A MULTI-SITE CASE STUDY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ON TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN FOUR IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education, is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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List of Abbreviations

AP	Assistant Principal
BOM	Board of Management
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPLD	Continuing Professional Learning & Development
CCPLD	Collaborative Continuing Professional Learning & Development
CSL	Centre for School Leadership
DE	Department of Education
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DL	Distributed Leadership
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals Network
ISIP	International School Improvement Project
ISTP	International Summit on the Teaching Profession
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LAOS	Looking at Our Schools
LNLS	Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life Strategy
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEC	National Education Convention
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCTE	Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education
PD	Professional Development
PLD	Professional Learning & Development
PCSP	Primary Curriculum Support Service
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PISA	Programme of International Student Assessment
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PLO	Professional Learning Organisation
QDAS	Qualitative Data Analysis Software

RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SDP	School Development Planning
SET	Special Education Teacher
SER	School Effectiveness Research
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SLSI	School Leadership for School Improvement
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
TC	Teaching Council
WSE	Whole School Evaluation

Abstract

School leadership is a major issue in policy and practice because it can influence collaborative teacher professional learning and development. Systematic national research has indicated a significant dearth in knowledge of the influence of school leadership on teachers' collaborative professional learning and development in primary schools. Furthermore, there has been little research into the overlap between school leadership and collaborative professional learning which are key components of school improvement and teacher professional development. Historically, school effectiveness research has focused on the principal as the 'solo, heroic' school leader. However, more recently school improvement literature, the international discourse and in turn national policy has shifted focus to the potential of distributed school leadership for school improvement to influence collaborative teacher professional learning and development in schools. This thesis presents key findings of an exploration into the influence of school leadership on collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools. A multi-site case study of four Irish primary schools was employed to explore the central phenomenon. The findings illustrated that shared school leadership for school improvement was influencing collaborative teacher professional learning and development in schools in multiple ways. The practice of shared leadership for school improvement was more reflective of delegation rather than genuine distributed leadership. One of the critical findings was that collaborative teacher professional learning and development was a beneficial byproduct of school development and the enactment of school improvement policy rather than the central aim of leadership activity. There was variance in the forms of professional learning within and between schools. School leaders were particularly reliant upon sustained support from the PDST to support collaborative professional learning and development for school improvement. This thesis concludes with a set of recommendations for future policy, practice, and research to progress enactment of the central phenomenon

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

The global discourse on school improvement calls for job-embedded, collaborative professional development led by teachers through models of distributed leadership (Asia Society, 2016; Asia Society, 2017; Asia Society, 2019; Burns & Darling-Hammond, 2014; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner & Espinoza, 2017; Kennedy, 2014; McMahon, Forde & Dickson, 2015; Schleicher, 2012). Maguire (2009) suggests that in many countries "education policy is being articulated in response to the apparently irresistible discourses of globalisation that assert the 'need' for infrastructural and economic reforms to support and enhance competitiveness" (p.59). Ball (2012) observes that "the impact of neo-liberal economic policies, coupled with globalisation and the technological revolution, (meant that) concerns for efficiency and effectiveness have percolated to the top of the agenda as international economic competition has gained hegemonic influence" (p. 183). The consequences are evident in increased accountability measures and the recognised need to drive school improvement within state education systems to support and enhance economic competitiveness (Ball, 2013, Conway & Murphy, 2013; Maguire, 2009). Performativity is a key mechanism of the neo-liberal vision for schools, and it operates "within a framework of judgment within which what 'improvement' and effectiveness are, is determined for us and indicated by measures of quality and productivity" (Ball, 2013, p.31). Ball (2012) argues that performativity is facilitated by organisational 'redesign' particularly through distributed leadership. Distributed leadership (DL) is considered an efficient approach to school improvement based on the assumption that distributing responsibility among principals and teacher leaders removes the concept of

the principal as the 'solo, heroic' school leader (Copland, 2003; McKenzie & Locke, 2014; Woods, 2004). Elmore (2000) asserts that most of the knowledge required for 'large scale' improvement "must inevitably reside in the people who deliver instruction" (p.14) creating an 'imperative' for the development of models of distributed leadership. Education leaders at the 2016 International Summit on the Teaching Profession (ISTP) observed that "at the school level there are a host of leadership roles that teachers can play – from mentoring beginning teachers, to coaching in specific subjects, to leading action research and professional learning in schools" (Asia Society, 2016, p.21). Summit leaders asserted that "job-embedded professional development is far more effective for teacher learning than isolated courses or workshops" (Asia Society, 2016, p.22). Summit leaders concluded "the most powerful forms of professional development are collaborative cultures" (Asia Society, 2016, p.21).

Conway & Murphy (2013) observe the drive for greater accountability in Ireland reflected in "widely influential neo-liberal economic theories and associated models of New Public Management (NPM)" (p.16). Sugrue (2015) argues that the influence of NPM has meant "responsibilities for decision making were devolved to the level of the school, (and) the role of the principal expanded to the point where teacher collaboration in 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998) underpinned by distributed leadership became the concept needed to lead and manage schools" (p.12). Following a systematic review and synthesis of research on school leadership in the Republic of Ireland, spanning the period 2008-2018, Murphy (2019) identified a significant dearth in research in terms of how school leadership influences collaborative teacher professional learning and development within schools. The purpose of this research is

to explore if school leadership is influencing collaborative teacher professional learning and development in Irish primary schools or not.

This chapter begins by describing the current policy context with specific emphasis on policy and legislation pertaining to school leadership, school improvement and teachers' professional learning. Subsequently, key policy developments from 1990 – present, central to the topic of inquiry are discussed. Next, discussion of the policy trajectory describes the evolution of policy on school leadership for school improvement (SLSI). Key policy definitions are presented, and the study parameters are defined to narrow the scope of the inquiry. Next, the rationale for the study is outlined addressing the personal, policy and research rationales and linking them to the research question.

The Current Policy Context

Looking at Our Schools 2016: *A Quality Framework for Primary schools* (DE, 2016), hereafter known as LAOS, and the School Self-Evaluation 2016-2020 Guidelines (DE, 2016a), hereafter known as the SSE Guidelines, are central policy documents designed to support school leaders to enact school improvement. LAOS (DE, 2016) links good performance by Irish students in international surveys of achievement and in school inspection reports to the quality of teaching and learning characteristic of Irish schools. It emphasises the importance of maintaining and improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world, advocating that teachers must be at the heart of efforts to reflect on and improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. LAOS (DE, 2016) and SSE Guidelines (DE, 2016a) provide standards which are designed to provide a clear picture of what good or very good practice in a school look like and to point the way towards improvement where needed. The quality framework provided in both documents sets out a unified set of standards

for two dimensions of the work of schools: teaching and learning; and leadership and management. Each of the dimensions is divided into a number of interrelated domains for which standards are provided. The standards "are stated as the behaviours and attributes characteristic of practices in an effective, well-functioning school" (DE, 2016, p.8). LAOS (DE, 2016) views "career-long development as central to the teachers' work and firmly situates reflection and collaboration at its' heart" (p.7). In the domain of teaching and learning, the quality framework standards specify that teachers "value and engage in professional development and collaboration…(and) contribute to building whole-staff capacity by sharing their expertise" (DE, 2016, p.12). Statements of effective and highly effective practice in this domain stipulate that "teachers' view collaboration as a means to improve pupil learning and to enhance their own professional development" (DE, 2016, p.20). In the domain of leadership and management it is expected that leaders "foster teacher professional development that enriches teachers' and pupils' learning…(and) promote a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation, and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment" (DE, 2016, p. 12). In a school demonstrating highly effective practice a principal "empowers teachers to take on leadership roles and to lead learning through the effective use of distributed leadership models" (DE, 2016, p.28).

LAOS (DE, 2016) stipulates that leadership and management are inseparable and the framework defines school leadership by its impact on learning. The quality framework uses the term 'school leaders' to refer to the formal leadership roles of principals and deputy principals and "includes teachers with posts of responsibility and those who have undertaken roles related to the school's priorities" (DE, 2016, p.7). The framework recognises that all teachers have a leadership role in the school and the leadership and management dimension is intended to assist all teachers in gaining

perspective on the development and expansion of their leadership skills over time. It situates reflection and collaboration at the heart of career-long professional development and emphasises that the quality of pupils' learning should be the main driver of teacher learning.

The establishment of the Teaching Council on a statutory basis in 2006 signified a landmark in the development of teaching as a profession in Ireland. The Teaching Council works within the framework of the Teaching Council Act, 2001 to promote, support and regulate the teaching profession while establishing best practice at all stages of the continuum of teacher education. In 2011, publication of the document Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (Teaching Council, 2011) marked a significant development as it provided a framework for the reconceptualisation of teacher education along a continuum of teacher education. Since it's inception the Teaching Council has been building a framework for initial teacher education (ITE) and induction (*Droichead*). In 2011, the Teaching Council stated its' intention to work toward the development of a coherent national framework for continuing professional development (CPD). In 2016, following a comprehensive consultation process, the Council published Cosán, the national framework that guides and supports teachers' professional learning following their induction process. Cosán emphasises the importance of teachers' lifelong learning and career development as a key priority both internationally and within the EU. Cosán (TC, 2016) recognises the necessity for sustained opportunities to reflect on the processes of learning, teaching, and assessment as essential to ensuring quality in the development of teaching as a profession in response to emergent needs and school improvement. The framework reflects the importance of acknowledging teacher professional learning and the need for quality assurance that benefits teachers and their students. The Cosán standards are

quality teaching and learning and continued professional growth for enhanced professional practice. The Teaching Council (2016) also proposes to provide a framework for collaborative reflection on the contribution of teacher learning to teacher effectiveness. Cosán is based on the premise

> that professional development is most effective in improving teachers' instructional
>
> > practice and contributing to student learning when it is continuous and sustained, and closely connected to the work of teachers in the classroom, where it fosters teacher professional collaboration and when it coherently relates to broader school reforms (Teaching Council, 2016, p.7).

Cosán acknowledges developments in thinking in relation to school leadership in particular the belief that all teachers are leaders. It had been anticipated that implementation of Cosán would be completed by 2020, however this has been hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic. In the interim, the Teaching Council (TC) and the Department of Education (DE) have worked jointly to develop an action plan to promote the system-wide implementation of Cosán, the national framework for teachers' professional learning, by 2027 (www.teachingcouncil.ie).

Conway & Murphy (2013) assert that a rise in accountability in Ireland in the period 1997-2012 has been characterised by "the range of educational legislation at national level… directives and guidelines emanating from the Teaching Council…and strategic leadership, both political and professional, from the Department of Education and Skills" (p.13). The Education Act (1998) specifies the legislative responsibility of the school principal "for the creation, together with the board, parents of students and the teachers, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the

students, and which promotes the professional development of teachers" (23(c)). The Teaching Council Acts[1] (2001-2012) establish the legislative remit of the TC to promote the continuing education and training of teachers. Organisational accountability is evident in the introduction of teacher registration and codes of standards across the continuum of teacher education and professional accountability through Teaching Council standards and professional accreditation. The Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers Updated 2nd Edition (Teaching Council, 2016a), provides an important backdrop to standards and practice in relation to teachers' learning. It has important legal standing in dealing with fitness to teach. The Code was developed in anticipation of the Council's current role in relation to continuing teacher professional learning and development. It sets out standards that apply to all registered teachers in six areas:

1. Professional Values and Relationships
2. Professional Integrity
3. Professional Conduct
4. Professional Practice
5. Professional Development
6. Professional Collegiality and Collaboration

The code promotes professional development, collegiality, and collaboration, binds teachers "to comply with national and school policies" (Teaching Council, 2016, p.7) and "cooperate with the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DE)" (Teaching Council, 2016, p.8) as appropriate. Conway & Murphy (2013) observe that professional codes of conduct, legislative requirements, and an emphasis on the

[1] The Teaching Council Acts 2001 and 2006 and sections 8, 9 and 10 and this subsection may be cited together as the Teaching Council Acts 2001 to 2015 (Teaching Council Amendment Act, 2012, Part 1(4).

provision of teacher professional learning and development have become a mechanism and method for moral/ethical accountability. The Code states that "teachers should take personal responsibility for sustaining and improving the quality of their professional practice by …availing of opportunities for career long professional development" (Teaching Council, 2016, p.8). In terms of professional collegiality and collaboration the Code states that teachers should "work with teaching colleagues and student teachers in the interests of sharing, developing and supporting good practice" (Teaching Council 2016, p.9). Consequently, based on educational legislation, DE policy (DE, 2016; DE, 2016a; DE, 2018) and TC policy (TC, 2012; TC, 2016; TC, 2016a) at national level, formally appointed school leaders are accountable for the enactment of policy on school improvement to foster collaborative teacher professional learning within a model of distributed leadership.

Key Policy Developments in Ireland: 1990-present

Coolahan (2007) observed that between 1965 and 1975 "an era of positive action" (p.2) which involved "fundamental restructuring of teacher education" emerged in Ireland. In particular, "a greater awareness of the importance of in-service education was in evidence with the establishment of regional Teacher Centres, from the early seventies" (Coolahan, 2007, p.4). However, the 1980s brought a period of retrenchment meaning that "teacher education fell well down the priority policy list within the Department of Education" (Coolahan, 2007, p.4). By the early 1990s wider preoccupation with the emergence of what became known as 'the knowledge society' (Coolahan, 2007, p.6) meant that politicians, economists, and educationalists "realised that a high-quality education system was a sine qua non …and that such a system is contingent on the availability of a quality teaching force" (p.6). In 1991, the Organisation for Economic Coordination and Development (OECD) conducted a Review of National Policies for

Education in Ireland. The reviewers "opposed the policy of retrenchment…based on a 'short-term economic strategy'" (Coolahan, 2007, p.7). The reviewers stated, "that the best returns from further investment in teacher education (would) come from careful planning and construction of a nationwide induction and in-service system using the concept of the teaching career as the foundation" (p.7). Coolahan (2007) suggests that while the report did not receive immediate 'widespread dissemination' in Ireland "it had a major shaping influence on the attitudes and discourse on teacher education for many years" (p.9). The remainder of this section describes key policy developments in teacher career development, school leadership and school improvement between 1990 and the present date.

The 1991 OECD review, along with contributions by the Primary Education Review body and the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum, informed the subsequent Green Paper on Education (DE, 1992). The Green Paper provided an opportunity for educational stakeholders and bodies to comment on prominent issues in education. The paper outlined the aim to train and equip teachers for a constantly changing environment, to create a system for effective quality assurance and the necessity to devolve administration to schools as a means to implement 'best practice' (DE, 1992). The Green Paper formed the basis for subsequent consultation at the National Education Convention (NEC) (1993). The NEC involved consultation between forty education partners as a mechanism to develop knowledge and ideas at all levels of education in Ireland. It provided an opportunity for partners in education to declare their positions on a range of educational issues in public and private consultation. The subsequent White Paper on Education (DE, 1995) provided a framework to systematically inform the development of education policy and practice. The White Paper (DE, 1995) emphasised "the need for a cohesive national policy on

and a comprehensive programme of in-career professional development for teachers related to the long-term development of the profession and the education system generally." (p.135). The White Paper also prioritised the "promotion of more collegiality and co-operation among teachers in schools in the development of whole-school approaches to educational provision and school planning, including the identification of curriculum leaders in particular specialisations" as central components of school based in-career development. However, Coolahan (2007) notes a period of 'policy drift' set in subsequent to publication of the White Paper (DE, 1995) and while there was no withdrawal from the concept "no central co-ordinated strategy for in-career development was devised" (p.16).

McNamara, O'Hara & Ní Angléis (2002) observe that traditionally Irish schools and teachers working in them have tended not to engage in collaborative planning and evaluation processes. The characterisation of evaluation processes in other countries contributed to disengagement with suggestions of approaches that involved anything such as appraisal, planning and target setting. However, rapid change in the Irish education system coupled with "influential research at home and abroad moved School Development Planning from the periphery to the centre of education policy in a very short time" (McNamara et al., 2002, p.202). Recognising the importance of whole-school planning and evaluation to further school effectiveness the DE commenced a three-year Whole School Evaluation (WSE) pilot project in 1998. Simultaneous to the ongoing WSE pilot project, the DE "actively encouraged all schools to develop a school plan through a processes of school development planning" (McNamara et al., 2002, p.201). Indeed, the Education Act (1998) made the development, regular review and updating of the school plan a legislative requirement. The DE proposed to extend WSE to all schools signifying the introduction of some

form of measurement set against targets and an emphasis on quality assurance, organisational and individual performance (McNamara et al., 2002; McNamara & O'Hara, 2012). In 1999, the DE issued framework documents to support the process of School Development Planning (SDP). McNamara et al. (2002) identified a shared collaborative approach as a key variable in the approach to SDP, however they questioned whether linking collaborative planning and evaluation, "designed to provide some degree of fuller accountability (could) be as uncomplicated and unproblematic as the DE suggest(ed)" (p. 204). Consultation between the DE and the education partners led to agreement that the emphasis would be on the performance of the school as a whole rather than individual teachers. It was agreed the process would become one of internal and external evaluation. McNamara et al. (2002) observed that "school improvement and quality assurance policy in Ireland (was) now founded on a 'twin-track' approach: SSE running parallel to Whole School Evaluation conducted by the inspectorate" (p.209). The LAOS framework (DE, 2003) stated that SSE would act "as a preparation for inspection but, most importantly…(as) a driving force for collaborative, internal school improvements" (McNamara & O'Hara, 2012, p.86). According to McNamara & O Hara (2012) "the assumption of this approach (was) that schools have the capacity to follow up inspection recommendations without further external assistance" (p.86). This assumption indicated that internal school review and school self-evaluation should also act as a driving force for collaborative, internal school improvement. However, McNamara & O'Hara (2012) observe that a lack of 'meaningful structural response' (p.95) within schools meant sustained school self-evaluation and school-based professional collaboration remained 'aspirational' (p.95). McNamara & O'Hara (2012) suggested that movements toward increased

accountability and transparency in the Irish education system would eventually lead to a profound difference in how quality would be assessed in schools.

The Policy Trajectory

Economic crisis combined with public and political attention aroused by the dissatisfaction with Ireland's performance in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 created a 'perfect storm' which resulted in a commitment to tackle long-standing issues in Irish education (Hislop, 2011). The Teaching Council, established in 2006, published a 'raft' of teacher education policy in the period 2010-2012 (Conway & Murphy, 2013). Simultaneously, the Literacy and Numeracy for Life Strategy (LNLS) (DE, 2011-2020) prioritised development of "a professional commitment among teachers to reflect, improve and upskill throughout their careers" (p.30). Echoing the global discourse, the strategy established a vision of professional learning in schools encompassing school improvement planning, school leadership, evaluation, and the development of teacher competence (Hislop, 2011). The Teaching Council worked closely with the DE to set targets and define action to "shape the sort of professional development" (Hislop, 2011, p.16) needed to realise the targets in the strategy.

The 'perfect storm' created a strong position for government officials to negotiate public sector pay and policy reform. Criteria for educational reform in Ireland were established through the Croke Park Agreement (Government of Ireland, 2010) and subsequent Haddington Road Agreement (Government of Ireland, 2013). The Croke Park Agreement (2010) ensured the full co-operation of teacher unions with a range of new and interrelated policies in teaching and teacher education and increased the time allowed for provision of school planning and school-based professional development by one hour per week. New guidelines on SSE were introduced and

became a mandatory requirement in 2012. O'Brien, McNamara & O'Hara (2014) found that lack of capacity was often cited as an underlying problem in engaging in SSE in Irish schools, advising 'up skilling' of staff to address the issue. In addition, "feedback showed that the standards had proved unwieldy for schools and the Inspectorate accepted that a significant re-writing was required" (Hislop, 2017, p.9) culminating in the publication of LAOS (DE, 2016) and the SSE guidelines (DE, 2016a).

In 2009, a moratorium on promotion in the public-sector meant that teachers could no longer be promoted to a post of responsibility outside the roles of Principal and Deputy Principal. It became "a matter for the school authority to re-organise and prioritise the appropriate duties for post of responsibility holders" (DE, 2009, p.1). In February 2016, the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) successfully balloted members for industrial action calling for non-co-operation with the SSE initiative in response to the seven-year moratorium on promoted posts of responsibility in schools. In March 2018, the INTO lifted its directive to facilitate benefits under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020. In response the Department of Education and Skills (DE) issued circular DE 0016/2018 Re-engaging with the School-Self Evaluation process in Irish schools (DE, 2018). In addition, the subsequent DE circular letter 0070/2018 set out a leadership and management framework for schools which is closely aligned with LAOS (DE, 2016) and SSE policy (DE, 2016a). The circular 'comprehends' (p.4) the development of a distributed leadership model in primary schools to build staff capacity. It also specifies the changed responsibility of teacher leaders to work in teams of collaboration with the Principal and Deputy Principal, and to lead professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development for school improvement. DE circular 0016/2018 reminds schools of the collaborative, inclusive

and reflective process of internal school review which centres on a six-step SSE process. As part of the re-engagement process schools have been instructed to select either one or two curriculum areas or aspects of teaching and learning as the focus of the SSE process[2].

School leaders are provided with numerous supports to facilitate re-engagement with the SSE process including access to regular updates on the SSE website, advisory visits from inspectors and support from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). The PDST have further responsibility for supporting implementation of the new Primary Language Curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2019). The Primary Language Curriculum has been introduced on a phased basis since September 2016 and the DE/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) are engaging with school leaders and teachers as they become familiar with the new curriculum and being to implement it in classrooms (DE, 2019). A new three-year cycle of support to implement the primary language curriculum commenced in September 2019 and continued until 2022. The PDST provided six in-school support visits during a full school year as part of a programme of sustained in-school support.

In 2015, the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) was established by the DE to provide professional development opportunities for school principals and deputy principals. The long-term vision for the CSL is to "expound best practice in school

[2] In March 2020, the government closed all schools and centres for education for public health reasons, due to the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus). DE Circular 0041/2020 advised that schools should use the SSE process to help them to address the challenges that will arising from the re-opening of schools and/or complete work on the aspects of teaching and learning that they had selected as the focus for self-evaluation in the period 2016-2020. This meant that there were no new SSE requirements for schools in the school year 2020/21.

leadership and continuing professional development (CPD) and to promote and drive system-wide adherence" (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2018, p.103). Fitzpatrick Associates (2018) conducted a study comprising of surveys and focus group interviews with principals and deputy principals to identify current practices in the area of professional development for school leaders. The surveys found that distributing leadership roles and responsibilities was ranked as a 'critical' (p.40) area of need for professional development leaders. In addition, school leaders frequently identified the need for professional development (PD) in leading teaching and learning, particularly in building a collaborative culture with staff and supporting teacher learning and development. Focus group interview findings concluded that effective leadership of any school is reliant on teachers taking leadership roles 'in harmony' with that of the principal. Principals and deputy principals suggested that teacher leadership must also come under the scope of the CSL and active support for the development of DL at all levels of school leadership was identified as a fundamental need.

The enactment of multiple reform initiatives and the development of the Cosán framework constitute much of what is expected in the global discourse in terms of school leaders by specifying the changed responsibility of teacher leaders to work in teams of collaboration with the Principal and Deputy Principal, and to lead professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development for school improvement. Cosán (TC, 2016) and LAOS (2016) recognise the potential of all teachers as leaders. The Fitzpatrick Associates (2018) report identifies challenges faced by principals and deputy Principals as they transition into newly defined roles and responsibilities in the local operation of national policy on school improvement. The report does not provide insight to the experiences and challenges of teacher leaders in their newly defined roles

on school leadership teams with shared responsibility to enact school improvement policy and lead the professional development of in-service teachers.

Key Policy Definitions

This section presents definitions of school leadership, teacher leadership and distributed leadership as presented in policy texts.

School Leaders

According to DE circular 0070/2018 the term 'school leaders' typically refers to formal leadership roles including teachers with posts of responsibility and others who carry out roles and responsibilities integral to the administration, management, and leadership of the school. School leadership encompasses the roles and responsibilities of those leaders who hold designated posts of Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II, under the new leadership and management structure of the school.

Teacher Leaders

According to Cosán (TC, 2016) and DE circular 0070/2018 every teacher has a leadership role within the school community and in relation to pupil learning. DE circular 0070/2018 specifies that the Boards of Management may take cognisance of the responsibilities being carried out by current post holders and responsibilities being undertaken by members of staff who do not hold posts of responsibility. Therefore, the term 'teacher leader' refers to formally and informally appointed leadership and management roles which are considered at all times as serving the school's core work: learning and teaching.

