILTE conference is evident in Figure 6 where the teachers worked collaboratively to showcase their individual and collaborative learning.

Figure 6. Example of 'Celebration' Process: FEILTE Conference Poster  
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These PALAR processes assisted the teachers to realise their expertise over time (Dworski-Riggs & Day Langhout, 2010) and gifted them with a sense of permission to feel confident and competent (Holland, 2021).

To narrow the theory-practice gap and overcome the socialisation threat of washout, a multi-space, multi-pathway approach was adopted (Holland, 2021), building a partnership implementation bridge (King, 2016). Iterative and sustained cycles of professional learning and development enactment, active experimentation, and reflection (Holland, 2021) provided the CoP members with authentic, contextual, and relational opportunities from which to grow and be empowered. Depending on the nature of their critical action targets, such opportunities were embedded within a variety of situated spaces, including but not limited to: their school, the partnership HEI and wider professional teacher education and research settings, but more notably

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at the early stages of LIn-CoP engagement, their class context. With respect to primary and second order change, the teachers in this study shared that their individual empowerment made an *impact*; another of Liden et al.'s (2000) psychological empowerment constructs. Accepting the teacher as primary beneficiary of professional learning and development ~~PLD~~ (King & Holland, 2022, ~~under review~~), the yarning process and shared reflections upon critical action target outcomes facilitated the teachers' explication of *how* their actions enhanced pupil behaviour, engagement, and attainment. As believing that one's actions make a difference (Yukl & Becker, 2006), however modest, is considered to be as significant as actually making an impact (Liden et al., 2000), the teachers' individual empowerment was further augmented.

### **Individual and Community Empowerment**

As proposed above, whilst teachers feel more capable of empowering the community and its individuals if they perceive themselves to be legitimate knowers (Holland, 2021), their individual potential for empowerment at the community level is inextricably and reciprocally interlinked to their social engagement in and with that partnership community. A co-constructivist approach and participative dynamic facilitated the teachers to support deeper reflection 'of' and 'for' growth, by, for example, exploring one another's implementation challenges, barriers, and solutions (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). The process of yarning provided "room for each individual's subjective understanding" and for priorities to be aired (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 209), whilst also offering the evidence required for peers to identify context specific patterns to unfold (Holland, 2021) and for "mid-level generalizations" to be drawn (Korthagan, 2010, p. 102). Such collaborative opportunities empowered the individuals and community to exercise "mindful abstraction" (Salomon & Perkins, 1989, p. 124), whereby they deliberately decontextualized a critical action shared by another member and adapted its original application for use in their own context. Figure 7 below is an illustration of one example and how the process facilitated the teachers to identify and reflect upon one another's TSAP critical actions in context.

Figure 7. Example of Critical Contextualisation Evaluation: 'Power Block Bingo'

### Activity: Power Block Bingo

Identifying Stakeholder Ties	Aligning Interests / Goals
Empowering Stakeholders through Enablement	Sales Pitch
Lobbying Support from Powerful Stakeholders	Picking the right time
Empowering Stakeholders through Social Acknowledgement	Picking the right action
Maximising Using Engagement in the LIn-CoP	ADD
ADD	ADD

- Re-Familiarise yourself with the 'Lobbying Stakeholders & Negotiating Power Blocks' Strategies (overleaf)
- In pairs, as you are sharing and listening to CoP members' TSAP, work to identify if and what strategies they have used.
- If you spot and explain this before another pair, strike it off your Bingo Sheet
- If you identify a new strategy not listed, this counts as a strike
- If you see and can explain how a CoP member could have included a strategy, this counts as a strike.

In doing so, teachers could see that the sharing of critical actions and outcomes was contributing to the empowerment of the community as a whole (Holland, 2021).