Study Parameters

In order to limit the scope of the investigation it is necessary to define the study parameters. Cosán outlines four dimensions to teacher learning:

1. formal and informal
2. personal and professional
3. collaborative and individual
4. school-based and external

This section defines the geolocation, target population and professional collaborative activities under investigation within these four dimensions of teacher learning.

Geolocation

Cosán (TC, 2016) affirms teacher learning that is embedded in the working context rather than decontextualised in-service. However, in line with an analysis of professional development practices by the Australian Institute for Teaching & School Leadership (2014) Cosán (TC, 2016) recognises the benefit of multiple learning settings as a means to create favourable environments to challenge existing beliefs and practice. Cosán (2016) advocates engagement by teachers in communities of practice in order to extend their expertise. Cosán (TC, 2016) therefore acknowledges the value of school-based and external opportunities for teacher learning. Furthermore, Cosán (TC, 2016) and the Code of Professional Conduct (TC, 2012) state that teachers should take responsibility for their own learning construction, maintain their professional knowledge and "in light of their professional knowledge base…(avail) of opportunities for career long professional development" (TC, 2012, p.8).

LAOS (2016) states that schools in which teachers engage actively with a variety of CPD providers exemplify good practice whereas a school which forms the

'primary locus' for teacher CPD exemplifies very good practice. LAOS (DE, 2016) also refers to cross-professional learning communities, the development of schools as Professional Learning Organisations (PLOs) and the engagement of a wide range of professional bodies including Department support services, third-level institutions, and professional associations to support teachers and school leaders in their roles. Furthermore, LAOS (DE, 2016) advocates that all teachers are leaders, encourages teamwork in all aspects of school life suggesting that teachers themselves are key actors in directing their own learning processes. In addition, the quality of student learning is considered the main driver of teacher learning with internal and external school evaluation considered "the most powerful agent of improvement" (DE, 2016, p.7). This research will focus on leadership of school-based professional teacher professional and learning, in the context of school improvement.

Target Population

Shen, Ma, Gao, Palmer, Poppink, Burt, Leneway, McCrumb, Pearson, Rainey, Reeves & Wegenke (2019) developed and validated an instrument to measure integrated school leadership for school improvement. They highlight the limitation of focusing on principal and teacher leadership in 'isolation' as if "in the presence of one, the other were absent in the context of school management and organisation" (Shen et al., p.403). They found that all teachers as 'front-line educators' (p.415) through whom educational leadership functions, may well be the best source of information on the extent to which school leadership is collectively practiced. Shen et al. (2019) conceptualise integrated school leadership as an integration of collective principal and teacher leadership.

In Irish primary schools, Assistant Principal I (API) and Assistant Principal II (APII) are expected, in line with the principles of distributed leadership, to work in

teams of collaboration with the principal and/or deputy principal and have shared responsibility for the enactment of policy on school improvement and engaging teachers in professional collaboration that enriches teacher learning (DE, 2016). The target population for this study is formally appointed school leaders working in Irish primary schools. The focus of this study is the collective or integrated experiences of these formally appointed school leaders as they enact their formally designated roles to facilitate collaborative teacher professional learning.

Rationale

Personal Rationale

I have worked with teachers at various stages along the continuum of teacher education including as a teacher educator on a programme of Initial Teacher Education (ITE), and as a teacher leader and school leader in various curriculum areas. My teaching and school leadership experience has been predominantly in a designated disadvantaged, DEIS[3] Band One school. I have undertaken formal and informal teacher leadership roles and school leadership roles since the outset of my teaching career in 2002. I also engaged in an inter-school job-share for one year, in a non-DEIS school, in which I engaged informally in leadership activity in restorative practice. I taught on a programme of ITE for six years, delivering tutorials and webinars in a range of curricular areas and thus have experienced the transition from the role of classroom teacher to teacher educator. Simultaneously, I worked as a module leader which meant I had leadership responsibilities for the delivery of the module by a team of teacher educators. I progressed to a leadership and management role on the same programme

[3] DEIS stands for Delivering Equality of Education in Schools. It is a DE policy initiative which aims to improve opportunities to ensure that educational outcomes are unrelated to social background as far as possible. d6b98002-a904-427f-b48a-0fa0af756ea7.pdf (www.gov.ie)

and my responsibilities included school placement supervision, assessment moderation and the development of professional development activities for teacher educators across the program. In recent years, I have returned to teaching as a Special Education Teacher. This research is important to me because I have encountered significant changes in my work as a teacher, teacher educator and school leader arising from the LNLS (DE, 2011-2020), mandatory requirements for SSE which were put in place in 2012, and the range of teacher education policies emanating from the teaching council. I have been concerned about the influence of the enactment of school improvement policy on my personal and professional learning and development as a teacher and a school leader.

Policy Rationale

Internationally, distributed leadership (DL) has been proffered as the solution to link internal and external school evaluation, school leadership, the development of collaborative work cultures and teacher professional development (Asia Society; 2016; Asia Society, 2019). At national level, Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (PCTE) (Teaching Council, 2011) defines teacher leadership in an administrative capacity suggesting the move to a model of DL would alleviate the Principal's administrative workload, enabling them to address the 'instructional leadership aspect' of their roles i.e., the development of a collaborative school culture for the professional development (PD) of teachers. DE Circular 0070/2018 specifies that in line with the principles of distributed leadership, formally appointed school leaders should work in teams with the principal and/or deputy principal to lead school improvement. School leaders should promote a culture of collaboration to foster teacher professional development (DE, 2018). Cosán (TC, 2016), the national framework for teachers' professional specifies that professional development is most effective when it is

continuous and sustained, fosters teachers' professional collaboration, and relates to broader school reform efforts. Given that the Teaching Council and the Department of Education have worked jointly to develop an action plan to promote the system-wide implementation of Cosán by 2027, the convergence of school leadership and professional development leadership is an emergent area of both policy and practice in Irish schools. This study will explore if the enactment of policy on school leadership is influencing collaborative teacher professional collaboration in Irish primary schools or not.

Research Rationale

The shift to leadership of professional learning means that school leaders need to develop their skills as professional development leaders (King, Poekert & Pierre, 2023; Lynch, Peddell, McGuigan, Willis, Yeigh & Marcoionni; Perry, 2020; Perry & Boylan, 2018) for school improvement. Perry & Boylan (2018) distinguish the 'first-order' role of classroom teachers from their 'second-order' role (Murray & Male, 2005, p.128) as teacher educators. Perry & Boylan (2018) acknowledge the 'complexity' of the 'second-order' role of teacher leaders which is "one step removed from the classroom" (p.255). This second-order role involves coordinating, designing, and facilitating professional collaboration to foster the professional development of participants who already know how to teach (Perry, 2020) while simultaneously enacting the requirements of school improvement policy. King (2011) observes that the "concepts of professional development, collaborative practices and professional learning communities are complex yet essential components linking teaching and school improvement" (p.153). However, these concepts are "often treated as separate entities in the literature with little research available on the convergence of these concepts in practice" (King, 2011, p.153). The more recent systematic review and synthesis of

research on school leadership in the Republic of Ireland, spanning the period 2008-2018, (Murphy, 2019) supports this assertion by identifying a significant dearth in research in terms of how school leadership is influencing collaborative teacher professional learning in schools. This study aims to address the dearth in research identified by Murphy (2019) by exploring if school leadership is influencing collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools or not.

Central Research Question:

How is school leadership influencing collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools?

Research Aims

This research aims to explore:

- ✓ if school leadership is influencing collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools or not.
- ✓ where evident, what school leadership of collaborative teacher learning looks like in practice.
- ✓ where apparent, aspects that may be hindering the influence of school leadership on collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has outlined the rationale, research question and aims of this study. It has provided a description of the national and international school leadership for school improvement and teacher education contexts. Chapter Two, the literature review, explores three waves of school reform to elicit changing conceptualisations of school leadership and how teacher professional learning and development is envisaged

in each. It explores key characteristics of effective professional learning and development to illuminate understanding of what the convergence of school leadership and collaborative teacher professional learning should look like in practice. Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach to the study. Chapter Four presents the findings of the studies within three key themes. Chapter Five is structured around discussion of four factors which arose from the three key themes presented in Chapter Four. This is followed by the conclusion of the study in Chapter Six.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This doctoral study explores if school leadership is influencing collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools or not. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, DE policy (DE, 2016; DE, 2016a; DE, 2018) has broadened sources of school leadership, directing teams of formally appointed school leaders to facilitate professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development for school improvement. The introductory chapter identified a significant dearth in national research on school leadership in the Republic of Ireland in terms of how it is influencing collaborative teacher professional learning and development within schools (Murphy, 2019). In addition, findings indicated that collaborative practices and professional development which are 'essential components' of school improvement are "often treated as separate entities in the literature with little research available on the convergence of these concepts in practice" (King, 2011, p.153). The purpose of this literature review was to identify central issues in the key areas of school leadership, school improvement, collaborative teacher professional learning, and teacher professional development. Key words and emergent concepts were selected from national policy texts and preliminary readings. The DCU search engine *Summon* was used to explore multiple search engines simultaneously, facilitating the exploration of a wide range of academic journals and databases. Given the breadth and depth of literature in each of the key areas the initial literature search prioritised broad syntheses and summaries of the literature in journal articles. The literature search also focused on journal articles that reported research studies in each of the key areas. Simultaneously, the library catalogue was explored to identify key texts particularly in the areas of school effectiveness and school improvement. This iterative process contributed to the

development of the framework for the literature review presented in this chapter which explores the convergence between changing conceptualisations of school leadership and effective collaborative teacher professional learning and development for school improvement.

Initially, this chapter explores three waves of school reform, to elicit understanding of changing conceptualisations of school leadership and how teacher professional learning and development for school improvement is envisaged in each: the School Effectiveness Movement; the School Improvement Movement; the Pursuit of Future Excellence. Subsequently, key characteristics of effective professional development and models of continuing professional learning and development are explored to identify what school leadership of collaborative teacher professional learning and development should look like in practice. Perspectives on professionalism are presented to further illuminate the potential influence of school leadership on teacher professional development. The convergence between recent conceptualisations of SLSI and teacher professional learning and development, emerging from the literature review and national policy, are discussed throughout and gaps in national research on school leadership of collaborative teacher professional learning are identified to narrow the scope of this study.

Three waves of Reform

Bananthy (1988) contends that reform efforts and recommendations have come in three waves asserting that the first wave involved 'doing more of the same'; the second wave meant doing 'the same but doing it better' and the third wave focuses on 'fundamental redesign of the education system' (p.7-8). The first wave is characteristic of the school effectiveness movement. The second is characteristic of the drive towards linking the

"emerging school effectiveness knowledge base" (Hopkins, Stringfield, Harris, Stoll & MacKay, 2014, p.274) with the processes of school improvement. The third wave reflects the continually 'evolving' (Hopkins et al., 2014, p.274) field of school improvement characterised by a focus on developing effective educational systems in the 'pursuit of future excellence' (Holly, 1990, p.195). The three waves of reform advocate particular conceptions of school leadership as mechanisms for school improvement. The following sections describe changing conceptualisations of school leadership within these three interrelated social movements to elicit understanding of how school leadership for school improvement has been linked to collaborative teacher professional learning and development.

The School Effectiveness Movement

The research-based approach to evaluating effective schools was influenced by the "prominence of the sociology of education in the late 1950s in Britain and the 'discovery of poverty' in the United States in the early 1960s" (Silver, 1994, p.76-77). In the early 1960s, proposed school reforms included action programmes targeting the development of 'educational priority areas' (Plowden, 1967) and forms of 'compensatory education' (Silver, 1994, p.78) to address the needs of 'at risk' (Silver, 1994, p.78) children. However, evaluation of reform programmes indicated no significant benefit for at risk children. The 1966 Coleman Report *Equality of Educational Opportunity* marked a critical juncture in the development of evaluation studies. The report set out to examine "the educational opportunities available to different racial and ethnic groups" (Silver, 1994, p.78) in the US. Although, the central message of the Coleman Report was that school differences "accounted for only a small percentage of differences in pupils' attainment…this was generally interpreted in the press and elsewhere to mean that school made no difference, that teaching was

unimportant" (Silver, 1994, p.79). The 1972 Jencks et al. *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* study deduced that family background was the most significant 'determinant of educational attainment' (Silver, 1994, p.79). The school effectiveness research movement emerged to counter the negative messages associated with early evaluation of the 1960s programmes, in particular the Coleman Report, which suggested that schools made no difference, and that home background had a far greater influence on a child's development than the school they attended (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis & Ecob, 1989; Silver, 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996).

Early school effectiveness researchers developed methodologies aimed at identifying common factors associated with effective schools (Mortimore et al., 1989). Several studies emerged initially to refute the seminal studies of Coleman et al. (1966) and Jencks et al. (1972) which saw several researchers, for example: Weber, 1971; Goodlad, 1979; and Reynolds, 1985, become "active in challenging the view that the influence of the school can only be trivial" (Mortimore et al., 1989, p.1). Research efforts focused on "separating the impact of family background from that of the school and ascertaining whether some schools were more effective than others and, if so, what factors contributed to positive effects" (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p.27). Studies of 'school effects' found "consistent (and, taken together, overlapping) correlates of school effects" (Reynolds, Sammons et al. 2014, p.199). Several factors became, and were to remain, prominent in school effectiveness research (SER) including strong principal leadership, principal participation in the classroom, high principal expectations of student and teacher performance; an emphasis on cognitive development (Silver, 1994).

Subsequently, researchers began searching for acceptable ways of identifying 'successful' (Silver, 1994, p.83) schools. The growth of 'input-output' (Teddlie &

Reynolds, 2000, p.3) studies saw the development of models that could predict the actual performance of school students. The prediction "was based on the input conditions at the moment of calculation (characteristics of the students, homes, and community) and the variable – the students' level of performance at that point. From these a prediction was made of the students' likely performance (the 'output') at a later point in time" (Silver, 1994, p.83). The difference between the inputs and the outputs were seen as an indicator of the school's 'relative effectiveness' (Silver, 1994, p.83). The identification of 'successful' and 'outlier' schools enabled researchers to select schools "whose characteristics would be worth investigation" (Silver, 1994, p.83). The trend of this research approach was to move from "the large scale… to the smaller sample, the unit, the case study, detailed study of organisation and activity, observation and other evidence of the interactive working of schools, their sub-units and specific contexts" (Silver, 1994, p.83). By the mid-1980s school effects research had evolved from input-output studies to more "methodologically sophisticated studies which began to show the scientific properties of school effects in such areas as the stability of school effects over time" (Reynolds, Sammons et al., 2014, p.199). By the early 1990s there were "numerous attempts to explore the reasons why schools had their different effects" (Reynolds, Sammons et al., 2014, p.199). SER became concerned with "the processes of effective schooling, evolving from case studies of outlier schools through to contemporary studies merging qualitative and quantitative methods in the simultaneous study of classrooms and schools" (Reynolds, Teddlie, Creemers, Scheerens & Townsend, 2000, p.3). Reynolds et al. (2000) observe the change in position from 30 years previously that 'schools make no difference' that was assumed to be the conclusions of the Coleman et al. (1966) and Jencks et al. (1971) studies to

> widespread assumption internationally that schools affect children's development, that there are observable regularities in the schools that 'add value' and that the task of educational policies is to improve all schools in general, and the more ineffective schools in particular, by transmission of this knowledge to educational practitioners (p.3).

Stoll & Fink (1996) define the term 'value added' as "the boost given by the school to pupil's achievement over and above what they bring in terms of prior attainment and background factors" (p.27). Reynolds, Sammons et al. (2014) observe that in school effectiveness research (SER) the "enthusiasm for 'evidence' has spawned considerable interest in 'meta-analysis' techniques to draw robust conclusions about the impact of educational factors upon children" (p.200). Meta-analysis is "a quantitative approach that combines results from different studies to come to an aggregate conclusion" (Muijs, Kyriakides, van der Werf, Creemers, Timperley & Earl, 2014, p.237). Several meta-analyses have summarised knowledge about the characteristics of effective schools from the literature to enhance understanding of the factors that contribute to effective schooling.

In their meta-analysis, Sammons et al. (1995) outlined 11 key factors for effective schools from an in-depth review of SER (See Table 2.1). Given the purpose of this study is to explore the influence of SLSI on collaborative teacher professional learning and development, understanding how factors such as professional leadership and the development of the school as a learning organisation have contributed to effective schooling is important. Professional leadership incorporates three features of leadership practice: firm and purposeful, the leading professional, and a participative approach. According to Sammons et al. (1995) 'brokerage' is a key aspect of firm and purposeful leadership characterised by "the ability to mediate or 'buffer' the school from unhelpful change agents, to challenge and even violate externally set guidelines" (p.10). The characterisation of the principal as the leading professional suggests their

"involvement in and knowledge of what goes on in classrooms" (Sammons et al., 1995, p.11).

Table 2.1 Key Factors for Effective Schools

11 Factors for Effective Schools	
1. Professional leadership	- firm and purposeful - a participative approach - the leading professional
2. Shared vision and goals	- unity of purpose - consistency of practice - collegiality and collaboration
3. A learning environment	- an orderly atmosphere - an attractive working environment
4. Concentration on teaching and learning	- maximising of learning time - academic emphasis - focus on achievement
5. Purposeful teaching	- efficient organisation - adaptive practice - clarity of purpose - structured lessons
6. High expectations	- high expectations all round - communicating expectations - providing intellectual challenge
7. Positive reinforcement	- clear and fair discipline - feedback
8. Monitoring progress	- monitoring pupil performance - evaluating school performance
9. Pupil rights and responsibilities	- raising pupil self-esteem - positions of responsibility - control of work
10. Home-school partnerships	- parental involvement in their children's learning
11. A learning organisation	- school-based staff development

Note. Adapted from "Key Characteristics of Effective Schools: A review of school effectiveness research", by P. Sammons, J. Hillman & P. Mortimore, 1995, International School Effectiveness & Improvement Centre, p. 8 for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). Copyright by ERIC, London.

However, multiple reviews of SER have examined the role of the principal and have concluded that principal leadership influences student achievement indirectly, predominantly through actions which influence school and classroom conditions (Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Heck 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Muijs, 2011; Muijs et al., 2014). Effective principals promote a participative approach and delegate by sharing leadership responsibilities among senior leaders and involving teachers in decision-making. Sammons et al. (1995) found that teacher involvement in decision-making contributed to greater student achievement. Such a participative approach is 'tied' (Sammons et al., 1995, p.10) to the extent to which the culture of the school is a collaborative one. This aspect of collegiality is closely related to the extent to which teachers adopt a consistent approach. A consensus on shared values and goals for the school is associated with improved educational outcomes for students (Mortimore et al., 1989; Sammons et al., 1995).

SER findings indicate that contribution to student achievement emerges from a strong sense of school community among staff and pupils, sharing of ideas, peer observation and feedback and collaborative learning to improve teaching and learning. (Mortimore et al., 1989; Sammons et al., 1995). The findings of Sammons et al. (1995) meta-analysis conclude that the development of a collaborative culture and teacher participation in decision-making has a direct influence on student outcomes.

School leadership of school-based staff development is fundamental to the development of the school as a learning organisation. SER findings show that effective school leaders practice a range of monitoring procedures, school evaluation and goal-setting processes and link them to staff development (Sammons et al., 1995). SER centres on the instructional leadership of the principal as a key component of effective schools (D'Agostino, 2000; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger, 2005; Reynolds, 1998;

Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). MacBeath & Riley (1998) observe that while the context and emphasis of school leadership varied it was the instructional leadership of the principal that was 'placed in the spotlight' (MacBeath & Riley, p. 143). Hallinger (2005) observes that during the 1980's SER made 'little reference' (p.223) to teachers or assistant principals as instructional leaders rather it promoted the concept of the school principal as the 'solo, heroic' (MacKenzie & Locke, 2014, p.168) school leader. Townsend (1997) argues the limitation of SER, which narrows the characteristics of effective schools, arguing that such an approach "may oversimplify the complex interactions that actually happen in schools" (p.312). Indeed, a significant limitation of SER is the focus on the leadership of the school principal which provides little insight to the practice of shared leadership for school improvement.

Despite the focus on the instructional leadership of the principal, Muijs et al. (2014) observe that one of the key findings from decades of SER is that "classroom practice is the strongest determinant of student outcomes" (p.237). Hattie (2009) synthesised over 800 different meta-analyses from SER and found that "teachers are among the most powerful influences in learning" (p.238). Furthermore, he suggests that

> enhancing learning also needs school leaders and teachers who can create school, staff-room, and classroom environments where teachers can talk about their teaching, where errors or difficulties are seen as critical learning opportunities, where discarding incorrect knowledge and understandings is welcomed and where teachers can feel safe to learn, re-learn and explore their own teaching knowledge and understanding (p.37).

MacBeath & Reilly (1998) contend that SER has identified good schools as "those whose culture provided opportunities for growth, not only for pupils but for teachers and school leaders" (p.146). Despite recognition of the potential of school-based professional development to promote learning across the school community Muijs et al, (2014) argue that this element of SER has been 'less developed' (p.231). They observe

"that 'state-of-the-art' understandings about processes and conditions that promote student learning are typically not used to construct appropriate learning environments for teachers" (Muijs et al., 2014, p.246).

Critics of SER argue that meta-analysis as a method, which lists key factors as a 'mechanism of effectiveness' to initiate school improvement "too readily reflects policy requirements for simple solutions" (Goldstein & Woodhouse, 2000, p.355; Muijs et al., 2014). Sammons et al. (1996) argue that one of the purposes of reviewing the key characteristics of effective schools was to "simplify issues so that information could be accessible to non-researchers'" (Goldstein & Woodhouse, 2000, p.360). However, MacBeath & Riley (1998) observe criticism of the use of SER findings being used as "blanket recipes – solutions to the problems facing all schools" (p.144). Furthermore, critics have accused the movement "of being narrow and evading some of the crucial social and cultural features of schools…(arguing) it was 'almost exclusively managerial'" (Silver, 1994, p. 99). In the 1980s some school effectiveness researchers began to identify as 'management theorists' (Ball, 1995, p. 258) with discussions of effectiveness broadening to include "the elaboration of operational models and the relevance of strategies derived from management theory and business" (Silver, 1994, p.97). Ball (1988) posits the managerial focus in schools as a fundamental criticism of the SER movement arguing it reduced teacher autonomy and contributed to the development of the conditions for a discourse of management. According to Silver (1994) the effective schools' researchers "were in fact drawing on an international literature of organisational behaviour and change, which also supported what was seen as a related emphasis on the mechanisms of school improvement" (p.99). The field of school improvement has evolved simultaneous to the field of school effectiveness research and although "different in theory, methodology and purposes" has been linked

with school effectiveness in efforts to bring about 'meaningful change' in schools (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p.41). The following section describes the emergence of the school improvement movement, and how it has been linked to the school effectiveness knowledge base.

The School Improvement Movement

Hopkins & Reynolds (2001) contend that there have been three 'distinct' (p.459) phases of school improvement in evidence since the mid-1980s. The first phase was "epitomised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) *International School Improvement Project* (ISIP) (Hopkins, 1987)" (Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001, p.459). It focused on the concept of school self-evaluation and "the outcomes of schooling, rather than being accepted as a given, were seen as problematic and open for debate, as the movement shifted in orientation towards the process of change" (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p. 43). However, the process-orientated approach did not necessarily lead to improvement and "by the late 1980s there began to be a return towards a focus on the evaluation of processes and outcomes" (p.43). According to Hopkins & Reynolds (2001) "the second phase of the development of school improvement began in the early 1990s and resulted from the interaction between the school improvement and school effectiveness communities" (p.460). The second wave of education reform marks considerable overlap between SER and much of the thinking about school improvement.

Stoll & Fink (1996) identify the continuing conditions required in schools to enhance school improvement (See Table 2.2). There are several commonalities between key factors for school effectiveness identified in SER (Sammons et al., 1995) (See Table 2.1) and continuing conditions to enhance school improvement (Stoll & Fink, 1996) (See Table 2.2). These include: the development of a shared vision for the

school; a participative approach to professional leadership/empowering leadership; a focus on staff development. SER advocates the development of the school as a learning organisation emphasising the importance of collaboration. Staff development, joint planning, and the development of a collaborative culture are considered key conditions to enhance school improvement. As identified in SER, the ability to 'buffer' (Sammons et al., 1995, p.10) the school from external change agents and challenge externally determined frameworks is seen as an important attribute of professional leadership. Creativity within an externally determined framework is recognised as a continuing condition for school improvement. Creativity is characterised by allowing schools flexibility to accommodate external demands within their own context and needs and the freedom to pursue their own interests within an externally determined framework (See Table 2.2). While monitoring progress is identified as a factor for effective schools (See Table 2.1) successful school improvement is linked to systematically planned and executed monitoring and evaluation of both the process and final outcomes (See Table 2.2). Stoll & Fink (1996) identify the ability to problem-seek and problem solve as a determinant of school improvement programmes and although implicit this is not specifically delineated in SER findings. Nevertheless, school effectiveness knowledge is identified as a key resource to support staff development for school improvement (See Table 2.2). The continuing conditions for school improvement signify a shift in emphasis from the instructional leadership of the principal to shared leadership for school improvement. The expectation is that a shared school leadership approach can create the conditions to develop a collaborative culture and drive staff development strategies through the use of suggested models of professional development e.g., coaching, mentoring for school improvement.

Table 2.2 Continuing Conditions to Enhance School Improvement

Continuing Conditions that Enhance School Improvement	Benefits
Vision	-helps schools to define their own direction and an attitude that says 'we're in charge of change'
Joint planning	-the most successful schools in the development of school-based initiatives are those who spend time to facilitate staff planning together -collaborative cultures are closely related to school improvement
Leadership & empowerment	-effective principals build opportunities for others to assume leadership roles and demonstrate a commitment to empowerment of teachers and pupils
Partnership	-outside assistance has the greatest influence on implementation when it is integrated with local support efforts
Monitoring & evaluation	-successful school improvement is linked to systematically planned and executed monitoring and evaluation of process and final outcomes
Problem-seeking & problem-solving	-the ability to deal with problems actively, promptly and in depth is a significant determinant of success in school improvement programmes.
Staff development & resource assistance	-staff development strategies within the school, for example mentoring, coaching and active research, have all been found to aid in classroom and school improvement -the resources necessary include: money, time, space, equipment, personnel, 'big ideas' – for example school effectiveness knowledge – and materials.
Adapting management structures	-leadership has to be supported by good management practices. -when school improvement efforts are underway, it is frequently necessary to restructure existing arrangements that obstruct the change process.
Creativity	-schools require flexibility to accommodate external ideas within their own context and needs -even within an externally determined framework successful schools are able to pursue their own areas of interest

Note. Adapted from "Changing Our Schools: Linking School Effectiveness and School Improvement", by L. Stoll & D. Fink, p.50, 1996. Copyright Open University Press, London.

Stoll & Fink (1996) contend that change must be accompanied by strategies for school improvement. They argue that "the school development planning process is the vehicle that blends the SER findings with the school improvement process" (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p.188). In a study of school development planning in nine UK primary schools, MacGilchrist, Mortimore, Stedman & Beresford (1995) found that "school development planning can be used as a school improvement strategy, but that the extent to which this becomes a reality in practice is dependent upon the type of development plan in use" (p.222). Ball (1997) describes how school development plans were pioneered in the UK in the 1980s and subsequently adopted in policy by the Department of Education. Subsequently, school development planning which "incorporated a management and staff development policy as major characteristic of successful schools" (Ball, 1997, p.329) was identified in a report by the School Management Task Force as having the potential to support organisational learning. Within an organisational learning model "leadership in strategic management and development planning becomes necessary in order to promote organisational learning and continuous improvement and development among school members" (Cheng, 2003, p.427). The development of the school as a learning organisation, under the instructional leadership of the principal incorporating the learning of school leaders, teachers and children is characteristic of effective schools (Hattie, 2009; MacBeath & Riley, 1998). The development of a collaborative culture, through shared leadership, which fosters strategies for staff development focusing on both processes and outcomes for learning is considered a necessary condition to enhance school improvement (See Table 2.1& 2.2).

The merger of the school effectiveness knowledge base and thinking about school improvement has been paralleled by various conceptualisations of principal and

teacher leadership. Shen et al. (2019) demarcate three stages of inquiry into principal leadership. The first stage covers most of the 1980s and 1990s with "a focus on the description of principals' traits, behaviours, strategies, effects as educational leaders …making it possible for theories of principal leadership to thrive" (p.403). The second stage is characterised by the emergence of models of school leadership which essentially categorise leadership traits and behaviour of principals" (Shen et al., 2019, p.403). These include transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and distributed leadership. The most researched leadership models that have been identified as resulting in school improvement success are 'instructional' and 'transformational' (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016, p.222). Day et al. (2016) assert that instructional leadership emphasises "above all the importance of establishing clear educational goals, planning the curriculum, and evaluating teaching and learning" (p.224). Vanblaere & Devos (2016) describe transformational leadership as "an empowering strategy that focuses on how leaders influence their staff" (p.28). During this stage some researchers began attempting to connect instructional and transformational leadership. Vanblaere & Devos' (2016) argue that theoretically the role of principal-led transformational and instructional leadership can function 'as a tandem' (Marks & Printy, 2003, p.373). Boberg & Bourgeouis (2016) contend within these integrated models of school leadership, leaders "reconcile managerial strategies of coordination and control traditionally associated with instructional leadership behaviours with the empowering and distributed approaches often associated with transformational leadership behaviours" (p.359). Marks & Printy (2003) found that where the integration of such leadership behaviours "was normative teachers provided evidence of high-quality pedagogy" (p.392). The second stage "gradually evolved into a recognition by many researchers that the work of principals as educational leaders is

too complicated to be simply categorised into a number of leadership models" (Shen et al., 2019, p.404). The third stage "began then to search for a more comprehensive list of leadership traits, behaviours and dispositions of principals that can improve school effectiveness" (p.404). Consequently, many studies suggested "various leadership frameworks, dimensions and practices of effective principals" (p.404). Sebring & Bryk (2000) identified several features that characterise the leadership style of principals of productive schools. For example, effective principals engage in numerous strategies such as they "start off by dealing with problems that can be solved quickly, they keep their long-term focus on student achievement, they follow a School Improvement Plan (SIP), and they attack incoherence" (p.2). The limitation of each of these stages of inquiry has been the persistent focus on the leadership behaviours of the school principal rather than exploration of the role of teacher leaders in the school improvement process.

Shen et al. (2019) draw on the work of Silva, Gimbert & Nolan (2002) to explicate the changing role of teacher leaders as educational reformers. Silva et al. (2002) contend that three conceptualisations of teacher leadership have emerged. Firstly, the creation of leadership roles for teachers which focussed on teachers as 'managers' (p.780) contributing to the efficiency of the system. Subsequently, emphasis shifted to the importance of teachers as instructional leaders inviting the creation of roles such as "team leader, curriculum developer, and staff development positions for teachers" (Silva et al., 2002, p.780). This approach was deemed problematic due to the tendency for teacher leaders to create 'prepackaged material' (p.780) for classroom teachers. The third approach conceptualises teacher leaders as having critical influence on educational reform and cultural change. This approach envisages teacher leaders sliding 'open the doors' to collaborate with "other teachers, discuss common problems… explore ways to

overcome the structural constraints of limited time, space, resources and restrictive policies …to bring students to a deeper engagement with their learning" (Silva et al., 2002, p.281). Shen et al. (2019) contend that research tends to focus on the first and second conceptualisation of teacher learning arguing that little is known about the third approach to teacher leadership. Furthermore, based on their review of the literature they contend the limitations of developing separate theories of principal and teacher leadership. Shen et al. (2019) state argue "that the literature contains sufficient evidence to explicitly refer the leadership dynamics within the 'walls' of a school to as an integration of principal leadership and teacher leadership" (p.406). This integration of principal and teacher leadership shifts the conceptual focus from the principal as the 'solo, heroic' (MacKenzie & Locke, 2014, p.168), broadening the scope of inquiry to encompass exploration of shared leadership approaches that can contribute to collaborative teacher professional learning and development for school improvement.

As discussed in the previous section, the professional development element of SER has been less well developed than other aspects. Stoll & Fink (1996) contend that "change is dependent on the thoughts and actions of teachers, which means the role of teacher development as a process of school improvement is fundamental" (p. 152). Stoll (2009) defines capacity as "the power to engage in and sustain continuous learning of teachers and the school itself for the purpose of enhancing student learning" (p. 117). She suggests that changing conceptions of leadership, lateral capacity building and systemic capacity building are necessary to support sustainability in schools, arguing that "developing leadership capacity is necessary if improvement is to be more than a temporary phenomenon" (Stoll, 2009, p.122). According to Stoll (2009) "it's well known that effective leadership is closely related to school improvement, but our understanding of whose leadership is important has changed" (p.122). In particular,

"the school improvement role played by middle managers…has been explored for some time…bolstered by evidence (that) the link between principal leadership and student learning outcomes is largely indirect" (Stoll, 2009, p.122). Hallinger & Heck (2009) conducted a longitudinal study investigating developmental trends in the effects of distributed leadership on school improvement and student mathematics achievement in 195 schools in the US. They found "significant direct effects of distributed leadership on change in the school's academic capacity and indirect effects on student growth rates in mathematics" (p.659). They observed that the indirect effects of distributed leadership on student achievement found in this study was larger than had been found in prior cross-sectional studies (Heck et al. 1990; Hallinger et al., 1996). They suggest the difference in 'magnitude' (p.683) of indirect effect was due to differences in their "conceptualisation of leadership as an organisational property rather than an individual attribute of the principal or due to differences in the research design" (Hallinger & Heck, 2009, p. 683-684). They contend "that a historically narrow focus on the impact of principal leadership may have hid a portion of the school's leadership resources from (their) conceptual and empirical lenses" (Hallinger & Heck, 2009, p.683). They conclude the need for future research to incorporate broader conceptualisations of school leadership as well as 'broader measures' (p.684) of school leadership. Shen et al. 's (2019) conceptualisation of school leadership as integrated leadership provides a suitable conceptual lens to 'team up' (p.407) principal and teacher leadership and explore if/how they are influencing teacher professional development for school improvement.

Hallinger & Heck (2010) conducted a longitudinal quantitative study in 198 US schools to investigate how teams of school leaders contribute to school improvement and student learning. They found that schools can "improve their learning

outcomes regardless of their initial achievement levels by changing key organisational processes such as leadership and school improvement capacity" (Hallinger & Heck, 2010, p.104). They argue that effective leadership strategies are 'highly contextualised' (p.107) asserting that school leaders "must be responsive both to the 'initial state of the school's academic capacity and learning outcomes, and to changes in these conditions as they develop (or decline) over time" (Hallinger & Heck, 2010, p.107). They conclude that the school's culture, or 'capacity for educational improvement' (p.107) should become a "key target for change interventions in concert with efforts to strengthen leadership" (p.107). Stoll (2009) contends that capacity building means "focusing on helping leadership teams collectively see, think and do things differently to improve all students' life choices, and find ways they can provide the conditions, environments and opportunities for their colleagues to be creative" (Stoll, 2009, p.122). Building lateral capacity provides an opportunity to build "the internal commitment and agency necessary to sustain improvement" (Stoll, 2009, p.123) in schools.

Lárusdóttie & O'Connor (2017) identified a disconnect between distributed leadership (DL) theory as outlined in the literature and the practice of teacher leadership in Irish and Icelandic primary and post-primary schools. They observed that while a form of DL exists in both contexts, it is strictly at the 'gift of the principal' (p.423) rather than a reciprocal relationship between school leaders to lead school improvement activities. They found that principals encumbered by 'bureaucratic chores' (p.430), particularly in the context of multiple reform initiatives, delegated responsibility for tasks that they would have previously completed to teacher leaders resulting in a tendency for teacher leadership roles to be dominated by management rather than leadership activities. Teacher leaders in Ireland expressed frustration at the lack of power and professional agency, remarking that their roles were 'positional'

rather than 'influential' (p.433). Furthermore, teacher leaders in Irish schools described many instances in which "principals may be unwilling or unable to relinquish genuine responsibility and accountability to teacher leaders" (Lárusdóttie & O' Connor, 2017, p.431). In contrast, data from Iceland indicated that those teacher leaders who were members of a school leadership team were more satisfied and identified better with their role as leaders and had a better overview of the leadership of the school as a whole. Since the introduction of recent changes to the roles and responsibilities of school leaders for school improvement in Irish primary schools (DE, 2018) little is known about how school leadership teams are operating to lead collaborative teacher professional learning.

The third phase of school improvement emerged in the 'mid-to-late 1990s' from "the somewhat uncomfortable evidence that the wide range of national educational reforms produced in various countries and the contributions of the school improvement communities of many countries, may not have been particularly successful" (Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001, p. 461). Stoll (2020) observes that in the second wave of education reform the focus was on building "capacity for lasting improvement, but this shifted to capacity for learning because the global changes we face require much more than improvement" (p.421). Similarly, Cheng (2003a) observes that at the turn of the century, doubts began to emerge as to "whether the effects of many initiatives of the first and second waves can meet the challenges and needs of rapid transformations in an era of globalisation and information technology" (p.203). The next section discusses the emergence of the third wave – the pursuit of future excellence (Banathy, 1988) – which aims to address the challenges facing education for the 21st century.

The Pursuit of Future Excellence

The era of school improvement is continually evolving with increasing focus on developing effective educational systems to enhance economic competitiveness. This is largely influenced by international benchmarking studies and systemic reform (Kennedy, 2014a; Reynolds et al., 2014). Cheng (2003) asserts that the third wave of education reform emphasises 'future effectiveness', 'life-long learning', 'global networking' and an 'international outlook' (p.429). Hopkins & Reynolds (2001) observe that "despite the dramatic increase in education reform in most OECD countries, their impact upon overall levels of student achievement is widely seen as not having been as successful as anticipated" (p.461). The 'third age' of "school improvement practice and philosophy attempts to draw the lessons from these apparently limited achievements of existing improvement and reform" (Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001, p.461). Reynolds et al. (2014) observe that this phase of school improvement is marked by "the spread of the knowledge base globally and at the same time learning more about achieving school improvement at scale, the essence of systemic reform" (p.275). The first annual *International Summit on the Teaching Profession* was held in New York in 2011, and since then they have been highly influential in systemic reform globally. The summits bring together education ministers, union leaders and other teacher leaders from high-performing and rapidly improving education systems as measured by PISA to identify best practices worldwide to strengthen the teaching profession and raise student achievement (McMahon et al. 2015; Schleicher, 2012).

At the first summit the high quality of teachers in high-performing countries was recognised as a function of teacher education policy and "the attention given to the quality of their preparation following their initial induction" (OECD, 2011, p. 240).

The focus on teacher quality was emphasised in the report "Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century: Lessons from Around the World" (Schleicher, 2012). The publication acknowledged that the "kind of teaching needed today requires teachers to be high-level knowledge workers who constantly advance their own knowledge as well as that of their profession" (Schleicher, 2012, p.11). Similarly, Stoll (2020) contends that "ensuring children are motivated and equipped to engage in deep and continuous learning requires the same of teachers, leaders and other stakeholders" (p.424). The 2012 summit leaders advocated a 'systems-based approach' from recruitment, through initial training and induction, to ongoing professional development and career paths" (Asia Society, 2012, p.24) arguing that the creation of 21st century learning environments hinges on effective school leadership. Consequently, teacher development has been reconceptualised as 'career-long' amidst "growing understanding … that in order to achieve professionalisation of the workforce… teacher learning should be restructured over the phases of a career long continuum" (McMahon et al., 2015, p.162). The question of teacher quality is 'pivotal' (McMahon et al., 2015, p.162) to enhancing economic competitiveness and is a central focus of national and international policy on systemic reform.

The global discourse on the improvement of school systems has long identified teacher quality as the single most important variable influencing student achievement (OECD, 2005; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Schleicher, 2012; Asia Society, 2012; Asia Society, 2013). However, at the 2016 summit it was argued "the quality of teachers cannot exceed the quality of the systems designed to train and support them" (Asia Society, 2016, p.23) The summit advocated the "development of professional learning systems and the need to design a continuing professional development system that meets the needs of teachers and schools across the board" (p.21). The 2016 summit

leaders established professional learning as “an improvement cycle that is tied to student learning; developing new types of teacher leaders and connecting evaluation and accountability not just to student performance but also to the quality of instruction and professional learning” (Asia Society, 2016, p.22). The 2016 Summit leaders suggested that the emergent concept of teacher leadership is a 'relatively easy place’ (Asia Society, 2016, p.22) for countries to begin. In addition, summit leaders asserted the design of professional development systems should involve “building indicators of collaborative cultures into inspection systems” (Asia Society, 2016, p.22). According to Schleicher (2012) “most countries now link professional development to the developmental priorities of the school and co-ordinate in-service training in the school accordingly” (p.19). Furthermore, in high-achieving countries “school leaders also played a key role in integrating external and internal accountability systems by supporting their teaching staff in aligning instruction with agreed learning goals and performance standards” (p.19). Reynolds et al. (2014) conclude that the “guiding image of successful schools and systems is their ability to balance ‘top-down/bottom up’ and ‘inside-out/outside-in’ change over time in the pursuit of sustained excellence in student achievement” (p.272). Schleicher (2012) contends “that in turn requires effectively distributed leadership, new types of training and development for school leaders and appropriate support and incentives” (p.11). The 2019 summit recognised “the importance of creating more collegial cultures in schools that promote deep professional collaboration and turn schools into continuous learning organisations” (Asia Society, 2019, p. 18).

As discussed in the introductory chapter ‘bad news’ from PISA 2009 and the ‘economic bailout’ (Conway, 2013, p.11) heightened interest in curriculum and teacher education policy in Ireland. The Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life Strategy

(LNLS) (DE, 2011) set targets to overcome perceived underperformance in PISA 2009 making school improvement plans a requirement for all schools (Kennedy, 2013). At the 2019 International Summit on the teaching profession, Minister for Education Joe O' McHugh, identified leadership and professional capacity building as key aspects of the implementation of reform in Irish schools (www.into.ie). Summit leaders observed that "teacher collaboration and leadership for collaboration are included in the School Quality Frameworks that are used for both school self-evaluation and external inspection" (Asia Society, 2019, p.17) in Ireland. The Looking at Our Schools (LAOS) Quality Framework for Primary Schools (DE, 2016) sets standards for the empowerment of staff to take on and carry out leadership roles stating that in highly effective schools the principal "empowers teachers to take on leadership roles and to lead learning, through the effective use of models of distributed leadership" (p.28). Furthermore, the quality of leadership and management of the school as a 'learning organisation' (p.28) and the creation of staff teams to lead development in key areas thus 'building leadership capacity' (p.28) are characteristic of practice in highly effective schools. The Summit leaders recognised that distributed leadership is a 'relatively new concept' (p.17) in Ireland and emphasised the importance of developing other policies to support it.

The LNLS (DE, 2011) states the importance of research and consultation, and 'best practice' (p.33) in other countries in informing Teaching Council Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (PCTE). PCTE (TC, 2011) recognises teacher education as a continuum which encompasses initial teacher education, induction, early and CPD and late career support. The TC (2011) have stated "CPD should be linked to school development and improvement and should empower teachers as professionals working within a coherent school programme rather than focussing solely on skills

training" (TC, 2011, p.21). Cosán (TC, 2016) recognises that "teachers' lifelong learning and career development is a key priority internationally and within the EU" (p.4). The TC (2016) has drawn on widespread international research literature which suggests professional development is most effective when it fosters teacher professional collaboration and is coherently linked to broader school reform efforts (Darling-Hammond & Burns, 2014; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001). Cosán (TC, 2016) emphasises "the importance of effective school leadership and management, in fostering a culture of professional learning and engagement, and actively supporting teachers' engagement in learning at school level" (p.8). In addition, Cosán (TC, 2016), the national framework that guides and supports teachers' professional learning, asserts the importance of teachers learning collectively by "cultivating professional learning communities" (p.9). DE policy conceptualises the development of schools as professional learning organisations (PLOs) (DE, 2016; DE, 2016a) while TC policy advocates the development of schools as professional learning communities (PLCs) (TC, 2011; TC, 2016). Each of these conceptualisations of professional learning have different implications for teacher professional development depending on the approach to school improvement adopted by school leaders and are explored further in the next section.

The three waves of reform represent various standpoints on the generation of knowledge and assumptions about the reality of practice in schools. SER was largely underpinned by the belief that ineffective schools can be improved by summarising knowledge about the characteristics of effective schools and transmitting that knowledge to educational practitioners. Attempts to identify factors associated with effective schools (See Table 2.1) have been criticised as 'blanket recipes' and 'simple solutions' (MacBeath& Riley, 1998) to the challenges and realities of practice facing

practitioners. Furthermore, the focus on the leadership of the school principal overlooked the complexity of collaboration that occurs in schools. The subsequent overlap between SER knowledge and school improvement processes culminated in the development of external frameworks for school improvement. These were founded on the belief that allowing schools flexibility and freedom to address their needs, within an externally determined framework, would lead to meaningful school improvement. The development of shared leadership teams to foster strategies for staff development were considered essential for sustainable improvement (Stoll, 2009). However, despite a wide-ranging reforms, the merging of SER and thinking about school improvement was deemed unsuccessful. The literature suggests that the issue was a focus on building leadership capacity rather than capacity for learning (Stoll, 2009). However, a significant issue was the assumption that allowing school leaders flexibility and freedom, within an externally determined framework, would provide the level of professional autonomy necessary for meaningful school improvement. The third wave attempts to learn lessons from previous reforms by tying professional learning to internal and external evaluation and building indicators of collaboration into inspection systems. This limits the concept of professional learning to a mechanism to enact externally determined requirements for school improvement. The following sections explore what effective collaborative professional learning and development for meaningful school improvement should look like.

Professional Learning Organisation and Professional Learning Communities

The enactment of school improvement policy by school leadership teams and their understanding of what constitutes effective professional development has implications for teacher professional learning. The development of schools as PLOs is characteristic of the need to drive school improvement through organisational learning. Clegg,

Konnberger & Rhodes (2005) characterise organisational learning as an emphasis on 'strategies and mechanisms' (p.149) to develop and use the learning potential of employees for organisational improvement, usually due to the necessity to adapt performance in times of reform. Watson (2014) argues "the term 'learning organisation' evokes a business orientation that may indeed be seen to be out of place in the world of education but has nonetheless penetrated it deeply in terms of policy and governance" (p.20). Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas (2006) argue it is unclear whether organisational learning approaches "would apply to the development and sustainability of learning communities where a key goal is continuous learning rather than implementing a specific change initiative" (p.228). Conversely, research evidence suggests that PLCs can have a positive impact on school improvement and continuous professional learning (Carpenter, 2017; Ghani, Velarde & Crow, 2020; Stoll et al., 2006).

Carpenter (2017) synthesised five characteristics of effective PLCs from a summary of the literature (See Table 2.3). Effective PLCs focus on both individual and collective teacher professional learning in a community context. Ghani, Velarde & Crow (2020) observe that "professional learning communities have continuously been instrumental in fostering a culture of collaboration and in developing capable teachers towards achieving improved students' outcomes" (p.76). In this community context "the focus on professionalism is toward the acquisition of knowledge and skills, orientation to clients and professional autonomy" (Stoll et al. 2006, p.225). Shared leadership and decision-making are identified as key characteristics of potentially transformative professional learning processes about teaching and learning in effective PLCs.

Table 2.3 Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning Communities

Characteristic	**Feature**
Shared leadership and decision-making	Shared leadership is a prerequisite to self-directed and or transformative learning.
Collaborative Inquiry	The collaborative inquiry process is how educators solve problems in a PLC with the intent on collective, transformative learning about teaching and learning.
Shared Practice	Shared practice is key in the transformative learning process as educators share pedagogical practices, providing opportunities for transformative learning by each PLC member and emerge with teaching and learning innovations.
Accountability for outcomes	Educators have an acceptance of the need to be accountable for outcomes of the collaborative inquiry process. They collectively decide what will be measured from transformative learning about their practice in PLC interactions.
Evolving relationships	The PLC provides opportunities for rich, deep professional relationships where educators interact through discourses and conflicting values and beliefs are shared in a respectful, mutually caring way.

Note. Adapted from "Collaborative inquiry and the shared workspace of professional learning communities," by D. Carpenter, 2017, *International Journal of Educational Management* 31(7), p.1069-1091.