Over time, the teachers were provided with the opportunity to vary the scope of their critical actions, setting targets for various growth aspects e.g. teacher, leader, researcher etcetera across the various authentic spaces mentioned above. Each boundary spanning experience within and beyond the partnership exposed the individuals and the CoP to the dissensus, (Kakavelakis & Edwards, 2011) and cognitive conflict required for deeper and wider knowledge expansion (Borzillo & Kaminska-Labbe, 2011), knowledge transfer and growth (Holland, 2021). The teachers found that the social robustness (Pigg, 2002) of their expert knowledge was bolstered by their continued engagement in and with an influential cross-school specialist network (Holland, 2021). They often referred to their 'strength in numbers' empowering them to go together, where they would not have gone alone (King and Holland, [2022 under review](#)). This enhanced sense of legitimacy empowered them to believe that they had the 'power to' empower, strengthen, and

foster growth in others beyond their classrooms (Pigg, 2002). Their individual and community empowerment as teachers contributed to their self-identification and empowerment as ‘teacher educators’ and ‘teacher leaders’, as evidenced by their engagement with a ‘teachers in residence’ opportunity at the partnership HEI. They also self-identified and were empowered as researchers, reflected by their: successful application for research funding; dissemination of their work by presenting at the Teaching Council’s annual FÉILTE (Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence) Conference and; preparation; and publication of a research paper in an international journal ~~(see Donnelly et al., 2020)~~. These partnership actions contributed to the individual, community, organisational (partnership HEI) and wider professional empowerment of the teachers, whilst also supporting the empowerment of professionals within and beyond the LIn-CoP partnership.

#### **Organisational Empowerment (and its empowerment prerequisites)**

Engagement in the LIn-CoP partnership highlighted that the nonlinear symbiotic interconnected and interdependent relationships between individual, community and wider professional empowerment are key prerequisites for effectively negotiating the complex challenges of one of the most important empowerment levels for the teacher in any partnership: organisational (Holland, 2021). The organisational architecture surrounding CoPs often fails to scaffold and strengthen them (Pyrko et al., 2017). Cultural, structural, and relational barriers to professional learning and development~~PLD~~ implementation and empowerment (Cooper et al., 2016) were identified by the teachers through stakeholder analysis, problem identification and resource analysis processes (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). However, through solution identification, conflict and change management processes, the teachers used their power ‘with’ and ‘through’ one another (Holland, 2021).

Raising their critical consciousness, this enabled them to design effective critical actions for overcoming those power asymmetries, which impeded their professional learning and development~~PLD~~ efforts (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015), and ultimately their organisational empowerment. Whilst the teachers effectively identified influential stakeholder ties; designed appropriate strategies to connect to their shared interests (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015); and empowered colleagues to engage in inclusive practices; at this point in the organisational partnership journey,

the majority of the empowerment outcomes at the organisational level could be attributed to the legitimacy they had gained from their individual, community and wider professional empowerment levels, including but not limited to: applying for specialist positions within their school; gaining support from school management to pursue postgraduate qualifications related to inclusion and leadership etcetera, all of which bestowed upon them both symbolic and literal legitimisation (Holland, 2021). However, as recently qualified teachers facing complex barriers to professional learning and development~~PLD~~ implementation and ‘cascadence’ (Holland, 2021), knowledge of what to do politically, was not always accompanied by the complex systems mindset required to do it (Kools & Stoll, 2017), though this varied over time and across teachers. Some used developmental approaches to empower colleagues cautiously and diplomatically, whilst others used thicker forms of power (Thomas, 2011) to engage slightly less cooperative and/or less inclusion focused~~ve~~ colleagues. However, there was still a way to go to develop the teachers’ ‘political efficacy’ (Watts et al., 2011) and ‘critical motivation’ to enact the necessary changes for their own organisational empowerment, and for that of their organisation (Holland, 2021).

Finally, this chapter will discuss the *Now What* as it relates to sustainability of partnerships such as the one in this chapter.