However, Watson (2014) argues that the ubiquitous discourse of the 'effective school' and the 'school improvement movement' with "it's drive for 'continuous school improvement'…may impose a narrowly instrumental or technicist agenda focused on pupil attainment as the legitimate aim of the PLC which suppresses the search for creativity, diversity, and adaptability thereby reducing effectiveness" (p.27). Given the newly defined responsibility of shared leadership teams to lead school improvement in Irish primary schools, it is essential to explore if they are facilitating collaborative teacher professional learning in community contexts or not. If they are, it is important to explore what the convergence of these concepts look like in practice. If not, it is important to explore why not? The next section traces the emergence of thinking about effective professional development, professional learning, and the

importance of teacher agency in transforming teacher learning about teaching and learning.

Professional Development, Professional Learning and Teacher Agency

The global emphasis on school improvement, teacher quality and student learning outcomes has led to 'concentrated concern' (Opfer & Pedder, 2011, p.376) about school-based professional development. School leaders' understanding of the purpose(s) of school-based professional development and their approach to identifying teachers' professional learning needs has implications for the improvement of the teaching and learning experiences of students. Li & Dervin (2018) observe that the following words are 'synonymous' (p.29) with continuing professional development: in-service training, in service education, and staff development. Easton (2008) states that the term 'training' was once used to describe "what educators underwent before and sometimes during the school year" (p.755). This was later replaced by the term 'development' which she suggests evoked "images of what someone does to someone else: develops them" (Easton, 2008, p.755). Easton (2008) argues that while in some cases training and development "are vital to professional and organisational growth…they are not sufficient" (p.755). Opfer & Pedder (2011) argue that the research and policy focus on teacher professional development has predominantly "rested on a process-product conceptualisation of causality: that effective professional development will improve teacher instructional practices, which will result in improved student learning" (p.384). Such an approach overlooks the importance of teacher professional learning for professional and organisational growth. Bubb & Earley (2004) contend that effective professional development "helps to bring about changes in practice and improves teachers' and others' teacher, management and leadership skills and qualities" (p.26). According to Easton (2008) "professional learning starts at

the bottom within schools, with educators identifying what students need to know and so what they themselves need to know" (p.758). On the other hand, professional development often begins 'at the top' with senior administrators "making decisions about the kinds of learning teachers need" (Easton, 2008, p.758). Professional development that emerges from what students need to know and identifies teachers' professional learning needs has the potential to transform teachers' knowledge of teaching and learning in a meaningful way, particularly if it is school based.

Teacher professional development can be defined and understood in different ways depending on the context in which it takes place (Li & Dervin, 2018; Kwakman, 2003). Avalos (2011) argues the situated nature of teacher learning as "a well-recognised condition of teacher professional development, considered what is known primarily as workplace learning or the formal and informal processes that take place and are facilitated by schools" (p.15). Carpenter (2017) defines the space where teachers formally interact to solve problems as the 'shared workspace' (p.1070). The physical workspace can be "classrooms, boardrooms, meeting locations and other such meeting venues…or may also take on the form of a technology application such as Lync, Skype or Zoom, where educators can meet physically through digital media to collaborate on practice" (Carpenter, 2017, p.1070-1071). This is relevant to this study as since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic school leaders are engaging various online platforms to collaborate with their staff.

It is imperative that school leaders recognise the importance of teacher agency in their professional learning and that it is linked to identified student learning needs within their classroom context. Following a review of publications in *Teaching and Teacher Education* over ten years (2000-2010) Avalos (2011) found that studies of teacher professional development had at their core an understanding that "professional

development is about teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students" (p.10). According to Stevenson et al. (2016) in 'contemporary times' continuing professional development is "a term that implies both the agency of the educator in their professional learning and the need for such learning to be responsive to change" (p.818). Emirbayer & Mische (1998) conceptualise agency as "a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present as a capacity to contextualise past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment" (p.963). Polatacan (2021) investigated how professional learning of teachers might be improved by two key factors: distributed leadership and teacher agency. He employed a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from 283 teachers in primary schools, secondary schools, and high schools in Turkey. He found a small direct relationship between distributed leadership and teacher professional learning, while teacher agency was found to play a significant mediation role with a moderate effect size. He concluded that where distribution of leadership was high "according to teacher perceptions…that teachers actively participate in professional learning processes…and emerge as agents in these learning processes" (Polatacan, 2021, p.7). He concluded that distributed leadership can influence teachers' professional learning indirectly through improving teachers' sense of agency.

The following sections explore the literature on key features of effective professional development. A framework for the analysis of collaborative professional development is presented and the importance of understanding professional development in context is explored. Focus then turns to the role of signature

pedagogies of teacher professional development. The section concludes by exploring the role of learning goals and evaluation in teacher professional development.

Effective Professional Development

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) conducted an extensive review of the literature over the previous three decades and identified seven widely shared features of effective professional development (See Table 2.4).

Table 2.4 Characteristics of Effective Professional Development

Characteristic	**Feature**
Content focus	Professional development that focuses on teaching strategies associated with specific curriculum content, supports teacher learning within teachers' classroom contexts. Encompasses an intentional focus on discipline specific curriculum development and pedagogies.
Active learning	Professional development that engages teachers directly in designing and trying out teaching strategies, providing them with an opportunity to engage in the same style of learning they are designing for their students. Such professional development is directly connected to teachers' classrooms and students to provide deeply embedded, highly contextualised professional learning.
Collaboration	High-quality professional development creates space for teachers to share ideas and collaborate in their learning, often in job-embedded contexts to create communities that positively change class and school culture.
Use of models and modelling	Professional development makes use of curricular models and modelling of instruction to provide teachers with a clear vision of what best practices look like.
Coaching and expert support	Provides coaching and peer support involving the sharing of expertise about content and evidence-based practices, focused directly on teachers' individual needs.
Feedback and reflection	High quality professional learning provides built in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by facilitating reflection and feedback thus enabling them to move toward the expert vision of practice.
Sustained duration	Effective professional development provides teachers with adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon new strategies that facilitate changes in their practice.

Note. Adapted from "Effective Professional Development," by L. Darling-Hammond, M.E. Hyler, M.Gardner and D. Espinoza, 2017, *Effective Teacher Professional Development*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

They assert that “effective PD possesses a robust content focus, features active learning, is collaborative and aligned with relevant curricula and policies and provides sufficient learning time for participants" (p.2). They found that in terms of content focus, effective professional development focuses on teaching strategies associated with specific curriculum content and supports teacher learning within teachers’ classroom contexts.

Timperley, Parr, & Bertanees (2009) describe an approach to teacher professional development which was associated with “substantive gains in student achievement on reading comprehension and the deeper features of writing” (p.227) in 218 primary schools in New Zealand. The PD approach supported 2,440 teachers to identify their professional learning needs by analysing “their students’ learning needs to build pedagogical content knowledge in sufficient depth to address their students’ learning needs” (p.227).The findings show that the project overall was successful in meeting the goal of raising student achievement in reading and writing. One illustrative case was chosen because it was typical of many New Zealand schools in terms of size and because of its average socio-economic status. In the case school, a summary of facilitator feedback at a meeting to engage teachers’ prior theories with all staff, teachers “articulated beliefs were primarily about the need to motivate students to write and generate content” (p.237). However, following deeper analysis of teachers’ learning needs “the teachers recognised their need to deepen their pedagogical content knowledge if they were to be more successful in teaching the deeper features of writing” (p.238). The writing samples for all students at the school in years 4-6 that were completed at the end of a four-month period showed significant gains for all year levels and the ‘overall effect size’ was “equivalent to more than twice the expected national gain for a whole year” (Timperley et al., 2009, p.239). However, one

illustrative case provides insufficient evidence for implications to be drawn about the wider success of the programme. Nevertheless, Timperley et al. (2009) assert that "by linking inquiry into student learning to teacher learning, teachers can gain an understanding of what it is they need to learn to improve outcomes for students and have a compelling reason to engage" (p.240). They suggest that at least a year of this professional development approach is required to achieve 'substantive outcomes' (p.241) for students, concluding that "developing the needed depth of pedagogical content knowledge and inquiry skills takes time" (Timperley et al., 2009, p.241). The findings of Timperley et al. (2009) support the assertions of Darling-Hammond & Richardson (2009) that "good professional development helps teachers understand how students learn specific content" (p.53) and is of sustained duration.

Opfer & Pedder (2010) investigated issues of access to continuing professional development in England to understand the type of activities that are offered to teachers and if a 'disconnect' (p.453) occurs between the activities provided and those needed by teachers. Drawing on the work of Garet et al. (2001) on teachers' perceptions of effective professional development they contend that sustained and intensive professional development activities have a greater effect on 'instructional change' (p.454) than activities of shorter duration. Activities of sustained duration had a positive influence on content knowledge emphasis, provided more opportunities for active learning, promoted connections to teachers' classrooms and supported professional communication with other teachers. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of linking professional development to teachers' classrooms and students, providing space for teachers to share ideas and collaborate in their learning and the need to provide deeply job-embedded, highly contextualised professional learning opportunities (See Table 2.3). However, as mentioned in the

previous section, professional development is often more consistent with a top-down approach to teachers' learning needs rather than a bottom-up approach to teacher professional learning based on identified student learning needs.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) observe the importance of collaboration for the creation of communities that positively change class and school culture. There has been significant growth in research evidence that effective professional learning is collaborative and focused on transformative teaching and learning (Carpenter, 2017; Handscomb, 2004; Gandhi et al., 2020). Hargreaves & Fullan (2012) observe that "although what counts as collaboration may vary, the overall evidence is consistent – teachers who work in professional cultures of collaboration perform better than teachers who work alone" (p.112). In her seminal work, Little (1990) delineated four 'phenomenologically discrete' forms of teacher collaboration from the extant literature and case studies: storytelling and scanning, sharing, aid and assistance, and joint work (see Figure 2.1). She presents each conception as a continuum moving from "conditions of mutual independence to interdependence among teachers" (Little, 1990, p.512). Each successive movement across the continuum marks how "the warrant for autonomy shifts from individual to collective judgment and preference" (Little, 1990, p.512). Little (1990) defines 'joint work' as collaboration that "anticipates truly collective action – teachers' decisions to pursue a single course of action in concert, or alternatively, to decide on a set of basic priorities that in turn guide the independent choice of individual teachers" (Little, 1990, p.519). Collaboration as 'joint work' is distinct from less formal types of collaboration because "it is dependent on the structural organisation of task, time and other resources in ways not characteristic of other forms of collegiality, and thus is both responsive to larger institutional purposes and vulnerable to external manipulation" (Little, 1990, p.519).

Figure 2.1. Delineating teacher professional collaboration from informal to formal activities.

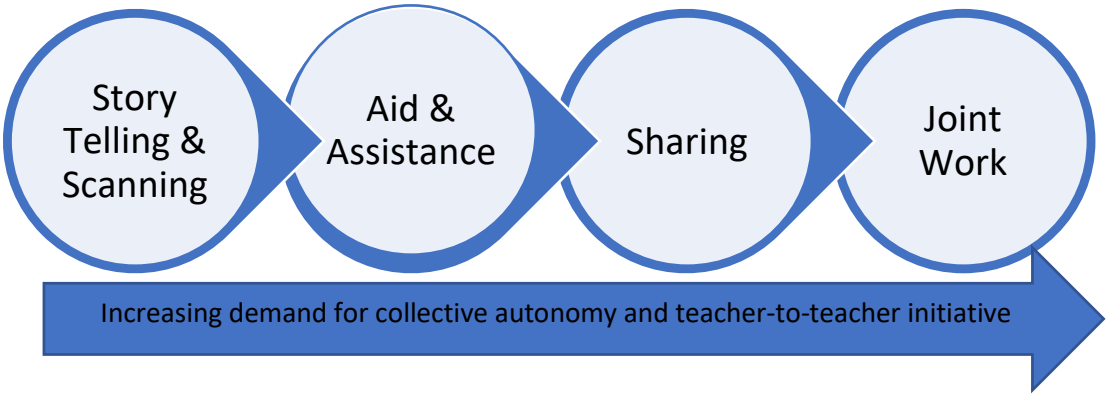


Figure 2.1 Adapted from Little 1990

Distinguishing collaborative activities in terms of autonomy and initiative provides a basis to account for the impact of specific types of collaborative activities on teacher professional development.

Effective professional development can make use of models and modelling of instruction to demonstrate to teachers what best practice looks like. The use of models of effective practice has been suggested to address the challenge of transferring knowledge of 'best practice' (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p.2) between schools and practitioners. Darling Hammond et al. (2017) found that high quality professional learning provides built-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by facilitating feedback which can enable them to move toward the expert vision of practice. Handscomb (2004) suggests that sharing best practice involves "promoting the sharing and exchanging of interesting and innovative practice, whilst on the other, also helping to build a body of knowledge about effective and best practice" (p.91). However, Hannon (2008) observes the challenge of adapting best practice to context and the difficulties associated with transferring a given practice across classrooms, schools, or sites. Guskey (2002) cautions that "what works best in

one context with a particular community of educators and a particular group of students might not work as well in another context with different educators and a particular group of students" (p.51). Furthermore, Handscomb (2004) argues against "the casual ease with which people talk of sharing best practice when what is being disseminated is untried, untested, interesting practice" (p.91). Hannon (2008) identifies the need to "find more effective ways of transferring knowledge, both theoretical and practical between schools and practitioners" (p.78).

In Ireland, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) works to provide professional support and to school leaders and teachers for curriculum development and school improvement. Johnston, Murchan, Loxley, Fitzgerald & Quinn, (2007) conducted a large-scale evaluation of the school-based work of the PCSP[4] in Ireland. They found significant variability in the role and function of cuiditheoirí which proved problematic where the aim of the professional development initiative was "to promote genuine adjustment in teachers' practice in relation to a limited number of clearly defined reform ideas" (Johnston et al., 2007, p.229). During shadowing by researchers, they observed that the provision of instructional strategies was the primary focus of school-based support sessions. The researchers observed few instances where teachers used recommended resource materials as part of formal, structured learning activities arguing that support sessions were reflective of a 'transmission mode' (p.229). Johnston et al. (2007) suggest that this could have "implications in relation to constructivist approaches to teacher learning" (p.231). However, it is argued that opportunities for a constructivist approach to teacher

[4] The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) was previously known as the Primary Curriculum Support Service (PCSP). The PCSP formed part of the Regional Curriculum Support Service (RCSS) to provide locally based advice and support to Principals and teachers in relation to the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum facilitated by 'cuiditheoirí' (Johnston et al., 2007).

learning could emerge through subsequent, collaborative, whole-school processes. Given the responsibility of PDST to provide support for schools in the school improvement process (DE, 2016; DE, 2016a) and the Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2019) and the commitment of the inspectorate (Hislop, 2017) to work closely with school leaders to enrich mutual understanding of good practice and evaluation it is important to understand if/how such external supports influence school leadership of collaborative teacher professional learning.

How models of best practice are disseminated has implications for transformative teacher professional learning. Hannon (2008) argues that "the identification of best or good practice, and its successful take-up and transfer across all schools would still be insufficient to achieve the kind of transformational reform which is increasingly recognised as essential to meet the demands of the 21st century" (p.79). Hannon (2008) suggests that 'next practices' (p.79) can be the sources of innovation in learning. She defines next practices as "emergent innovations that could open up new ways of working" (Hannon, 2008, p.79). Furthermore, she argues such innovations "are much more likely to come from thoughtful, experienced, self-confident practitioners trying to find new and more effective solutions to intractable problems" (Hannon, 2007, p.79). Flitton & Warwick (2013) provide an account of a school-centred research and professional development project at a middle school in the United Kingdom aimed at improving teacher and pupil understanding of talk as a tool for learning. The project was undertaken by a lead teacher who hoped "to work from researching her own practice to developing a wider pedagogic approach with colleagues, making it part of the teaching and learning repertoire in classrooms in her department and school" (p.102). The study involved mixed-method data collection and analysis including video analysis of lessons, interviews, and research logs to encourage wider reflective practice

amongst teachers. The central focus of the analysis was on "the teachers' developing understanding of a dialogic approach to teaching and learning" (p.105). Findings from the project demonstrated "a noticeable and significant response from the pupils in terms of motivation and confidence, both in terms of general use of language skills and with regard to engagement with learning and the quality of the outcomes" (p.115). Findings also suggest that the classroom-based research approach "was highly successful in developing a staff as a community of learning and suggests an approach that involves the collaborative analysis of classroom practice can lead to significant whole-school developments" (Flitton & Warwick, 2013, p.99). They argue that "as well as developing a dialogic approach to learning within classrooms, this project also developed a dialogic approach to professional learning among teachers" (Flitton & Warwick, 2013, p.115). They conclude that the collaborative process undertaken in this project 'empowered teachers' and suggest that distributed leadership could support the ongoing development of this model of research. Flitton & Warwicks' findings are a good example of 'emergent innovations' (Hannon, 2008, p.79) coming from a thoughtful practitioner that opened up new ways of working. However, Hannon (2008) concludes that next practice should not replace the deployment of 'evidence-based' practice by school leaders for school improvement but argues the need for innovation which "arises from the work of skilled and creative practitioners – increasingly co-created in conjunction with their learners" (p.81). Little is known about whether school leaders engage models and modelling of best practice or support the emergence of next practices in Irish primary schools.

Darling Hammond et al. (2017) conclude the importance of the content of professional development, the process by which it is transmitted. Furthermore, Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) assert "the importance of on-the-job learning with colleagues

as well as sustained learning from experts in content and pedagogy" (Darling Hammond et al., 2009, p.18). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) conclude that effective professional development incorporates most or all of the seven characteristics.

Models of Continuing Professional Development

The body of literature that focuses on the features of effective continuing professional development (CPD) has developed alongside the literature on specific models and contexts of CPD (Kennedy, 2014). Kennedy's (2005) seminal work on models and contexts of CPD has contributed to the development of a framework to explore and analyse school leadership of collaborative professional development for this study. Drawing on international literature, Kennedy (2005) constructed her framework identifying and classifying the characteristics of nine key models of CPD (See Table 2.4). She argues that the standards-based view of teacher professional development, which is the dominant discourse in many countries, "supports the notion that standardisation of training equates to improvements in teaching, learning and pupil attainment" (p. 237).

As mentioned in the opening chapter, the Teaching Council is working in collaboration with the Department of Education to implement Cosán (TC, 2016), the national framework that guides and supports teachers' professional learning following their induction process by 2027. The LAOS (DE) quality framework sets out standards to assess good practice and areas for improvement for school self-evaluation and external inspection. The Cosán, the national framework for teachers' professional learning, reflects the standards-based model of professional development (See Table 2.5), stating its intention to create opportunities for teachers to "think clearly and in an evidence-based way about the contribution of professional learning to teachers'

effectiveness individually and more importantly collectively" (Cordingley, 2014, p.45 in Cosán, TC, 2016).

Table 2.5 Defining Characteristics of Models of Continuing Professional Development

Model	**Defining Characteristic**
Training	Supports a skills-based technocratic view of teaching whereby CPD provides teachers with the opportunity to update their skills in order to be able to demonstrate their competence according to a nationally agreed standard.
Award-bearing	Relies on or emphasises the completion of award-bearing programmes of study – usually, but not exclusively, validated by universities.
Deficit	Professional development can be designed to address a perceived deficit in teacher performance, often in the context of performance management.
Cascade	This model involves individual teachers attending training events and then cascading or disseminating the information to colleagues.
Standards-based	The standards-based model is underpinned by empirical evidence of the relationship between teacher effectiveness and student learning.
Coaching/Mentoring	The defining characteristic of this model is the importance of the one-to-one relationship, generally between two teachers, which is designed to support CPD.
Community of Practice	A community of practice generally involves more than two people and would not necessarily rely on confidentiality. Learning within such a community could be either positive and proactive or a passive experience depending on the role played by the individual participant.
Action Research	Involves the participants themselves as researchers with a view to improving the quality of practice within the situation.
The Transformative Model	The key characteristic of the transformative model is its effective integration of the range of eight models described above, combined with an awareness of issues of power and whose agendas are addressed through the professional development process. It relies on tensions and the consideration of conflicting agendas and philosophies.

Note. Adapted from "Models of Continuing Professional Development: A framework for analysis," by A. Kennedy, 2005, *Journal of In-Service Education*, 31(2), p.237-240.

The purpose of such reflective processes is to “facilitate teachers in considering the complex ways in which their learning can benefit their students” (TC, 2016, p.10). The standards-based approach supports a “high degree of central control often veiled as quality assurance” (Kennedy, 2005, p.237).

The Teaching Council (2016) state that Cosán reflects their thinking about how teacher learning can be ‘quality assured' (p.3) for the benefit of teachers and students. The logic and appeal of mechanisms for quality assurance are obvious, particularly in economic terms, however they can have ramifications for teacher autonomy and agency. It can be argued that a standards-based approach provides a means for stakeholders to “control and limit the agenda” (Kennedy, 2005, p.237). Conversely, the response of school leaders to external policy requirements can provide a ‘scaffold’ for professional development by providing “a common language, thereby enabling greater dialogue between teachers” (Kennedy, 2005, p.242). It is essential to explore if a standards-based model of CPD is being used to facilitate teacher professional collaboration in schools or not. If so, it is important to explore what it looks like. If not, it is essential to explore why not?

The community of practice model is advocated by the Teaching Council (2016) to foster teacher professional collaboration for ‘effective professional development’ (See Table 2.5) (p.7). Cosán (TC, 2016) envisages “the creation of a responsive and dynamic community of practice” (p.12) arguing that “professional development is most effective in improving teachers’ instructional practice and contributing to student learning…when it fosters teacher professional collaboration and when it coherently relates to broader school reform efforts” (p.7). LAOS (DE, 2016) suggests that school leaders should set specific goals and expectations for the development of the school as

a learning community. Wenger (1998) contends that learning within communities of practice involves three essential processes:

- evolving forms of mutual engagement
- understanding and tuning their enterprise
- developing repertoire, styles, and discourses (p.95).

Wenger (1998) argues the importance of negotiation of a 'joint enterprise' (p.77) which is defined by participants within communities of practice. Kennedy (2005) argues that shared "understanding of the joint enterprise, therefore (allows) the members of that community to exert a certain level of control over the agenda" (Kennedy, 2005, p.245). She contends that the issue of power is 'fundamental' to effective professional development in communities of practice. She argues that for professional learning to take place within this context, "it should be neither a form of accountability nor of performance management" (p. 245). Negotiating a joint enterprise can give 'mutual accountability' (Wenger, 1998, p.78) arising from relations among members of the community of practice. Kennedy (2005) argues that such an approach can promote "greater capacity for transformative practice than a managerial form of accountability would allow" (p.245). The question in this study is if school leaders in Irish primary schools are developing communities of practice, and if so, do they "serve to perpetuate dominant discourse in an uncritical manner" (p.245) or are they acting as sites for the transformation of practice?

The central characteristic of the transformative model of CPD is development of practices and the creation of conditions that support a 'transformative agenda' (Kennedy, 2014, p.347). Collaborative professional inquiry is presented as a transformative model and refers to "all models and experiences that include an element

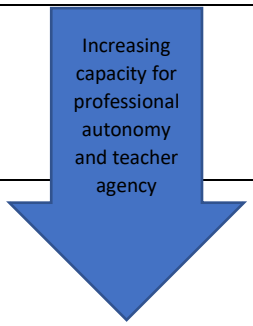
of collaborative problem identification and subsequent activity, where the subsequent activity involves inquiring into one's own practice and understanding more about other practice, perhaps through engagement with existing research" (Kennedy, 2014a, p. 693) (See Table 2.5). Cosán (TC, 2016) states that professional development should be evaluated according to the extent to which it provides opportunities for "critical thinking and engagement with evidence…purposeful collaboration…action research and inquiry…(and) advancement of professional learning communities" (p.24). The transformative model of CPD integrates a range of models of CPD "together with an awareness of issues of power, i.e., whose agendas are being addressed through the process" (Kennedy, 2005, p. 247). An explicit awareness of the professional and political context can create the tensions necessary for critical consideration of conflicting agendas among stakeholders (Fraser, 2007; Kennedy, 2005). Such critical reflection and dialogue can underpin a transformative orientation toward teacher professional development, potentially transforming the practice of teaching and learning and enabling teachers to participate in and contribute to policy development and enactment in local contexts.