### **Now What?**

Sustaining new innovations, in this case partnerships, can be difficult and warrants attention. This requires integrated action at the micro, meso and macro levels of the system (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). At the micro level, it is important to reflect upon the sustainability of the PALAR LIn-CoP. **While this partnership can be described as having developed teachers’ “bilingual fluency in the languages of critique and possibility” the research and literature bases fail to recognise the professional learning and development~~PLD~~ elephant in the room: professional learning and development~~PLD~~ and partnership design and facilitation falls short of adopting the complexity and critical thinking required for sustainable empowerment and transformation at the organisational level and for the organisation (Holland, 2021, p. 269). Problem identification processes revealed that the most imminent challenge to their empowerment lay at the organizational level. As partnership facilitators, we are extremely cognisant-we need to accept that professional learning and development~~PLD~~ is a socially just and moral enterprise (Rahman et al.,**



2014) and, as such, we that they have a moral responsibility to facilitateempower teachers' empowerment of themselves and one another, to develop not only a coping intelligence (Srivastava & Tang, 2015) but also a deeper problem-solving mindset (Draper et al., 2011) to persist in the face of organisational barriers (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). Therefore, as facilitators, we are prospectively at a critical juncture at the "in-design" professional learning and developmentPLD journey to critically reflect retrospectively and prospectively to inform the 'what now' with theories which acknowledge and address the organisational complexities which the teachers' are embracing and tackling. A Doing so will support the teachers' initial development of a final fluency in the "language of leadership for change and empowerment" (Holland, 2021). This should go some way towards ~~helps: to~~ sustaining the partnership's accrued capacity, quality, and meaningful change (Lovett & Gilmore, 2003); to prevent wash out (Zeichner, 1987); ~~and to~~ ensuring that "the time and resources spent" are not wasted (Poekert et al., 2016, p. 308) and that ripples of change are sent out into the complex partnerships.

Whilst the above micro-level recommendation is valuable and socio-culturally relevant; alone, it runs the risk of serving a 'trouble-shooting' purpose, which should not be solely relied upon. At the meso level, there is a significant role for leadership in schools to afford teachers the time and space (King, 2016) required to empower them to create collaborative learning cultures. However, school leaders cannot simply be expected to understand how to alter professional cultures (Holland, 2021) or to empower leadership behaviours in their staff (Yukl & Becker, 2006). Therefore, they must be supported to learn (Fitzpatrick, 2018) through for example, the CSL (2017), whose aim it is to "ensure the provision of high-quality professional development opportunities for aspiring and serving school leaders" (p. 11). Additionally, within the HEI space academics need to engage in 'brave research' in partnership with schools in order to lead to the transformation of education (Swennen and Powell, 2018, p. 155). As partnership facilitators we have a responsibility to advocate for and raise critical awareness of the potential of school partnerships by presenting and celebrating at the local level in our university, in schools and within wider professional bodies. All involved ought to Only then can we begin to challenge hegemonic practices that shape current approaches to partnerships, for example, expert and novice, theory, and practice divides. Notwithstanding the above, it is essential to consider how to scale the concept of partnerships, which arguably cannot be done without all partnersn-organisation driving it and working tirelesslystrategically to implement it (Coburn et al., 2013).

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At the macro level, relevant local, national, and international partners need to demonstrate more value for the micro and meso level issues related to partnership. Governments and other funding bodies need to adopt funding strategies (Coburn et al., 2013) for partnerships that enhance system capacity through reciprocal learning of diverse partners. Examples in Ireland include the aforementioned John Coolahan Research Fund and the Schools Excellence Fund. While government policy is advocating such partnership-supportive approaches, these tend to be in the form of initiatives and the concern is that these initiatives, like many others, will disappear without collaborative cultures and partnerships being fully embedded in the system. A move is required away from isolated initiatives to partnerships being the norm in and across schools and HEIs toward the development of an integrative and inclusive partnership organisational structure and culture. Holland's (2021) recommendation is adopted, calling for all partners within education, policy, and research to endorse a multi-level partnership approach, whereby investment is top-down, but “local, innovative and creative” professional learning and development PLD design and evolution is bottom up in collaboration with facilitative partners, including for example “regional hubs”, such as the Education and Training Boards (Fitzpatrick, 2018, p. 10). To adapt Coolahan’s (1995) advice: taking “ownership of the [partnership] agenda for educational change...is an important cultural shift we need to make” (p. 10). However, this partnership paradigm shift is reliant upon all partners in “casting off the cloak of dependency on the Centre for the solution of all problems” (Coolahan, 1995, p. 10). In the process, we come a little closer to achieving partnership empowerment and change.

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