The Spectrum of Models of CPD

Kennedy (2014a) adapted and categorised her models of CPD ranging from transmissive, malleable, and transformative purposes (See Table 2.6). The spectrum of models of CPD identifies the relative potential capacity for transformative practice and professional autonomy 'inherent' in each (Kennedy, 2005, p.236). Kennedy, Reid & McKinney (2007) observe that "models of CPD where the purpose is deemed to be 'transmissive' rely on teacher development…focusing on technical aspects of the job rather than issues relating to values, beliefs, and attitudes" (p.160).

Table 2.6 Spectrum of Models of CPD Adapted by Kennedy (2014a)

Purpose of Model	**Examples of models of CPD which may fit within this category**
Transmissive	Training models Deficit models Cascade model
Malleable	Award-bearing model Standards-based model Coaching/mentoring models Community of practice models
Transformative	Collaborative professional inquiry models



Note. Adapted from "Understanding continuing professional development: the need for theory to impact on policy and practice" by A. Kennedy, 2014a, *Professional Development in Education*, 40(5), 688-697.

Kennedy (2014a) asserts that the malleable category of purpose "acknowledges that one particular type of model of CPD can be used to different ends depending on the intended (or unintended?) purpose(s)" (p. 692). For example, as seen in the previous section, communities of practice can adopt transmissive or transformative purposes depending on whether mutual accountability emerges as a result of joint enterprise or whether a managerial approach to accountability is adopted. Transformative models of CPD demonstrate increasing capacity for professional autonomy and teacher agency. Kennedy (2014a) updated the terminology from her 2005 Framework to reflect developments in the literature (See Tables 2.5& 2.6) The term 'action research' has been replaced by the more 'broadly encompassing' term 'professional inquiry' (Kennedy, 2014a, p.692). The 'collaborative professional inquiry model' replaces the 'transformative model' to reflect "a more deliberate focus on problematising practice within a shared local context" (p.692). Kennedy (2014a) considers collaborative professional inquiry as more of 'an orientation' (p.693) to teacher professional learning as characterised in prior discussion of effective professional learning communities.

Transformative professional development is dependent on allowing teachers to have professional autonomy and the "ability and space to exert agency" (Kennedy, 2014a, p.691).

Carpenter (2017) contends that collaborative professional inquiry is a key component of school improvement. He asserts that "the job-embedded improvement process is the cornerstone of a functional PLC and connects school improvement with the collaborative culture" (p.1071). While much is known about the characteristics of an effective PLC little is known about what teachers actually do in a PLC (Carpenter, 2017). Carpenter (2017) explored the perceptions of educators in the context of well-formed PLCs in the US. He found that educators experienced positive and negative interactions through the collaborative inquiry process, and this was influenced by issues of power and equal participation. He found that "educators that developed their own agenda collaborated (physically and intellectually interacted with achievement data and pedagogy) more so than educators that had the agenda provided to them by administrators" (Carpenter, 2017, p. 1076). Educators in such schools associated collaboration with discussion, interaction, and equal participation. Similarly, in their system wide multi-methods study in Ontario, DeLuca, Bolden & Chen (2017) found that teacher choice of inquiry-focus was an important factor in enhancing collaborative inquiry in schools. In contrast. educators in "schools that had the agenda provided by administrative leadership teams deviated greatly from the agenda" (Carpenter, 2017, p. 1076). He found that educators either chose to work on the set agenda or to focus on their own personal tasks, ignoring PLC participation. He concluded that "since fewer educators participated in the PLC collaborative efforts, the PLC was non-transformative to their practice" (p.1077). DeLuca et al. (2017) observe that teachers identified that having agency in the choice of inquiry-focus contributed to their

motivation and level of involvement in collaborative inquiry. It is evident from these research findings that the level of agency afforded to teachers for their own professional learning by school leadership teams has consequences for the transformative professional learning in schools.

The categories of purpose presented in the spectrum of models of CPD (Kennedy, 2014a) enables us to critically consider the capacity for professional autonomy and agency inherent in school leaders' approaches to professional development for school improvement. Kennedy (2014) concludes that "no one individual model of CPD on its own can be seen to support a particular purpose of CPD" (p.694). Furthermore, she asserts that "not all CPD experiences must be transformative in nature, but rather a transformative purpose or orientation will privilege particular models of CPD, while acknowledging that some skills may well be best learned through more transmissive approaches to learning" (p.694). The following sections draws further on the seminal work of Kennedy (2005; 2014; 2014a) to further develop a framework to explore school leadership of professional development for school improvement.

CPD Policy & Practice: A Proposed Framework for Analysis

The development of a spectrum of models of CPD which describes the characteristics and potential purposes of CPD is not sufficient in itself to fully explore if school leadership is influencing collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools. Kennedy (2005) proposes five keys questions which serve as tools to further analyse models of CPD:

- What types of knowledge acquisition does the CPD support?
- Is the principal focus on individual or collective development?

- To what extent is the CPD used as a form of accountability?
- What capacity does the CPD allow for supporting professional autonomy?
- Is the fundamental purpose of the CPD to provide a means of transmission or to facilitate transformative practice? (p.247).

In the Irish policy context, CPD is considered most effective when it is 'coherently' (TC, 2016, p.7) related to broader school reform efforts. This reflects the dominant global discourse which links teacher quality, teacher professional development and improved student outcomes. Engaging teacher professional development as a mechanism to enact reform or policy change has implications for teacher learning in local contexts. Depending on how school improvement policy requirements are enacted by school leaders, school-based professional development "can serve to equip teachers with the requisite skills to implement (education) reforms as decided by others (usually government) or to inform, contribute to and provide critique of the reforms themselves" (Kennedy, 2005, p.247-248). Kennedy (2005) concludes that CPD which serves to prepare teachers to implement reform tends to support a transmissive purpose, while CPD which facilitates teachers "in contributing and shaping education policy and practice" (p.248) would support transformative purposes. Kennedy's (2005) proposed framework for analysis allows for further exploration of the central phenomenon however it does not provide sufficient scope to explore school leadership of the collaborative aspect of teacher professional development in schools.

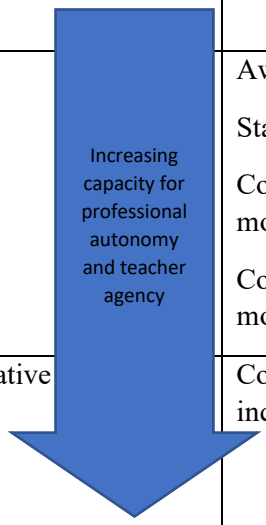
Collaborative CPD: A Framework for Analysis

Kennedy (2011) developed three levels of collaborative engagement and aligned them with her spectrum of models of CPD (Kennedy, 2011) (See Table 2.7). This framework, in conjunction with the 5 key questions for the analysis of models of CPD, and Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2017) more recent categorisation of key characteristics

of effective professional development provides a suitable critical lens to explore if school leadership for influencing collaborative teacher professional learning in schools or not.

Table 2.7 Aligning Models of CPD, Purpose of Models & Levels of Collaborative Engagement

Purpose of Model	**Models of CPD which may fit within this category**	**Typical levels of collaborative engagement**
Transmissive	Training models Deficit models Cascade model	Being beside each other but not necessarily interacting. A common scenario when information or 'facts' are being transmitted. (Co-location)
Malleable	Award-bearing model Standards-based model Coaching/mentoring models Community of practice models	Talking with others about common interests e.g. curriculum. (Co-operation)
Transformative	Collaborative professional inquiry models	Engaging with others on issues of context, values and action which are more likely to result in dynamic, progressive, and potentially transformative practice. (Collaboration)



Note. Adapted from "Understanding continuing professional development: the need for theory to impact on policy and practice" by A. Kennedy, 2014a, *Professional Development in Education*, 40(5), p.688-697.

The next section discusses continuing professional development in context to explore the sites of knowledge acquisition that can influence the development of professional knowledge and the wider policies within which they are situated.

Continuing Professional Development in Context

Understanding the policy processes that underpin the organisation of teacher professional development for school improvement is key to understanding the

development of professional knowledge in practice. Eraut (1994) distinguishes three contexts in which professional knowledge is acquired: "the academic context; the organisational context of policy discussion and talk about practice; and the context of practice itself" (p.20). Kennedy (2014) asserts that "knowledge acquisition is not situated exclusively within any one of these three contexts, but the identification of the different contexts is useful in analytical terms" (p.236). Consideration of these sites as "potential sites of knowledge acquisition…aids the analysis of the underpinning agendas that are supported by the various models" (Kennedy, 2014, p.236). The focus of this study is the organisational context of policy discussion and talk about school leadership and the practice of fostering teacher professional development in the context of school improvement. It is likely that prior academic contexts of knowledge acquisition are influencing the acquisition of professional knowledge in schools, and this should be explored. In addition to considering contexts of knowledge acquisition Kennedy (2014a) argues the need to consider "the wider policies within which these experiences are situated" (p.694). As discussed in the section on the pursuit of future excellence, the global discourse has aligned teacher quality, the design of systems to support professional learning, school improvement and student learning outcomes. Individual nation states responses to the global policy trajectory can differ, meaning it is "crucial that we explore the context within which CPD systems are developed" (Kennedy, 2014a, p.694). Consideration of the perspectives on professionalism that inform the development of national policies on CPD can facilitate "understanding of the ideological and political driving forces" (p.694) that underpin them and if/how they are influencing school leadership of professional development in schools.

Sachs (2003) observes the emergence of two competing discourse on professionalism – democratic and managerial professionalism. Democratic

professionalism emerges from the teaching profession itself and is characterised by participative, collaborative decision-making, collective action between teachers and other educational stakeholders. From this perspective "the primary aim of school-based teacher inquiry…is to foster understanding and improvement of practice; and to help teachers to come to know the epistemological bases of their practice" (Sachs, 2003, p.153). Conversely, managerial discourses claim that efficient management can solve any problem by applying the practice of private sector enterprises to the public sector. King (2016) argues that "some principals may adopt a managerial approach to professional development where it is mandated and prescribed arguably resulting in" (p.579) transmissive modes of professional development with "teachers as technicians carrying out someone else's agenda" (King, 2016, p.579). Conversely, some principals "may choose a more collaborative approach focused on winning teachers' hearts and minds and a desire for collaborative school improvement" (King, 2016, p.579). King (2016) asserts the latter form of leadership is "often associated with transformative models of professional development where teachers are supported to work collaboratively in a constructivist manner to change their practices to meet the needs of their students in context (Kennedy, 2005)" (p.579). Kennedy (2014a) contends that the "delineation of managerial versus democratic professionalism in many ways provides a conceptual framework for understanding the 'transmissive' and 'transformative' purposes" (p.694) of teacher professional development.

More recently, Sachs (2016) has aligned democratic professionalism with 'occupational professionalism', and managerial professionalism with 'organisational professionalism' (Evetts, 2011, p. 408-409). Evetts (2011) suggests that the contrast between organisational and occupational professionalism and "between different occupational principles more broadly might not always be polar opposites and mutually

exclusive" (p.409). Faulconbridge & Muzio (2008) contend that 'hybrid forms' of professionalism "are emerging as professionals respond to new pressures and challenges" (p.10). The concept of hybrid forms of professionalism supports the assertion that "that any one national CPD policy would necessarily fit wholly under either the managerial or democratic categorisation" (Kennedy ,2014a, p.695) and emphasises the importance of interrogating component parts in order to see the system as a whole. King (2011) emphasises the 'critical role' of school leadership in building collegiality based on 'trust', 'respect', 'equal status', and high regard for 'input' (p.150). She argues "in the absence of these features and where principals advocate change in a managerialist and top-down approach, a form of 'contrived collegiality' (Hargreaves, 1994) may result with a negative impact on the long-term sustaining of collaborative practice" (King, 2011, p.150). Hargreaves & Fullan (2012) contend that contrived collegiality has both 'positive' and 'negative' connotations (p.118) Structured, collaborative activities are particularly useful as a 'stepping-stone' (p.118) in schools where teacher collaboration has been limited or non-existent, however it should form the basis for the development of a collaborative culture. Contrived collegiality is "characterised by formal, specific, bureaucratic procedures to increase the attention being given to joint teacher planning and other forms of working together". (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.118). Evidently, school leaders have an integral role in the adoption of approaches to collaborative teacher professional learning in schools and their underpinning perspectives on professionalism have consequences for transformative professional learning. It is also necessary to ascertain whether chosen pedagogies of teacher education are aligned with the purposes of the purposes of chosen professional development initiatives. The next section describes the

growing focus on signature pedagogies of teacher education and how they relate to the purposes of professional development.

Signature Pedagogies for Teacher Professional Development

The field of teacher education has begun to shift attention from the development of professional knowledge for teaching toward how best to support teachers to use knowledge in action (McDonald, Kazemi & Schneicher Kavanagh, 2013; Parker, Patton, & O'Sullivan, 2016). 'Signature pedagogies' (Shulman, 2005) or 'core practices' (McDonald et al., 2013, p.378) which focus on "specifying teaching practices that entail knowledge and doing" (McDonald et al., 2013, p.378) are now a focus in the improvement of teaching and teacher education. A signature pedagogy has three dimensions (See Table 2.8).

Table 2.8 Shulmans Dimensions of Signature Pedagogies

Signature Pedagogy Dimension	Description
1. A surface structure	Consists of concrete, operational acts of teaching and learning, of showing and demonstrating, of questioning and answering, of interacting and withholding, of approaching and withdrawing.
2. Deep structure	Is characterised by a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge and know-how.
3. Implied structure	Encapsulates a moral dimension that comprises a set of beliefs about professional attitudes, values, and dispositions.

Note. Adapted from "'Signature Pedagogies in the Professions'" by L.S. Shulman, 2005, *Daedalus*, 134(3), 52-59.

Parker et al. (2016) observe "a growing research base investigating what pedagogies are best suited to supporting teachers in their professional learning" (p.137). They

engaged Shulman's (2005) concept of signature pedagogies to "interrogate and distil a set of teacher education pedagogies that were central to the work of teachers in a series of professional development studies over a 10-year period" (p.139). Their meta-review identified three discrete signature pedagogies and questioned their effectiveness for teacher professional development: critical dialogue; public sharing of work; communities of learners. Parker et al. (2016) aligned these discrete signature pedagogies of teacher professional learning with Shulman's (2005) dimensions of signature pedagogies. (See Table 2.9). Critical dialogue is presented as a signature pedagogy which characterises "a process of acquiring knowledge through communicative interactions" (Parker et al., 2016, p.142).

Table 2.9 Surface, deep, and implicit structures of signature pedagogies.

Signature Pedagogy	**Surface Structure**	**Deep Structure**	**Implicit Structure**
Critical Dialogue	A focus on critical dialogue and reflection of content and pedagogies.	Allows teachers to bring their own experience to the table with a focus on inquiry and reflection	Challenges teachers' professional beliefs and values pushing their thinking about what it takes to become a teacher.
Public Sharing of Work	Development and public sharing of artefacts.	Supports teachers to create and share concrete representations of their learning.	Affirms teachers in the work they do to move the profession forward while developing their leadership capacity.
Communities of Learners	Groups who engage in a process of collective learning around a shared concern or a passion.	Provides teachers with the necessary support, focus, time and environment to facilitate learning	Provides a safe social learning environment to explore teaching, values about teaching, and challenge routinized and sometimes long held teaching and learning practices while also learning new content, pedagogies.

Note. Adapted from "Signature pedagogies in support of teachers' professional learning" by M. Parker, K. Patton & M. O'Sullivan, 2016, *Irish Educational Studies*, 35(2), 137-153.

Crafton & Alber (2012) contend "the manner of thinking in teacher education – its signature pedagogy – must be both critical and complex, based on the best that we know about how people learn with one another, promoting the ongoing collaborative

inquiry within learning communities" (p.226). Teacher dialogue "of this quality involves deep conversations that get beyond surface conversations, and thereby challenging evidence in regard to their teaching and childrens' learning" (Parker et al, 2016, p.142). Public sharing of work aims to remove "the visual boundaries of the classroom to allow teachers learn from and with each other while becoming champions for their profession" (Parker et al., 2016, p.144). This signature pedagogy emphasises the importance of making time for teachers to share ideas formally. It supports teacher empowerment by "treating them as professionals and leaders and valuing that they have professional knowledge worthy of sharing and knowledge viewed as valuable by other teachers" (Parker et al., 2016, p.145). As discussed previously, engagement in a community of learners involves the creation of a supportive learning environment for collective teacher learning in which "members collaboratively generate knowledge and teaching practices" (Parker et al., 2016, p. 146). Crafton & Albers (2012) argue that a "signature pedagogy requires that teachers reflect on the shifting nature of school contexts and the students whom they serve, their pedagogical approaches and how content is selected and presented" (p.223). Shulman's (2005) dimensions of signature pedagogies, identified within these discrete pedagogies of teacher professional development link to defining characteristics of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) and the spectrum of models of continuing professional development (Kennedy, 2005). The 'implied' dimension enables exploration of the moral dimension of teacher professional development. It moves the focus beyond characteristics and models of effective professional development to question if values and beliefs about teaching are being challenged to teach new content and pedagogies to teachers. A key question is if school leaders are challenging teachers existing values and beliefs about teaching as they lead professional development for school

improvement? If they are, it is important to explore what it looks like. If not, it is important to explore why not. Shulman (2005) argues that “signature pedagogies simplify the dauntingly complex challenges of professional education because once they are learned and internalised, we don’t have to think about them: we can think with them” (p.53). However, he goes on to caution that such ‘habit shifts' are “marvellous scaffolds for complex behaviour as well as dangerous sources of rigidity and perseveration” (p.56). It is critical that school leaders are aware of signature pedagogies of teacher professional development and how they link to the purposes of professional development.

Parker et al. (2016) observe the need to:

- identify the purposes of the professional development initiative.
- provide evidence as to whether the choice of signature pedagogy is aligned with the purposes of the professional development initiative.
- question whether the role is to convey professional knowledge or enhance teacher learning.

In addition, signature pedagogies of teacher professional development must be configured around the ‘targeted learning goals’ (Parker et al., 2016, p.150) of participants. The next section describes the importance of targeted learning goals and how they can support the evaluation of professional development.

Learning Goals & Evaluation in Professional Development

Opfer & Pedder (2011) contend that school systems involved in the professional learning of teachers encompass “the collective capacity to realize shared learning goals” (p.384). Guskey (2002) places learning and learning goals derived from the systematic use of information to the fore of effective professional development programs. He argues the

need to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development activities emphasising that improved student outcomes should be the 'desired result' (Guskey, 2002, p.46). Bubb & Earley (2008) state that evaluating CPD "in terms of activities to be engaged in (inputs) rather than the actual development of knowledge and expertise" (p.5) overlooks improvements in teacher professional learning and the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Several frameworks have been developed to evaluate the impact of PD (See Table 2.10). Guskey (2002) presents five critical, interdependent levels of professional development evaluation which can be used as a 'backward' planning framing for effective professional development in schools (See Figure 2.2). Guskey (2002) asserts that planning of professional development to improve student learning must commence at level 5 and work backwards. He cautions that "professional developers can fall into the same trap that teachers sometimes do – making plans in terms of what they are going to do, instead of what they want their students to know and be able to do" (p.51). He suggests clarification of the goals of professional development at the outset can support evaluation of the effectiveness of the initiative.

Table 2.10 Evaluation Frameworks

Guskey 2002	**Bubb & Earley 2010**
1) Participants' reactions 2) Participants' learning 3) Organisation support and change 4) Participant's use of new knowledge and skills 5) Student learning outcomes	1) Baseline picture 2) Goal 3) Plan 4) The experience 5) Learning 6) Organisational Support 7) Into practice – degree and quality of change (process, product, or staff outcomes) 8) Students' learning outcomes 9) Other adults in school 10) Other students 11) Adults in other schools 12) Students in other schools

Note. Adapted from "Evaluating the impact of teacher professional development: and evidence-based framework", by F. King, 2014, *Professional Development in Education*, 40(1) 89-111.

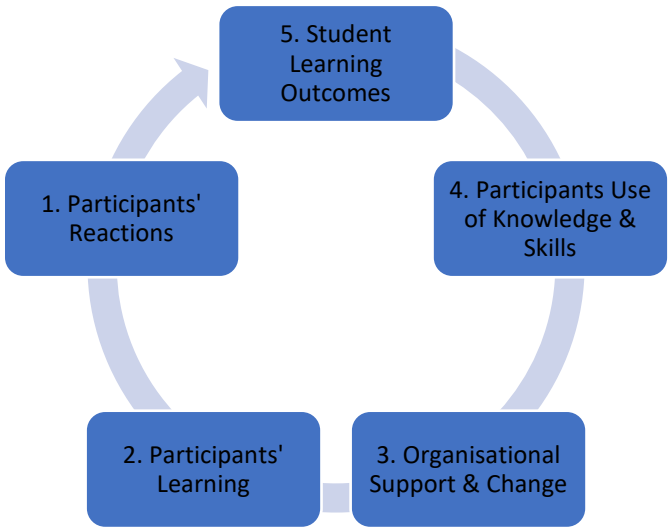


Figure 2.2 Five Critical Levels of Professional Development Evaluation

The use of relevant data from student assessments, samples of their work and school records can help to identify student learning goals. This evidence can be used to decide "what instructional practices and policies will most effectively and efficiently produce those outcomes" (Guskey, 2002, p.50). While Guskey's framework is useful in evaluating the effectiveness of professional development for student learning outcomes, it overlooks the importance of teacher agency in their professional learning. Bubb & Earley's (2010) framework, which is an adaptation of Guskey's backward mapping approach, is also designed to facilitate both the planning and evaluation of professional development in schools (See Table 2.10). Significantly, Bubb & Earley (2010) emphasise the importance of evaluating teacher and student learning outcomes. The section on Into Practice (See Table 2.10) evaluates "the long-term impact, measured in terms of process, product and staff outcomes" (King, 2014, p.100), focusing on the degree and quality of change and taking account of 'new products', 'new processes' and 'staff outcomes' (King, 2014, p.95). Given the dearth in research on school leadership of professional development for school improvement little is known about whether school leaders are planning for and evaluating teacher

professional development in schools, and if they are, little is known about what it looks like. Information on if/how school leadership teams are planning for teacher professional collaboration will provide vital information on whether school leadership for school improvement is influencing teacher professional development or not.

Conclusion

The literature review has explored changing conceptualisations of school leadership for school improvement within three waves of education reform. The concept of integrated leadership is integral to this study because it enables exploration of the influence of principal and formal teacher leaders on teacher professional development for school improvement. Darling-Hammond et al. 's (2017) review of the literature identifies seven characteristics of effective professional development and combined with the framework for analysis of collaborative professional development provide a suitable critical lens to explore school leadership of the central phenomenon in practice. The choice of signature pedagogy of teacher education, targeted learning goals for teachers and students, and ongoing evaluation are also critical factors in the leadership of effective professional development for school improvement. Given the significant dearth in national research on the influence of school leadership on collaborative teacher professional learning this study merits a qualitative approach. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological design for this study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Introduction

The introductory chapter and the literature review explored changing conceptualisations of school leadership for school improvement and how they could potentially influence collaborative teacher professional learning in schools. The move from the concept of a 'solo, heroic' school leader (Copland, 2003; McKenzie & Locke, 2014), and the broadening of sources of school leadership in national policy texts provided a timely opportunity to explore if school leadership was influencing collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools or not. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perspectives of formally appointed school leaders concerning the influence of school leadership on collaborative teacher professional learning in four Irish primary schools.

The research question was:

> How is school leadership influencing professional collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools?

Given the recognised need to expand national research on the convergence of school leadership for school improvement and professional collaboration for teacher professional development (Murphy, 2019) this research 'merits' (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.36) a qualitative approach. A multi-site case study was deemed most appropriate to explore the central phenomenon. This chapter outlines the methodological approach for this study. It begins by outlining key characteristics of qualitative research. Subsequently, the theoretical perspectives, philosophical assumptions, and methodological assumptions underpinning this qualitative research design are described. The rationale for choosing a multi-site case study approach is

outlined. Critical consideration is given to the advantages and disadvantages of a multi case study approach. The research method section describes the sampling strategy and the stages of conduct for each of the semi-structured qualitative interviews. Discussion proceeds to data analysis and the phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2021) which were applied in this study. Finally, discussion focuses on how trustworthiness was maintained throughout this study.

The Qualitative Research Paradigm

Historically, the qualitative research paradigm has its roots in social science disciplines such as social or cultural anthropology, sociology, and organisational behaviour (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). However, it was only in the 1980s that qualitative research began to be widely applied by researchers in educational settings (Borg & Gall, 1989; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hatch, 2002). Creswell & Creswell (2018) define qualitative research as:

> an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of data (p.23).

Marshall & Rossman (2016) state that qualitative research begins with questions and its 'ultimate purpose' (p.4) is learning which in turn contributes to the development of knowledge. They contend that "to inform the questions, the researcher collects data, the basic units or building blocks of information…(and) when information is interpreted and put to use or applied, it becomes knowledge" (p.4). Creswell & Creswell (2018) observe a consensus in the literature about the basic characteristics of qualitative research. The features of eight basic characteristics of qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and their implications for this research are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Characteristic	**Features**	**Implications for this Research**
1. Natural Setting	"In qualitative work, the intent is to explore human behaviours within the contexts of their natural occurrence" (Hatch, 2002, p.7).	The aim was to describe what happens in each setting, how the school leaders perceive their actions and those of others, and the contexts in which those actions take place (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).
2. Researcher as key instrument	Qualitative researchers "are the ones who gather the information and interpret it" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.257).	This meant I was positioned closely to 'raw words' and 'real life' at all stages of the research (Brodsky, 2008, p.767). Analysis, interpretation and 'meaning making' came from my use of personal and professional skills to create a "coherent picture of the research" (Brodksy, 2008, p.767) as I saw and experienced it.
3. Multiple sources of data	Qualitative researchers "try to understand people through multiple methods…these are known more formally as the primary techniques of interviewing, observing, gathering documents, and examining material culture" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.7).	The methods are both 'interactive' and 'humanistic' (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.7) meaning that throughout this research I engaged with participants, observing, and listening to their accounts of how they go about their everyday school leadership activities.
4. Inductive and deductive analysis	"Qualitative researchers typically work inductively, building patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organising the data into increasingly more abstract units of information" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.257). "As patterns or relationships are discovered in the data hypothetical categories are formed, and the data are read deductively to determine if these categories are supported by the overall dataset" (Hatch, 2002, p. 10).	The process of data analysis began inductively. This meant the construction of the picture began to take shape as I collected and examined parts of the data (Bogdan &Biklen, 1992). As initial themes were generated, I had to look back at the data to determine if I had sufficient evidence to support each theme or whether I needed to gather additional information. The process began inductively but also involved deductive thinking (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
5. Participants' meanings	"Qualitative studies try to capture the perspectives that actors use as a basis for their actions in specific social settings" (Hatch, 2002, p.7).	This meant that throughout the research process I had to keep the focus on the meanings that participants held about the central phenomenon.
6. Emergent design	"This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 258).	This meant that when I entered the field, I had to be aware that questions could change, forms of data collection might need to be adjusted and the individuals studied and the sites visited may need to be modified (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
7. Reflexivity	"Inquirers reflect about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they	This meant that I had to engage reflexively at all stages of the research process. I kept a reflexive log during the research process. I annotated transcripts in NVivo to keep track of my influence on the setting and of my own

	advance and the meaning that they ascribe to data" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.258). "Given this interpretive characteristic, the researchers' personal biography shapes the project in important ways" (Marshall & Rossman, 2017, p.25).	biases. This allowed me an opportunity to reflect on my own emotional responses to the data.
8. Holistic account	"Qualitative researchers respect for the individual in context draws them to look at social worlds holistically, as interactive complex systems" (Marshall & Rossman, 2017, p.7).	This meant the focus was on describing and interpreting the lived experience of participants rather than measuring and predicting (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.7)

The following section addresses how reflexivity was addressed in this study and philosophical assumptions which underpinned this research design.

Theoretical Perspectives

Positionality

Creswell & Poth (2018) emphasise the importance of researchers "considering what they bring to the inquiry, such as their personal history, views of themselves and others, and ethical and political issues" (p.17). Similarly, Marshall & Rossman (2016) observe that qualitative studies "take the researcher into the field, into complex and varied interactions with the participants" (p.25). Consequently, they contend that "the knowledge constructed during a qualitative study is interpretive" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.25). Therefore, qualitative researchers must engage reflexivity to recognise and identify their own "self-understanding about the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.228). In this study, I, in the role of researcher generated qualitative data through interviews which enabled me to explore the central phenomenon. Creswell & Poth (2018) emphasise the 'value-laden' (p.20) nature of data gathered in the field and the importance of researchers "identifying their 'positionality' in relation to the context and setting of the research" (p.20). Creswell & Creswell (2018) assert that this aspect "is more than merely advancing biases and values in the study, but how the background

of the researcher actually may shape the direction of the study" (p.258). To address reflexivity, it was important to make my positionality explicit in relation to the central phenomenon given "the act of writing a qualitative text cannot be considered separate from the author, the study participants, or the reader" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.228). As mentioned in Chapter One I have occupied various school leadership positions, both as an assistant principal (formerly B post) and as a teacher leader with leadership roles which would be considered as serving the school's core work. At present, I do not occupy a formally appointed school leadership role owing to the commitments of this research. Nevertheless, given my role as teacher, a significant challenge for me upon entering the field was maintaining a position of 'marginality' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.113). Marginality involves "living simultaneously in two worlds, that of participation and that of research" (Hammersley &Atkinson, 1995, p.113). Although no longer occupying a formally appointed school leadership role I was keenly aware of how my past experiences of school leadership for school improvement, both as a leader and an ongoing participant in school improvement activities, could shape my interpretation of the phenomenon. In addition, given my experiences of leading professional development on a program of initial teacher education and my background knowledge developed through my doctoral course work and the literature review I had to continually engage reflexivity to ensure my findings represented the lived experiences of participants. I drew on the guidance of Creswell & Poth (2018) to write "reflexive comments about what (was) being experienced as the study progresse(d) – (including)… observations during data collection or hunches about what the findings might indicate or reactions from participants during the study" (p.227). In addition, I followed their advice and used 'memo functions' (p.227) which could easily be retrieved in NVivo. As well as personal reflexivity, Braun & Clark

(2021) stipulate the key role of 'functional' and 'disciplinary' (p.12) reflexivity which "encompasses the researcher reflecting on the methodological choices and disciplinary location, and how these shape knowledge production" (p.12). Creswell & Poth (2018) assert that axiological, ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions "are often applied within interpretive frameworks that qualitative researchers use when they conduct a study" (p.20). These interpretive frameworks may be "paradigms or beliefs that the researcher brings to the process of research, or they may be theories or theoretical orientations that guide the practice of the research" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.22). The next section outlines how my philosophical assumptions were applied to this research design within a social constructivist, interpretative framework.

Philosophical Assumptions Underpinning this Research

The research design for this study adopted an 'experiential' (Braun & Clark, 2021, p.158) qualitative approach underpinned by the ontological assumptions of social constructivism and interpretivism and contextualist and relativist epistemologies. Ontology relates to assumptions that all researchers make "about the nature of reality, and the nature of 'being'" (Braun & Clark, 2021, p.167). Social constructivism is a paradigm or worldview 'typically seen' (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.26) as a qualitative research approach. Creswell & Creswell (2018) state that constructivism has four major elements: understanding, multiple participant meaning, social and historical construction and theory generation (p.26). It is often 'described' (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.22) as or 'combined with' (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.26) interpretivism. "Social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.27). Interpretivists believe that "the knower and the process of knowing cannot be separated from what is known and the facts cannot be separated from values" (Waring, 2012, p. 18). Given the

purpose of this study was to seek understanding of the world in which school leaders work my 'intent' was "to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.22) school leaders have about school leadership for school improvement and whether they perceive it is as influencing teacher professional development in schools or not. Social constructivists believe that individuals develop 'subjective meanings' (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 27) of their experiences "meanings directed toward certain objects or things" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.22). These meanings are 'varied' and 'multiple' seeking a 'complexity of views' (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.26) appropriate to address the research question of this study.

Epistemology "relates to knowledge theorising, what it is possible to know and meaningful ways of generating knowledge" (Braun & Clark, 2021, p.166). As mentioned previously, a key characteristic of qualitative research is the researcher as a key instrument in gathering and interpreting data. Consequently, "the investigator and the object of the investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the 'findings' are literally created as the investigation proceeds" (Waring, 2012, p.18). Within a 'contextualist' epistemology "knowledge cannot be separated from the knower, and the researcher's values and practices inevitably shape the knowledge they produce" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.178). Similarly, Waring (2012) observes that "there are multiple realities with the mind playing a central role by determining categories and shaping or constructing realities" (p.18). Significantly, Braun & Clark (2021) argue that "humans cannot be separated out from, and meaningfully be studied in isolation from, the contexts they live in and that give meaning to their lives" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.178). Consequently, a relativist epistemology was central to this study given that each case is unique and that the lived experiences of participants would likely vary within and across the cases. Relativists argue "that because truth can be understood

only within a language, there are no inherent or given characteristics of the world and, as such there can be no ultimate fact of the matter" (Smith, 2008, p.250). Waring (2012) asserts that within a subjective, transactional, and interpretive framework the "conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology dissolves" (p.18). Smith (2008) concludes "all that can be said about the world is that there are different ways of interpreting it – interpretations that are time and place contingent, or put differently, are relative to time and place" (p.250). The aim of this study was to develop understanding, interpret and 'formulate' informed and sophisticated constructions and become more aware of 'competing constructions' as the study progressed (Waring, 2012, p.22).

The methodological assumptions underpinning the research design were dialectical, ideographic, and hermeneutical. Experiential research is underpinned by a dialectical "view of language as a tool for communicating meaning, offering a more or less transparent window into the psychological world 'inside the head', or social worlds 'out there'" (Braun & Clark, 2021, p.158). Waring (2012) contends that "the variable and personal nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator(s) and respondent(s)" (p.18). Therefore, qualitative interviews were deemed as the most appropriate data collection method to address the research question of this study. In an ideographic research methodology "the concern is for what is specific to the individual case" (Hermans, 1995, p.786-787). A multi case study approach was chosen to address the recognised need to provide an in-depth understanding of the chosen cases. In an experiential qualitative approach "hermeneutics refers to the philosophy of interpretation – the assumptions that underpin how we make sense of and interpret data" (Braun & Clark, 2021, p.158).

Given the necessity to identify and interpret key features of the data relevant to the research question and the importance of researcher reflexivity a reflexive thematic analysis approach was engaged (Braun & Clark, 2021). The methodological approach was underpinned by these three assumptions consistent with an experiential qualitative research design. The following section discusses the methodological approach to this study in greater detail.

Methodological Approach

Rationale for adopting a Qualitative Approach

As identified previously, there is a recognised need to expand national research on the central phenomenon (Murphy, 2019). According to Creswell & Creswell (2018) if "a concept or phenomenon needs to be explored and understood because little research has been done on it…then it merits a qualitative approach" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.36). Five approaches to qualitative research were considered in the design of this study (See Table 3.2). The introductory chapter recognised the need to expand research that examines how school leadership for school improvement influences teacher professional development in schools through distributed leadership and professional collaboration (Murphy, 2019). Furthermore, King (2011) identified a dearth in research linking school improvement, collaborative practices, and teacher professional development. Therefore, a case study approach was deemed most appropriate given "the purpose of case study research might be to explore a phenomenon about which not much is known" (Ashley, 2012, p.102). Case studies are defined as "a design of inquiry, found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process of one or more individuals" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.32). The use of more than one research method 'fits comfortably' (Denscombe, 2014, p. 54) with the

case study approach and as discussed previously, qualitative interviews were deemed most appropriate to address the research question for this study.

Table 3.2 Five Approaches to Qualitative Research

Research Approach	**Focus of this Approach**	**Types of Research Best Suited for Approach**	**Relevance**
Narrative Research	Exploring the life of an individual	Needing to tell stories of individual difference.	Not relevant. This study moves beyond the concept of the principal or any leader as the 'solo, heroic' school leader (Copland, 2002)
Phenomenology	Understanding the essence of the experience. Emphasises a phenomenon to be explored in terms of a single concept or idea.	Needing to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon experienced by several individuals.	Not relevant because this study seeks to explore commonality and variations in experiences of multiples concepts i.e., school leadership for school improvement and professional collaboration for teacher professional development.
Grounded Theory	Grounded theory research focuses on a process or an action that has distinct steps or phases that occur over time.	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field.	Not relevant given the inductive nature of a grounded theory approach and the emphasis on theory development.
Ethnography	Describing and interpreting a culture-sharing group	Describing and interpreting the shared patterns or culture of a group.	Not relevant because this study seeks to explore commonality and variance among cases.
Case Study	Developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases	Providing an in-depth understanding of a case or cases.	Relevant because this study seeks to explore a phenomenon about which not much is known hence the need of in-depth description and analysis.

Note. Adapted from "Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches" by J.W. Creswell & C.N. Poth, p. 104-105, 2018. Copyright by Sage Los Angeles/London/New Dehli/Singapore/Washington DC/Melbourne.

There are several advantages to a case study approach. One advantage of case study research is that it makes use of 'naturally occurring settings' (Denscombe, 2014, p.65). This enabled me to explore the direct experiences of school leaders and the meaning they make of their own actions and the actions of others in their own context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, Hatch, 2022). The value of the case study approach

was that it provided the opportunity "to go into sufficient detail to unravel the complexities of (each)… given situation" (Denscombe, 2014, p. 58) in its own right. Another considerable strength of the case study approach was the ability to capture 'unique features' that may otherwise have been "lost in large scale data" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.293). Furthermore, I could "embrace and build in unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.293). Another significant advantage of the case study approach was that it took a 'holistic view' which enabled me to "look in depth at the subtleties and intricacies" (Denscombe, 2014, p.66) of the complex, central phenomenon which was the focus of this study.

Given the vast number and types of primary schools in Ireland a multi-site case study was deemed most appropriate to explore the central phenomenon in and between different contexts. One of the key advantages of a multi-site case study is the potential to make broad assertions about what characterises the central phenomenon and to question if the findings make sense beyond a specific case. Case studies can provide insight into and support analysis of other 'similar situations' (Cohen et al., 2011, p.293) and cases. Miles & Huberman (1994) contend that in multi case research there is a tension between the 'particular' and the 'universal' and that the challenge lies in "reconciling an individual case's uniqueness with the need for more general understanding of generic processes that occur across cases" (p.171). The strength of exploring multiple cases is that they "not only pin down the specific conditions under which a finding will occur but also help us form the more general categories of how those conditions may be related" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.171). A multicase study approach makes a 'special effort' (Stake, 2006, p.6) to study a phenomenon which has lots of cases. A multicase study starts by "recognising what concept or idea binds the cases together" (Stake, 2006, p.23). Stake (2006) argues "the binding concept, the

phenomenon of interest in the case needs to be prominent in these cases" (p.24). In multicase study research cases are of interest because they belong to a wider collection of cases which are "somehow categorically bound together" (Stake, 2006, p.6). In order to understand the phenomenon that binds the cases together it was considered necessary to study some of its single cases, but it was the phenomenon that I was seeking to understand. Denscombe (2014) observes the difficulties of defining the boundaries of the case arguing that they "can prove difficult to define in an absolute and clear-cut fashion" (p.66). This can create challenges in terms of "deciding which sources of data to incorporate in the case study and which to exclude" (Denscombe, 2014, p.66). The binding concept in this study was delineated from national policy documents as the overarching requirement that teams of formally appointed school leaders should lead professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development for school improvement in Irish primary schools (DES, 2016; DES 2016a; DES 2018; TC, 2016; TC, 2016a). Data for this multi case study came mostly from the cases that were studied and was accompanied by a cross-case analysis with some emphasis on the binding concept (Stake, 2006).

Notwithstanding the strengths and advantages of a multi-site case study approach it did present challenges and disadvantages. Denscombe (2014) contends that one of the disadvantages of a case study approach is the challenge of 'gaining access' (p.66) to case study settings. It was particularly challenging to gain access to schools owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and thus interviews were conducted via Zoom. At the time of data generation school leaders were facing ongoing challenges around the management of staff absence due to health and safety requirements. In some instances, principals remarked that their school leadership team was decimated for a variety of reasons. Vicary, Young & Hicks (2017) found that using a reflective journal inside a

software package and alongside the stages of qualitative data analysis enacted potential 'validity criteria' by producing an audit trail and "reflectively prompting the process of learning, interpretation and bracketing thus evidencing transparency" (p. 553). I began journaling in NVivo during the pilot phase of this study and this process continued during data analysis and the write up of the research findings. This process mitigated the challenge of gaining access to case study settings in several ways. It provided a space to make decisions about timeframes for communication with participants. I was able to plan future actions while also reflecting on key ethical considerations e.g., the principle of voluntarism. It provided a space for me to reflect on any modifications I needed to make as the study progressed. Case study research has been subject to criticism for producing what has been perceived as 'soft data' (Denscombe, 2014, p.66) owing to the predominant use of qualitative data and interpretive methods. This was addressed by paying particular attention to detail and rigour at all stages of data collection and analysis. Another disadvantage of case study research is the 'credibility' (Denscombe, 2014, p.66) of generalisations made from its findings. Ethical considerations and issues around trustworthiness and credibility are discussed later in this chapter. The following sections outline the research design, the research methods, the sampling plan, and steps for data analysis for this study.

Research Design

The research design comprised of a multi-site case study conducted in four Irish primary schools. Reflecting on the theoretical orientation of this research, a 'constructionist conception' (Roulston, 2010, p.51) of the qualitative interview was adopted. In the constructionist conception of the interview "data provides situated accountings on research topics – that is, particular versions of affairs produced by particular interlocutors on specific occasions" (Roulston, 2010, p.61). The focus in this

study was on participants' 'sense-making practices' (Baker, 2002, p. 778) and the co-construction of data through semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008; Roultson, 2010).

Developing & Piloting the Interview Protocol

The main research question and aims were developed in 'academic language' and subsequently "translated into the vernacular as questions to be posed" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p.72) during each one-to-one and group interview. While the overall research question served as a 'guiding framework' (Ashley, 2012, p.105) for data collection and analysis, a semi-structured interview protocol (Yin, 2009) was used to address the overarching research question and associated research aims. In March 2022, the interview protocol was piloted in a one-to one interview with a principal, and a group interview with a deputy principal and an assistant principal, separate to the four actual cases for the study. The main issue arising from the pilot interviews was the overlap between school improvement planning and DEIS planning, and this was addressed by using both terms in DEIS schools. Otherwise, no adjustment was made to the interview schedule as the pilot interviews generated in depth discussion about the central phenomenon and participants indicated that they understood the purpose of the interview and the questions presented.

Sampling Strategy

This study employed non-probability, purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2011). I purposely selected cases from the wider population of schools to include in the sample rather than attempting to generalise to the wider population. According to Coe (2012) "the selection of cases and contexts for study in qualitative research is guided not by their representativeness of some wider group, but for their potential to contribute information in their own right: their ability to provoke new insights, understandings,

connections and explanations" (p.48). Stake (2006) argues "the benefits of multicase study will be limited if fewer than, say, 4 cases are chosen, or more than 10" (p.22). The limitation of choosing two or three cases was that it would not have shown enough of the interactivity between the central phenomenon and its 'situations' (Stake, 2006, p.22). Conversely, choosing too many cases would provide more 'uniqueness of interactivity' (Stake, 2006, p.22) beyond the scope of this study. The purposive sampling of sites for inclusion in this study incorporated 'maximum variation sampling' (Coe, 2012, p.49). This meant that I chose cases to "illustrate a wide range of the dimensions of interest" (Coe, 2012, p.49). Specifically, I had to consider the size of the school, the number of formally appointed school leaders on the staff, and the type of school. Having reviewed school improvement policy and recognising the planning processes in DEIS schools can differ from those in non-DEIS schools I considered it important to include at least one DEIS and one non-DEIS school in the sample. Other possible dimensions of interest that were considered included the school leadership experiences of a teaching principal and the experiences of principals in developing schools.

The study was undertaken to understand the central phenomenon, both the variance and commonalities across different sites. It is supposed that the overarching requirement that formal school leaders organise professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development for school improvement is influenced differently by the cultural, policy and socioeconomic context of each case. Therefore, it was expected that all cases would "be similar to each other in respect of the central phenomenon and that in addition to school demographic features each case will have other distinct or 'unusual' features (Stake, 2006, p.40). Purposive sampling of individuals was applied at each site. Principal participation was essential given their overall responsibility for

the leadership of school improvement. Maximum variation sampling involved "choosing cases to illustrate a wide range of the dimensions of interest" (Coe, 2012, p.48). The sample was chosen to ensure a wide variety of participants. This sampling strategy was applied at each site and where the principal was in an administrative role it was deemed necessary to include them and at least two other members of the school leadership team to demonstrate the experiences of various, formally appointed school leaders. This strategy was also employed when choosing specific sites because of the recognised differences in approaches to school improvement planning in DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Therefore, it was deemed important to include at least one DEIS and non-DEIS school in the sample to illustrate different dimensions of the binding concept.

Recruitment Strategy

Initially, I contacted the Irish National Teachers Organisation and the Irish Primary Principals Network with respect to placing recruitment advertisements (See Appendix A). The INTO advised that it was a difficult time to recruit participants given the demands on school leaders owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. I did not receive a response from the IPPN. I spoke with colleagues of mine and sent the advertisement to several school principals. I also engaged with professional contacts who were working as school leaders. As mentioned previously, I engaged in reflexive journaling in NVivo throughout the process of participant recruitment and this contributed to the development of an audit trail for the study. A plain language statement and informed consent form was provided to all interested participants in advance of interviews (See Appendix B & C). Pseudonyms have been used to ensure the anonymity of participants and the approaches to data generation employed at each site are described.

Emergent Design

Creswell & Creswell (2018) identified an emergent design as a characteristic of qualitative research. As the research progressed it was necessary to adjust some forms of data generation and modify the sites that were visited. At the time of data generation, the leadership structures at each of the sites varied. There were formally appointed school leadership teams in place at two of the sites. Semi-structured group interviews were conducted at sites where a formally appointed school leadership team was in place. Focus and group interview methods are "often used synonymously to mean an organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain collective views about a research topic" (Gibbs, 2012, p.186). The advantage of conducting a group interview was that it provided a "way to gather many opinions from individuals within a group setting" (Gibbs, 2012, p.186). However, "the distinguisher of focus groups is that they are interactive, the group opinion is at least as important as the individual opinion, and the group itself may take on a life of its own not anticipated or initiated by the researcher" (Gibbs, 2012, p.186). Conversely, "a group interview can be undertaken very much like a one-to-one interview in the sense that the interviewer remains the focal point of the interaction that takes place" (Denscombe, 2010, p.176). In this study, group interviews were undertaken, and the focus was on the individual opinion of school leaders. This was followed by a one-to-one, semi-structured interview with the principal to discuss the overall leadership of the school. At two of the sites there were only individual principals occupying formal leadership roles. At each of these sites a semi-structured, one-to-one interview was conducted with the principal. This meant that I had to draw on questions from the group and one-to-one interview schedules to generate an in-depth account of the central phenomenon at these sites.

Data Analysis

This research design followed a 'typical format' for a multicase study by first providing "a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a within-case analysis" (Stake, 2006, p.100). This was followed by "thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis, as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the cases" (Stake, 2006, p.100). The interpretation of the meaning of cases contributed to the identification of lessons learned which were posed "at a higher conceptual level than that of the specific case(s)" (Yin, 2014, p.68). The next section provides further detail on the research methods, the conduct of the interviews at each site and steps in data analysis.

Research Methods

The data was generated over an eight-month period from March 2022 to November 2022. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that interviews and observations could not be safely conducted on site and thus Zoom interviews were the most appropriate mechanism for data generation.

Data Recording Procedures

Information from semi-structured qualitative interviews was recorded via Zoom which is a "collaborative, cloud-based video conferencing service offering features including…secure recording sessions" (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, Mavourneen & Lawless, 2019, p.2). The use of Zoom was particularly advantageous given the restrictions in place in schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the ability to securely record and store sessions "without recourse to third-party software" (Archibald et al., 2019, p.2) was important given the need to meet the requirements of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Interview Conduct

Yin (2009) suggests that qualitative researchers need to document the procedures of their case studies and to document as many steps of the procedure as possible. He also recommends setting up a 'case study protocol' as "a major tactic in increasing the reliability of case study research" (Yin, 2009, p.63). A case study protocol was developed for this research study. It is considered 'essential' when using a multiple-case design" (Yin, 2009, p.63). It contained the procedures and general rules that had to be followed in using the instrument at each case study site. The development of a Zoom Interview Protocol (See Appendix D) formed part of the ethical approval process for this study. The participants were informed in advance that the interviews must take place in an appropriate setting to protect the privacy of all participants. Unique meeting IDs were provided for each scheduled meeting. The purpose of this was to protect the privacy of participants. School Leadership Team group interviews and one-to-one interviews with principals were conducted at School B and School D. School principals were provided with a unique meeting ID for the one-to-one interviews to further protect their privacy. The Zoom meetings were set up 30 minutes before each interview and the links and meeting passwords were shared privately with participants via email. The waiting room feature was used and only the research could admit individuals to further protect participants.

The interview was commenced by a 'briefing' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p.62) in which I defined the situation for the participants and spoke briefly about the purpose of the interview and the use of the Zoom recording facility. I read the plain language statement, checked signed informed consent forms, and asked participants to verbally confirm their willingness to participate. I informed participants that there would be an opportunity for them to review the transcript before it would be

anonymised. This aim was to provide them with an opportunity to review the transcript to ensure it represented their lived experience. Participants were offered an opportunity to ask questions before the interview commenced. These steps allowed participants the opportunity to "have a grasp of the interviewer before they allow(ed) themselves to talk freely and expose their experiences and feelings to a stranger" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p.62). Given the in-depth nature of the interviews a more 'open format' (Mears, 2012, p.172) was employed. This meant that I had "a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered" (Denscombe, 2010, p.176) but maintained flexibility in the order of which topics were considered. More significantly, I focused on allowing "the interviewee(s) develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised" (Denscombe, 2010, p.176) by me. Each of the interviews was rounded off with a 'debriefing' by the interviewer noting some of the main points that had been learned from the interview and allowing the participants to make any final comments or ask any further questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p.63).

Qualitative interviews were particularly advantageous because participants could not be directly observed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me some control over the line of questioning which enabled me to explore the research question while allowing participants to convey important aspects of their lived experience. Zoom Meetings enabled me to observe the participants "voice and facial and body expressions…provid(ing) a richer access to the subjects meaning that the transcribed texts" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p.63). Following interviews at each case study site I allowed myself some time to reflect on what had been learned from that particular interview. Qualitative interviews presented some limitations e.g. I was aware that my presence might 'bias responses' (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 264). Furthermore, the data provided was 'indirect' and "filtered

through the views of interviewees" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 264). Nevertheless, qualitative interviews can "help us learn about the world in terms of human experience" (Mears, 2012, p. 74) and given the significant need to expand data on the central phenomenon provided a practical means to explore the lived experience of school leaders.

Data Analysis Procedure

Using NVivo for Assistance

Given the significant level of data generated in this study including interview transcripts and researcher memos NVivo12 was used to support data management and analysis. According to Guest et al. (2012) "one of the fundamental reasons for using QDAS is to facilitate review, exploration, and reduction of qualitative data to present a comprehensive response to a particular research objective" (p.240). "Qualitative software programs have become quite popular (because)…they help researchers organise, sort and search for information in text or image databases" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 268). Qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) packages enhance the "efficiency of thematic analysis by enabling researchers to organise and work with all of their data in one program" (Guest, MacQueen, Namey, 2012, p.220). QDAS packages are particularly useful as a management tool and can serve as 'electronic filing cabinets' (Guest et al., 2012, p.220) thereby enhancing the efficiency of data analysis. QDAS offer "powerful means by which to organise data according to known 'facts', descriptive features and data types for later comparison and queries" (Lewins & Silver, 2009, p.5). Lewins & Silver (2009) contend that QDAS packages both "reflect and significantly facilitate the 'cyclical' nature which is characteristic of many qualitative research and analysis processes…and significantly increase the researcher's access to the different elements of their project and sub-sets of data" (p.5). QDAS has

benefits as a ‘data tagging tool’ (Guest et al., 2012, p.220) and was utilised to review and label data and develop thematic codes to capture both the content and context of the data. Furthermore, QDAS has ‘search capacity’ (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.268) which enabled me to locate text associated with specific codes and create ‘searchable associations’ (Guest et al., 2012, p.220) between codes, pieces of data, data and source information and reflexive memos. While QDAS was beneficial in supporting data analysis in this study I was mindful of the problems that can arise with the technical side of the software (Guest et al., 2012) and the potential for data loss. This was overcome by seeking regular technical assistance from the NVivo technical support team and regular backing up and saving of NVivo files.

Data Analysis Process

A reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) approach based on the work of Braun & Clark (2006; 2017; 2021) was employed in this study. RTA is “a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes” (Braun & Clark, 2021, p. 4). RTA can be applied across a range of theoretical frameworks and was ‘compatible’ (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.78) with the constructivist methods which underpinned this research. Thematic analysis aims to “identify and interpret key, but not necessarily all features of the data guided by the research question” (Braun & Clark, 2017, p.297). The version of thematic analysis developed by Braun & Clark (2017) emphasises “an organic approach to coding and theme development and the active role of the researcher in these processes” (p.297). Thematic analysis was particularly useful in this study because it can be “used to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants lived experience, views and perspectives, and behaviour and practices” (Braun & Clark, 2017, p.297). Thematic analysis is considered particularly useful when

"investigating an under-researched area, or (when) working with participants whose views on the topic are not known" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.83). Thematic analysis tends to come from a constructionist paradigm "where broader assumptions, structures, and/or meanings are theorised as underpinning what is actually articulated in the data" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.85) and meets one of the objectives of this research which is to use cross-case analysis to make broad assertions about the central phenomenon grounded in the data findings. Braun & Clark (2021) specify that RTA is not the 'method' but that the 'analytic process' and the "process applies the method to work with and make sense of data, but it is embedded in and surrounded by, a bigger set of values, assumptions, and practices which collectively, make up the method" (p.6). Braun & Clark (2021) assert that "a reflexive researcher is a fundamental characteristic of thematic analysis…and a differentiating factor across versions of TA" (p.5). The research epistemology that guided data analysis adopted a social constructionist perspective from which "meaning and experience are socially reproduced rather than inhering within individuals" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.85). The constructionist underpinnings, the capacity to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experience, and the fundamental emphasis on researcher reflexivity meant that RTA was deemed the most suitable analytic process to address the research question of this study.

The analytic process is one of six phases (Braun & Clark, 2021) (See Table 3.3). The data analysis had elements of inductive and deductive orientations. In RTA, an inductive orientation is concerned with the experiences, meanings, and perspectives of participants. Inductive analysis is "a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.83). A deductive orientation

> refers to a more researcher-or-theory driven approach, where the dataset provided the foundation for coding and theme development, but the research question asked – and thus the codes developed – reflect theoretical or conceptual ideas the researcher seeks to understand through the dataset (Braun & Clark, 2021, p.56).

Braun & Clark (2021) specify that coding of a dataset can encompass semantic and latent coding. In this study, reflexive thematic analysis sought to "capture meaning from semantic (participant-driven, descriptive) to latent (researcher-driven conceptual) levels" (Braun & Clark, 2021, p. 56).

Table 3.3 Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2021)

Phase	
1. Familiarising yourself with the data	Reading and re-reading of data and working with transcripts of audio data, listening to the recordings at least once, making brief notes about any analytic ideas or insights
2. Coding	Systematic coding aimed at capturing single meanings or concepts. Capturing your 'analytic take' on the data.
3. Generating initial themes	Identification of potential or candidate themes that capture the data and address the research question. Data is collated relevant to each candidate theme.
4. Developing and reviewing themes	Checking that the themes make sense in relation to both the coded extracts, and the full dataset. Consider if the themes highlight the most important patterns across the dataset in relation to the research question.
5. Refining, defining and naming themes	A refining process: ensure that each theme is clearly demarcated and is built around a strong core concept or essence. Write a brief synopsis of each theme. Decide on a concise and informative name for each theme.
6. Writing up	Finesse and finish the writing process. The aim is to weave together the analytic narrative and compelling, vivid data extracts, to provide a coherent and persuasive story about the dataset that addresses the research question. Production of the final research report.

This meant that data analysis engaged both semantic and latent coding as the process progressed. Semantic codes are "about capturing explicitly stated ideas, relevant to answering (the) research question" (Braun & Clark, 2021, p.57). Latent codes "focus on a deeper, more implicit or conceptual level of meaning, sometimes quite abstracted from the obvious content of the data" (Braun & Clark, 2021, p.56).

This organic process allowed the codes to evolve as analytic insight developed. While the phases in thematic analysis are presented 'sequentially' it does not mean that the process of data analysis is 'linear' (McCartan & Robson, 2016, p. 469). The first stage of data analysis in this study was the analysis of data from each case site. The first phase of thematic analysis was familiarising myself with the data set. The interviews were transcribed, anonymised, and imported to NVivo12 where they were collated with researcher reflexive memos. The initial data was read and re-read, and I noted down 'initial ideas' (McCartan & Robson, 2016, p.469) as memos in NVivo. Phase two was the generation of initial codes and this involved "comparing each new chunk of data with previous codes, so similar chunks (were) labelled with the same code" (McCartan & Robson, 2016, p. 469). This phase involved semantic coding whereby the focus was on exploring meaning at the surface of the data. The process aimed to capture 'explicitly-expressed-meaning' (Braun & Clark, 2021, p.56) relevant to the research question.

The process was also deductive as I noticed some connections to theoretical ideas during this phase. In phase three the initial codes were grouped into a small number of themes and consideration was given to the potential of the initial themes to address the research question (See Table 3.3). Subsequently, the themes were checked to ensure that they made sense in relation to the coded extracts and the research question. The fifth phase consisted of a refining process in which I wrote a brief synopsis, ensuring that each theme was built around a strong core concept (See Table 3.3). The coding process contributed to the write up of the research report. The key focus at this point was ensuring that the chosen data extracts and reports for each case study addressed the relevant research question. At this stage the focus was on ensuring

that the "findings preserve(d) certain activity found in the special circumstances of the case" (Stake, 2006, p.40).

The second stage of data analysis was cross case analysis to determine how commonality and variance among cases could be explained. In cross case analysis "themes are analysed for each individual case and across different cases (as in case studies)" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.269). According to Stake "given the binding concept, a theme, issue, phenomenon, or functional relationship that strings the cases together – the researchers have an obligation to provide interpretation across cases" (Stake, 2006, p.39). Maxwell & Miller (2008) argue that the categorisation of data according to similarities and differences in qualitative data analysis can overlook connections between things. They argue that case studies can compensate for the "loss of contextualities that result from a primarily categorisation approach but rarely…go beyond what is apparent in the data" (Maxwell & Miller, 2008, p.467). They contend that "it is often productive to alternate between categorising and connecting moves" (p.470) in data analysis. The analysis followed a sequential pattern (See Table 3.4). Firstly, cases were analysed individually in NVivo to gain an understanding of each "entity as it was situated" (Stake, 2006, p.40). While the cases were similar to each other in many respects, this process preserved the uniqueness of the findings at each site. The subsequent cross-case analysis took evidence from each of the case studies to show how 'uniformity' and 'disparity' (Stake, 2006, p.40) characterised the central phenomenon. This enabled the researcher to explore the central phenomenon and understand not only "how it works and does not work in general, independent of local conditions, but how it works under various local conditions" (Stake, 2006, p.40). The findings from each of the cases were combined with cross-case assertions and are presented in Chapter Four.

Table 3.4 Overview of Key Themes, Overarching Themes & Sample Factors

	Key Themes	**Overarching Themes**	**Factors**
School A (Teaching Principal)	• School Improvement Planning • Shared leadership for school improvement • External Support Services • Staff professional collaboration	• Shared School Leadership • School Improvement Processes • Professional Collaboration for Professional Learning & Development	• Legacy of Established Structures • Hierarchical Structures • Policy Compliance • Reflective of PLO • Managerial professionalism
School B (DEIS)	• School Improvement Planning • Professional collaboration amongst school leaders • Developing a collaborative culture. • External support services.	• Shared School Leadership • School Improvement Processes • Professional Collaboration for Professional Learning & Development	• Legacy of Established Structures • Hierarchical Structures • Policy Compliance • Arranged collegiality. • Reflective of PLO • Managerial professionalism
School C (Developing School - early stage)	• Leading and developing a collaborative culture. • Shared school leadership • External Support Services	• Shared School Leadership • School Improvement Processes • Professional Collaboration for Professional Learning & Development	• No Legacy of Established Structures • Hierarchy somewhat flattened • Community of Learners • Democratic Professionalism
School D (Developing School - late stage)	• Developing a collaborative culture. • Professional collaboration amongst school leaders. • External Support Services • Professional collaboration for school-based PD	• Shared School Leadership • School Improvement Processes • Professional Collaboration for Professional Learning & Development	• No Legacy of Established Structures • Hierarchy somewhat flattened. • Democratic Professionalism

The next phase of analysis involved identifying and merging factors from each case. Factors are influential variables 'beyond the situation' (Stake, 2006, p.64) of each

case. The meeting of themes and factors both consolidated and extended understanding of the influence of school leadership on collaborative teacher professional learning. The findings from the factorial analysis are presented in Chapter Five.

Trustworthiness

Nowell, Norris, White & Moules (2017) argue that for qualitative research to be accepted as trustworthy the researcher "must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematising, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine where the process is credible" (p.1). Lincoln & Guba (1985) refined the concept of trustworthiness by defining the four terms 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability' as alternatives to the 'conventional paradigm' criteria of 'internal validity', 'external validity', 'reliability' and 'objectivity' (p.290). Over time, other scholars have presented "expansive and flexible markers of quality in qualitative research" (Nowell et al., 2017, p.3). This study adopted some of the more recently presented, expansive and flexible markers of qualitative research (Braun & Clark, 2021; Tracy, 2010) and overlapped them with Lincoln & Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria. The criteria chosen to demonstrate trustworthiness in this study were:

- Rich rigor
- Sincerity
- Credibility
- Resonance
- Ethical

In the following section, these trustworthiness criteria are briefly defined and interwoven with discussion of how they were operationalised to conduct a trustworthy reflexive thematic analysis.

Rich Rigor

High-quality qualitative research is marked by descriptions and explanations that are rich (Tracy, 2010; Weick, 2007). Tracy (2010) contends that for a study to achieve 'rich rigor' (p.840) it should make sufficient use of the following means, practices, and methods:

- Theoretical constructs
- Data and time in the field
- Sample(s)
- Context(s)
- Data collection and analysis procedures (p.840).

Lincoln & Guba (1985) argue the importance of 'prolonged engagement' (p.109) in the field to generate credible findings. The process of data generation, transcription, and ultimate exit from the field was approximately ten months duration. In case study research, the researcher, and participants 'interact intensively' (Aalio & Sundin, 2010, p.70) for the duration of the study. According to Weicks (2007) "it takes richness to grasp richness" (p.16). This richness is "generated through a 'requisite variety' of theoretical constructs, data sources, contexts, and samples. (Tracy, 2010, p.841). Tracy (2010) applies the concept of 'requisite variety' to qualitative rigor suggesting "a researcher with a head full of theories, and a case full of abundant data, is best prepared to see nuance and complexity" (p.841). In the case of this study, a 'clear conceptual frame' (Aaltio & Sundin, 2010, p.70) presented in the previous chapter formed the

foundation for analysing and interpreting data. Tracy (2010) argues that "a richly rigorous qualitative scholar is also better equipped to make smart choices about samples and contexts that are appropriate or well poised to study specific issues. Engagement with national policy texts and national and international literature informed the sampling procedures for this study. The generation of research data required 'systematic behaviour' (Aaltio & Sundin, 2010, p.72) meaning I had to continually reflect on the number of participants and whether other participants could offer a different perspective. The contextuality of the case data was "an essential foundation of interpretation" (Aaltio & Sundin, 2010, p.72). The rich research data generated through this multi-site case study gave "opportunities to quote the interviewees and to bring forward the views of…(participants)" (Aaltio & Sundin, 2010, p.70). Tracy (2010) asserts that "rigor is also judged by the practice of data collection and analysis procedures" (p.841). This has been achieved by outlining the data-analysis approach above and providing a codebook to ensure "transparency regarding the process of sorting, choosing, and organising data" (Tracy, 2010, p.841) (See Appendix F). Braun & Clark (2021) assert that "a codebook, which lists and defines codes/themes and provides instructions on how to apply them, is an essential component of coding reliability TA" (p.236).

Sincerity

Tracy (2010) uses the term sincerity to "relate to notions of authenticity and genuineness…marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher's biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research" (p. 841). Self-reflexivity and transparency about the methods and challenges encountered are fundamental to meeting the quality criteria for sincerity. Tracy (2010) suggest that self-reflexivity can be demonstrated "by weaving

one's reaction or reflexive considerations of self-as-instrument throughout the research report" (p.842). Guba & Lincoln (1985) advocate the use of a reflexive journal "in which the investigator on a daily basis, or as needed, records a variety of information about self" (p.109). According to Tracy (2010) "transparent research is marked by disclosure of the study's challenges and unexpected twists and turns and revelations of the ways research foci transformed over time" (p. 842). I developed an audit trail for this study in NVivo providing "information about methodological decisions made and the reasons for making them" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.327). For the duration of the study, I engaged self-reflexivity by writing in a reflexive journal as needed and recording memos in NVivo. Yin (2009) suggests that qualitative researchers need to document the procedures of their case studies and to document as many steps of the procedure as possible. He also recommends setting up a 'case study protocol' as "a major tactic in increasing the reliability of case study research" (Yin, 2009, p.63). A case study protocol (See Appendix E) was developed for this research study. It contained the procedures and general rules that had to be followed in using the instrument at each case study site. It is considered 'essential' when using a multiple-case design" (Yin, 2009, p.63). Braun & Clark (2021) contend that "maintaining a detailed electronic or paper audit trail of the analysis is useful" (p. 273). A qualitative codebook was developed in NVivo for the phases of data analysis (See Appendix F). This study engaged multicase analysis worksheets (Stake, 2006) which operated as a protocol for data analysis (See Appendices G-I).

Credibility

Tracy (2010) defines credibility as the "trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings" (p. 842). Credibility can be achieved by providing 'thick description' and through the process of 'triangulation' or 'crystallisation' (Tracy, 2010,

p.840). A key feature of thick description is providing "enough detail that readers may come to their own conclusion about the scene" (p.843). The case study approach engaged in this research aimed to provide more than "merely a description of data; it (was) a logical approach that relie(d) on interpretation and analysis" (Aaltio & Sundrin, 2010, p.70). In case study research, triangulation is "an effort to assure that the right information and interpretations have been obtained" (Stake, 2006, p. 35). Lincoln & Guba (1985) have suggested that triangulation can be engaged as an 'operational' (p.219) technique to establish credibility in qualitative research. Triangulation in qualitative research "assumes that if two or more sources of data, theoretical frameworks, types of data collected, or researchers converge on the same conclusion, then the conclusion is more credible (Denzin, 1978)" (Tracy, 2010, p.843). Lincoln & Guba (1985) argue that triangulation and the practice of using a reflexive journal can 'dovetail' (p.319) with the audit trail to establish for 'confirmability' (p.318). Braun & Clark (2021) argue that triangulation embeds "the realist overtones and suggestions of a singular reality and truth" (p.277). They suggest that the metaphor of 'crystallisation' (Tracy, 2010, p. 843) is a suitable, qualitative alternate to triangulation. The technique of crystallisation "relates to the practice of using multiples data sources, researchers and lenses" (Tracy, 2010, p.843). The underpinning assumption is "not to provide researchers with a more valid singular truth, but to open up a more complex, in-depth but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue" (p.844). The metaphor of crystallisation was particularly suited to the aims of this study. Braun & Clark (2021) observe that this conception 'fits' with their "conception of themes as multi-faceted gems" (p.277). The concept of 'multivocality' is closely aligned with crystallisation. Multivocal research "includes multiple and varied voices in the qualitative report and analysis" (Tracy, 2010, p.844). It focuses on 'verstehen' or understanding of "social

action from the participants' point of view" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). Lindlof & Taylor (2002) argue that for interpretivists "it is axiomatic that we need to see social action from the actors' point of view to understand what is happening" (p.31). Case study research, which involves intense collaboration between the researcher and participants is particularly suited to achieving multivocality. Tracy (2010) suggests that qualitative studies should allow for 'member reflections' and these "may take the form of member checks, member validation and host verification" (p.844). In this study, member checking involved "returning (either literally or through correspondence, phone, e-mail etc.) to respondents and presenting to them material such as transcripts, accounts, and interpretations" (McCartan & Robson, 2016, p.172) that I had made. It is considered a 'valuable means' (McCartan & Robson, 2016, p.172) of protecting against researcher bias.

Resonance

Tracy (2010) defines resonance as the "research's ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience" (p.844). This can be achieved through naturalistic generalisations or transferable findings. This multi-case study sought to generalise within and across cases. In multicase studies, such as this one, the case activities are bound by the larger research question. Stake (2006) contends that the generalisations are of 'a different sort' (p.90) and "show how a variety of components and constraints lead to a partly irreducible individualism among cases. The common and the unusual are both portrayed, and both are situated in a complex of experience against a local and diverse background" (Stake, 2006, p.90). Transferability can lead to resonance if "readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation, and they intuitively transfer the research to their own action" (p. 845). In this study, I

invited transferability by striving to generate 'direct testimony', providing thick, rich description, and writing 'accessibly' (Tracy, 2010, p.845).

Ethical

Tracy (2010) contends that "just as multiple paths lead to credibility, resonance, and other markers of qualitative quality, a variety of practices attend to ethics in qualitative research including procedural, situational, relational and exiting ethics" (p.847). Procedural ethics refers to "ethical actions dictated as universally necessary by larger organisations, institutions or governing bodies" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). The procedures involved at each stage of this research study were subject to the scrutiny of the DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC). The research followed the principles of informed consent incorporating four key elements: competence, voluntarism, full information, and comprehension (Cohen et al., 2011). This study was conducted with formal school leaders who would be classified as mature, competent adults capable of making independent decisions about their participation in this study. The plain language statement was read with participants in advance of each interview and participants were asked to confirm that they had read, understood, and signed a copy of the informed consent document. Informed consent documents were collected and verified in advance of Zoom interviews. Any identifiers of participants e.g., school name, location, participant name was replaced by pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the case study and rights of veto on the initial reports. Specific consideration was given to REC guidelines on the management of qualitative interviews via Zoom e.g., host control of chat and visibility and subsequent data storage. Procedural ethics suggests that "research participants have a right to know the nature and potential consequences of the research – and understand that their participation is voluntary" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). This was communicated

through the informed consent form and at the outset of each interview. Situational ethics "assumes that each circumstance is different and that researchers must repeatedly reflect on, critique, and question their ethical decisions" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). This was addressed through practising self-reflexivity and ongoing discussion with my supervisors. Relational ethics "involve an ethical self-consciousness in which researchers are mindful of their character, actions and consequences on others" (Tracy, 2010, p.847). Practicing self-reflexivity enabled me to reflect on the importance of values such as dignity, mutual respect, dignity and connectedness with researchers and the communities in which they work. Exiting ethics is about ethical considerations which "continue beyond the data (generation) phase to how researchers leave the scene and share results" (Tracy, 2010, p.847). During interviews, I let participants know that I would send a copy of the interview transcript and that they had the right to change any aspect of it prior to anonymisation. I ensured all participants had my contact details so that they could contact me post data generation if they had any concerns about the interviews. I informed participants that a copy of the findings of the study would be made available to them on request. I considered the presentation of the final report by practising reflexivity so as "to avoid unjust or unintended consequences" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research methodology and design of this multi-site case study. It has addressed my ontological and epistemological assumptions which underpinned the research design. The analytical framework used to guide data analysis was presented based on Braun & Clark's (2021) framework for Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Chapter Four is a presentation the thematic findings from each of the cases.

Chapter Five presents four factors from the analysis, which form the basis for discussion of the findings.

Chapter 4

Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case site study was to develop a better understanding of whether school leadership was influencing collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools or not. The literature review identified a significant dearth in national research in terms of how school leaders are meeting the professional learning needs of in-service teachers in schools (Murphy, 2019). It was observed that there is little research available on the convergence of collaborative practice, teacher professional development, and school improvement in practice (King, 2011). The binding concept in this study was delineated from national policy documents as the overarching requirement that formally appointed school leaders lead professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development for school improvement in Irish primary schools (DE, 2016; DE 2016a; DE 2018; TC, 2016; TC, 2016a). This chapter is a presentation of the three key themes from the data analysis. Chapter Five is an analysis of four factors identified within each of the three themes, which form the basis for discussion of the findings. This study employed maximum variation sampling, meaning I chose cases to illustrate a wide range of the dimensions of interest (Coe, 2012). The following describes the chosen cases:

Case School A

School A is a small, urban primary school run by a teaching principal. At the time of data generation there were four mainstream teachers, including the principal, and each worked with two classes in a multigrade setting. The school had a full time Special Education Teacher (SET) and access to a shared SET, who worked with a cluster of schools, for one hour per day. There were several Special Needs Assistants employed

in the school. Ordinarily, the school had a deputy principal and an assistant principal (AP)I in situ. However, at the time of data generation the deputy principal had been seconded and the assistant principal had not yet returned from approved statutory leave.

Case School B

School B is a DEIS Band One Urban school. At the time of data generation, the school was run by an administrative principal, deputy principal and a school leadership team consisting of one AP1 and four APII positions. Given it's DEIS status the school had a designated Home School Community Liaison Coordinator (HSCL). The HSCL scheme aims to improve educational outcomes for children through supporting parents/guardians. It is a central component of the DE, DEIS scheme, and Tusla Education Support Service has responsibility for the scheme which is only available in DEIS schools. The HSCL coordinator is ordinarily a teacher from the school who provides support to children and parents in attaining their educational goals.

Case School C

School C is a developing school situated in a rapidly growing urban community. At the time of data generation, the school was reaching the end of its second year in development. At that time there were three teachers employed, two mainstream teachers and a Special Education Teacher. The mainstream classes were Junior Infants and Senior Infants. The principal was working as a teaching principal in a special education setting. The school was expected to expand and become a seven-teacher school the following year. The principal anticipated that they would move to become an administrative principal the following year once the school became a seven-teacher

school. At the time of data generation, outside of the role of the principal, the school had not yet been sanctioned for any formal school leadership positions.

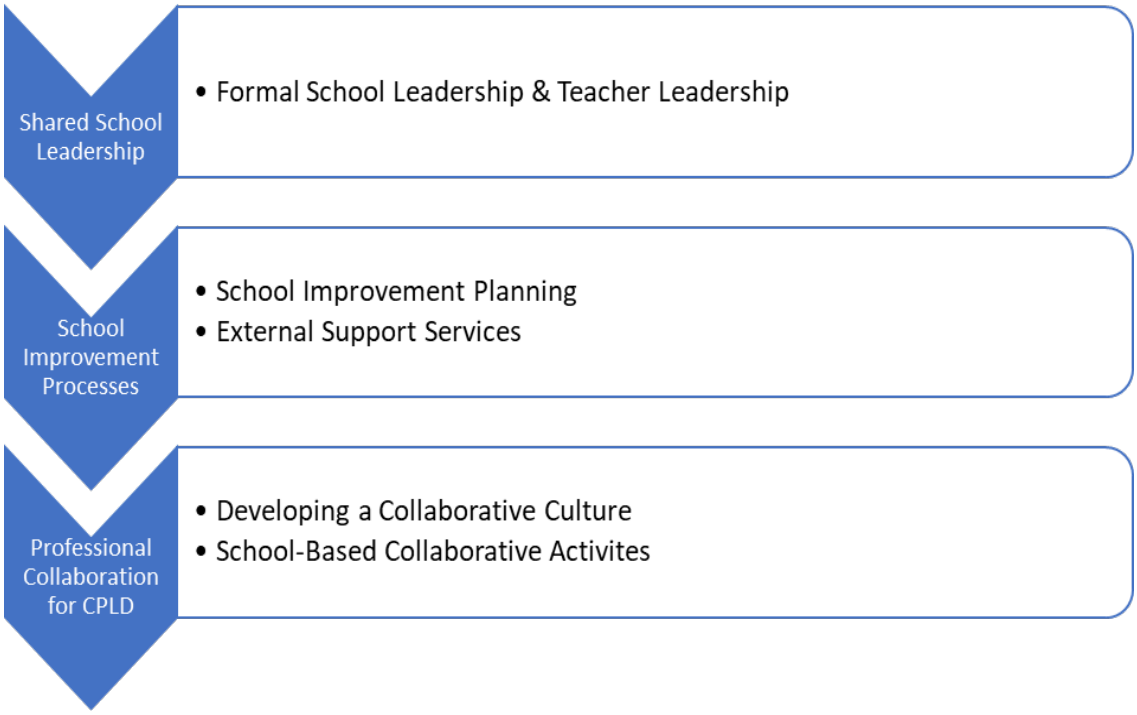
Case School D

School D is a developing urban school which, at the time of data generation had been open

for seven years. The school catered for all classes from Junior Infants to Sixth Class with two streams of every class. The school was expected to move to a permanent premises in the coming months. The school leadership team consisted of an administrative principal, a deputy principal and two APII positions. The principal expected the school leadership team to expand in the coming months under the restoration of middle management posts by the DES as per circular 0043/2022.

Data from each of these sites was analysed in NVivo 14 using a reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clark, 2021). The analytic and reflexive processes inherent in reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) underpinned this multiple case study analysis (Stake, 2006). This culminated in the generation of themes and sub-themes (see Figure 4.1), case reports from each site (See Appendix G) and the development of cross case-assertions (See Appendix H). The cross-case assertions are the ‘conceptual structure’ (Stake, 2006, p.79) which are at the heart of the findings presented within the three main themes in this chapter. This chapter is structured around the themes and sub themes presented in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Key Themes and Sub-Themes



Shared School Leadership for School Improvement

This theme describes what shared school leadership for school improvement looked like at each of the case sites. The focus of this study was on the exploration of the experiences of formal school leaders and whether opportunities for teacher leadership for school improvement were provided or not. School effectiveness research made little reference to the role of assistant principals as instructional leaders (Hallinger, 2005) but rather promoted the concept of the school principal as the 'solo, heroic' (MacKenzie & Locke, 2014, p.168) school leader. It is six years since national research reported frustration amongst formally appointed school leaders at their lack of power and professional agency (Lárusdóttie & O' Connor, 2017). They remarked that their roles were 'positional' rather than 'influential' (p.433) describing instances where the school principal was "unable or unwilling to relinquish genuine responsibility and accountability" (p.431). The findings from this study indicated that formally appointed

school leaders were engaging in reciprocal relationships which underpin the requirements of DE school improvement policy. However, the principals at each site were encountering challenges in leading shared leadership arising from situational and/or policy constraints. Evidence of ongoing collaborative engagement between members of formally appointed school leadership teams and teacher leaders for school improvement was found at each site. This considerable overlap between formal school leadership activity and teacher leadership activity at each site meant that it was necessary to merge findings relating to both concepts to gain understanding of the overall picture of shared school leadership for school improvement.

Formal School Leadership and Teacher Leadership

The principal of School A described some challenges associated with leading a school leadership team as a teaching principal of a small school. As mentioned previously, the school ordinarily has a team of three formally appointed school leaders including the principal. The school leadership team would usually meet in advance of staff meetings with Principal A stating, "we would try to meet on a Monday or a Tuesday because Croke Park would be on a Wednesday, once a month". Principal A would also collaborate with the Deputy Principal every morning however, at the time of data generation the deputy principal had been seconded to a different role. This meant that there was an opportunity for teachers in the school to apply to undertake the role in her absence. However, Principal A encountered a lack of willingness from staff to apply for the position. The first reason she identified was a fear of the level of responsibility involved in the absence of the principal remarking "it's such a busy role and I think a lot of people are reluctant to step up because they are afraid the principal might not be around". Given there are only five teachers on staff including the principal there is a greater likelihood of a school leader being asked to fulfil the responsibilities of the principal in their absence. The

second reason she cited for reluctance to undertake the role was related to policy on pay for school leaders in a small school. In a small school the pay allowance for a Deputy Principal and an Assistant Principal is the same in a small school. She spoke to staff about this, and the encounter went as follows: "I was wondering why nobody would go for the post and then someone said to me 'sure it's the same, they're paid the same amount and it's really not that much." Despite the reluctance to undertake formal leadership roles Principal A described a willingness amongst the teachers to undertake teacher leadership roles and support school improvement. Although there is usually a formally appointed school leadership team in situ, she views her staff as a team of five. She describes transparency among staff with respect to decisions about school improvement and other formal school leadership activity. She stated:

> to be honest with you, because there is so much good will, everything is quite transparent in the school to do with policy and stuff because if there is only four class teachers and one SET teacher, we are all in it together.

The principal feels fortunate that staff are willing to give up their own time and provides opportunities for teacher leaders to undertake leadership roles in different areas. The principal outlined how responsibility for managing the school has been shared remarking "we've delegated a lot of the kind of roles, making sure the cleaners, looking after the building, dividing those up". She described how the two teachers undertook responsibilities stating, "one of the teachers has stepped up to take over P.E. which is brilliant…and the other teacher has stepped up to do music." Both teachers had been helping Principal A in the absence of the other school leaders however she was concerned as to how long that could last. Principal A described how the board of management (BOM) supports aspects of school leadership. The principal stated, "sometimes I have to call on my chairperson or my Board of Management if there's a

tricky situation to do with parents or to do with maybe, you know, complex situations." The BOM acts in an advisory capacity supporting school leaders to develop local policy around areas such as the admissions policy or situations arising in the school. Evidently, Principal A endeavours to enact policy requirements of school leadership for school improvement. Nevertheless, the practice of shared leadership is impacted by situational constraints. These include a reluctance amongst teachers to apply for formal leadership responsibilities owing to the possibility of having to step up to the role of principal, and DE policy on remuneration of formal school leadership responsibilities in a small school setting. Despite the challenges around formal leadership roles, the principal promotes a shared leadership approach to school improvement and provides opportunities for teacher leadership, noting that she is reliant on the good will of staff.

The principal of School B demonstrated similar views about the importance of shared school leadership and the provision of opportunities for teacher leadership for school improvement. Given the administrative role of the principal, the size of the school leadership team, and the larger teaching staff there was greater scope to develop practices of shared school leadership for school improvement. At School B shared leadership practice for school improvement was influenced by the DEIS status of the school and related leadership roles occupied by school leaders and formally appointed teacher leaders. Principal B described the importance of the HSCL role as a link between parents and the school leadership team. She explained that there are seven areas in DEIS with HSCL being one of them. She asserted the importance of the HSCL's involvement with the school leadership team, whether he/she occupied a formally appointed leadership role or not. She asserted "now the Home School doesn't have to be… she just happens to be on the ahm management team but if she wasn't that person would still be involved in that process because you know you have to be, especially with parental involvement".

The HSCL is expected to collaborate with school leaders to help determine priorities in the school and has a pivotal role arising from their ongoing work with parents. Principal B works with a DEIS coordinator, who is a teacher leader, to work on planning for DEIS which is the school's improvement plan. The DEIS coordinator is secretary to the BOM, meaning she is in a position to report directly to them about progress in DEIS. Principal B describes how DEIS is on the agenda for every board meeting. Principal B stated, "the Board has an understanding that we are a DEIS Band One school, and this is the way we work, so they know what it means but they are not living it." The BOM operate in a supervisory capacity in terms of DEIS planning, and Principal B also described their role in ratifying policy.

Principal B described the importance of collaborating with the in-school management team in advance of staff meetings stating, "I try to do them the week before the week of the staff meeting so that we are all very clear what has to be done and where we're going and what everybody is going to do." Principal A had undertaken a similar approach by meeting with formally appointed school leaders in advance of staff meetings. Andrew, an AP II at School B described what professional collaboration amongst school leaders at in-school management meetings looked like stating "it's the meetings really are a sharing of news as well as ideas and maybe solutions to problems that are put forward. But really, it's just a collaborative culture that we have here." The meetings provide a mechanism to coordinate school leadership practice, and for school leaders to collaborate and problem solve. Aside from team meetings, Principal B went on to describe how formally appointed school leaders are assigned to lead teams for various aspects of the DEIS plan. Principal B remarked "everybody got to be head of you know, say the Attendance team, so that everybody, so that there was formal (pauses) that was on their list of things to do, on their menu of duties." Then opportunities are

opened to teachers to join each of the teams. Principal B stated, “then there is a team brought together and that’s opened up to members of staff, who wants to be on the Literacy Team, who wants to be on the Numeracy Team?” Shane, another APII in the school, described how the team meetings provide an opportunity for teacher leaders to “see where the needs are of the school and then that information is passed on to the teachers.” He asserted that this approach to school leadership underpins a distributive and empowering approach to leadership within the school. He stated, “the element of distributive leadership as well where other teachers and other staff members are empowered to take on different initiatives.” Shane described how school leaders engage with teacher leaders and teaching staff remarking:

> I think from our expertise of knowing the staff down through the years and knowing the strengths of our staff we know who to approach and how best to approach them and that’s for the greater good of the whole school.

While the current structures in place in the school allow scope for shared school leadership Principal B did report that she is hindered by DE policy on the appointment of assistant principals. She described how in the previous principals’ time the school had a huge leadership team. She recalled “we had three API posts and five or six APII posts and we are down to one API post and there’s five including me on the leadership team.” Despite the commitment to shared leadership in the school she feels hindered because there is only so much she can ask people to do and only so much they can do. However, it is evident that there are multiple structures in place in School B to support collaboration between formally appointed school leaders for school improvement. The principal shares responsibility for the enactment of DEIS with formally appointed school leaders by appointing them as team leaders in specific areas. She then opens up opportunities for teacher leaders to participate on teams. Team leaders in turn collaborate with formal

teacher leaders to identify the needs of the school and this in turn opens up opportunities for the involvement of the wider staff and the children to get involved in school initiatives.

The principal of School C articulated a similar understanding of the importance of formal leadership roles and opportunities for teacher leadership as previously mentioned by Principal A & B. However, his approach to shared school leadership was determined by situational constraints associated with the developing nature of the school. Principal C described the challenge of not having any formally appointed school leaders in place given the high level of collaboration and decision-making required in the early stages of the development of a school. This experience of leading a developing school in the early stages was echoed by the principal and deputy principal at School D. Diane, the deputy principal at School D, recalled "we both say that in the first two years we had a lot of long conversations and at the time we were like, just talking all the time." Principal C described how he collaborated with the other two teachers in the school about how they would share leadership during the early stages of school development. He stated, "we chatted about it as the three of us that look, even if, even if the three of us aren't formal leaders at least…being the first three teachers in the school there is a leadership by or in itself." Principal C described the emotional challenges he faced and how he was very dependent on the goodwill of the other two teachers in the school and that he regularly asks them to stay behind to collaborate. He explained "and like I mean I felt guilty about it you know like I was asking can you stay behind for an hour I know you have work to do but let's…can we have a chat about this?" He described how the amount of time required to collaborate with his staff in the initial stages of school development as follows:

> I'd say we did thirty-six Croke Park hours in the first, definitely in the first two months I'd say because there is just so much and it's like one person can't just sit down and make every decision for the whole school because everything impacts everyone.

The challenges described by Principal C bore similarities to those described by Principal A. Both principals were reliant on the good will of teacher leaders arising from situational constraints around the appointment of a formal school leadership team. Principal A had concerns about the long-term picture for shared leadership in a small school. Principal A noted "it is the nature of a small school that you will have movement of staff and also people coming in and out of leadership roles". Conversely, Principal C was anticipating that he would be sanctioned for a deputy principal in the coming months and knew that his leadership team would expand as the school developed. His long-term vision for shared leadership was of all staff members as leaders with roles and responsibilities outside of their classrooms. He commented "I'd like to think of everyone as a leader in some way. Like I-I would love it if everyone had, felt they had, a role outside their class or their just teaching responsibility." He remarked that he is already having formal, individual professional conversations with his staff about such leadership opportunities. Principal C described his experiences of collaboration with the Board of Management in a similar vein to the experiences of school leaders at School A & School B. He stated that school improvement and school development were on the agenda of every BOM meeting. He described uncertainty about how to involve the BOM in school improvement as follows:

> It's reporting at the moment. I'm unsure how to change that, maybe it's a confidence thing, maybe I need to be able to say right, who wants to take this on? That I feel like it has to be me but at the moment they are not really doing anything to facilitate school improvement in any practical way.

He remarked that he needed more training and support to develop more effective collaboration between himself and the board. It is evident that Principal C was striving to share leadership responsibilities, however, he was hindered by the lack of a formally appointed school leadership team and professional learning support on how to involve the BOM in the school improvement process. This meant he was dealing with the emotional toll of relying on the goodwill of staff and overburdened with responsibilities that could have been shared with a formally appointed leader and/or the BOM.

There was evidence of structures for school leadership for school improvement at School D which bore strong resemblance to the structures in place at School B. Principal D described how over the course of the development of the school they had occupied various contexts which had impacted leadership capacity. She remarked,

> we've been the two-teacher school, the five-teacher school, the nine-teacher school. We went from three children to a hundred to one hundred and fifty to two hundred and on like that. It's like we have a lens to look at everything now.

The deputy principal described the benefit of the growth of their in-school management team for shared school leadership. She asserted "it's sharing the cognitive load. It's not just the jobs it's like the thinking about it's the thinking ahead parts". An important facet of shared leadership in the school has been the development of a shared vision for the school amongst school leaders. She remarked "so, I think the big thing for us in terms of post holding is actually less about individual jobs and more about sharing the vision or actually creating the vision first and then sharing it". This shared leadership approach permeates leadership practice across the school.

Similar to School B, there were committees in place which offered teachers the opportunity to participate in shared leadership for school improvement. Principal D

described the dynamic between the school leadership team and committees stating, “the leadership and management team aren’t elevated above everyone else that like this is a whole…so like they might be dealing with leading the problem-solving or the committees but it's-it’s a whole school issue”. Ann, an APII at the same school, described the willingness of other teachers to share responsibility despite the fact that they are not being paid for their contribution. She struggled at times with the guilt commenting “but then getting rid of that guilt as well and of being like oh no we can all share this even though I’m getting paid for it it still like… that’s what I found hard.” The challenge of asking teacher leaders to engage with shared school leadership for school improvement, despite not being remunerated for their contribution was an issue for some school leaders. However, at each site teacher leaders were willing to share leadership for the overall improvement of the school. Ann remarked:

> I thought that somebody would be like but you’re getting paid for it, you do it whereas I think everyone here is of the mentality let’s all do it together but let's have somebody that we can go to that isn’t Principal D to ask questions to and to kind of share the responsibility.

The deputy principal articulated the importance of the provision of opportunities for teacher leadership by Principal D. She stated, “what it actually is is empowering and what we have is this whole cohort of young teachers who are doing so much”. She described shared leadership as a critical factor in a developing school because everything is being done for the first time. She said it would be unrealistic to expect that a post holder in a developing school could have sole responsibility for events such as open night or Junior Infant induction day. Principal D explained that the coordination of school leadership going forward, remarking “I think it’s going to be a challenge always because it’s a sense of like trying to hold the reins if that makes sense but holding them loosely so that everyone is dragging their own carriage.” Principal D

described how school improvement is always on the agenda at BOM meetings. Similar to other schools, she explained that although school improvement plans are discussed with the BOM, they wouldn't have "critical input into the formation of those plans". She described the board as being particularly helpful in the creation and review of policy, however in terms of teaching and learning they are led by feedback from staff.

It is evident from these findings that principals at each site are striving to share school leadership responsibilities for school improvement. Principals report the BOMs acting in a largely supervisory and/or advisory capacity in terms of school improvement. Principals are engaging team leadership approaches and providing opportunities for formally appointed school leaders and teacher leaders to collaborate and problem-solve for school improvement. However, situational and policy constraints such as school size, the stage of development of the school, remuneration, and the sanctioning of formal school leaders are hindering the development of school leadership teams. Nevertheless, there is commitment amongst formally appointed school leaders and teacher leaders to collaborate and undertake shared responsibilities for school improvement.

School Improvement Processes

This theme further illuminates the practice of shared school leadership by describing school leaders' lived experiences of school improvement processes at each site. The findings within this theme demonstrated that school leaders worked collaboratively with staff to identify foci for school improvement and develop subsequent plans. School leaders engaged with DE policy documents to plan for school improvement. Findings indicated that school leaders engaged support from multiple external support agencies to address the foci of school improvement planning. The following sections describe the

experiences of school leaders within two sub-themes: school improvement planning and external support agencies.

School Improvement Planning

As findings in the previous theme concluded, the structures in place for team leadership varied depending on the situational circumstances at each site. Similarly, the collaborative planning processes for school improvement varied between sites and these were influenced by policy requirements, decisions of formally appointed school leaders, the structures in place for team leadership, and the situation of each case. At School A, the teaching principal and the deputy principal collaborated to plan for School Self-Evaluation (SSE). Principal A explained that the school has a high proportion of children with special needs and that this formed much of the basis for collaboration for school improvement. The focus for school improvement was P.E. but work was ongoing in other areas including IT, child protection, literacy, and SPHE. She described her collaboration with the deputy principal as follows:

> we kind of did most of the work together and did the School Self-Evaluation, we looked at P.E. and things were going along smoothly and then somebody retires and then you've new people coming along so it has been a bit higgledy piggledy.

Principal A described how when the deputy principal retired how she advertised four times before she managed to fill the post. The most recently appointed deputy principal was on secondment at the time of data generation. This meant Principal A was intermittently reliant on the good will of other teachers to support planning for school improvement. She explained "there is an awful lot of goodwill and free will and putting the shoulders to the wheel and just doing it, doing policies together, sitting down together during Croke Park hours and that." She explained the challenges of sharing

leadership for school improvement when new staff arrive in the school stating, “where I did delegate quite a bit in the past but then you can only delegate so much when you have new staff. They have to get in on the routine of the school” The turnover of staff has meant that the teaching principals' time has been spent supporting new teachers to integrate into the school rather than drawing on much needed teacher leadership support for school improvement planning. Principal A described the Looking at Our Schools (LAOS) guidelines as helpful to some extent when planning for school improvement because they help the staff to know what they have to do. However, as a teaching principal dealing with competing demands on the ground, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, she reported finding them overwhelming at times. Principal D described similar experiences when working as a teaching principal in the early stages of development of her school commenting “I do think that when I was a teaching principal, I didn’t have the luxury of sitting with Looking at Our Schools as much as I do now.” Principal A described the challenges around recording school improvement processes, commenting “you’re probably covering a lot of it incidentally but to have it all down on paper is a challenge.” It appears challenging for teaching principals to engage with the depth of detail set out in school improvement policy. Principal A felt this could be improved if the LAOS guidelines were “condensed a little bit more into more concise language.” Conversely, Principal C, who was currently working as a teaching principal of a school in the early stages of development, interpreted policy requirements around written planning differently. He stated, “it is best practice, and it is a lot better than it used to be as in it, it’s a lot smaller you know, and it would be more about what can we do rather than what do we have to write.” While Principal C found the requirements for school improvement planning had improved, he was facing

challenges arising from the early development status of the school. He described the requirement to enact mandatory policies as follows:

> The mandatory policies straight away well you get a letter saying well I'm looking at this policy and this policy, so they kind of have to be right and they are not the ones that always really affect the school that much.

He described how they spent the first year of development working on those mandatory policies. This meant that rather than developing other, what he termed 'more practical', policies such as a homework policy or a healthy eating policy they had to develop procedures instead. However, he did recognise the benefit of starting from nothing commenting "because we have started from nothing, there's no piece of paper there which in a lot of ways is great because we can really develop everything." He recognised the importance of using research to develop policy and expressed frustration at the lack of time and availability of a formally appointed school leadership team to enable him to do so. He remarked "I would like to think that maybe when we have an expanded leadership team that we could sit down, and we could research ourselves." The school had developed several foci for school improvement including handwriting, restorative practice, and Aistear. Principal C described how the foci are needs driven because in the first year they have enrolled infant classes only. He describes how the collaborated with the other teacher leaders to decide on their school improvement focus in the second year as follows:

> we decided our school improvement, like we struggled a little bit even with that phrase because everything we do is from scratch so it's nothing to improve it's the school beginning (pauses) but because play is really important to us, to all of us as teachers in the school and because we only have infants, so all our work is with infants we decided on Aistear.

Principal C described how they engaged sustained support from PDST, and this supported them to develop their school improvement plan. Notably, he expressed that

the school improvement happened through collaboration rather than writing the plan stating:

> We cobbled together a school improvement plan but to be honest the school improvement plan is… we did it for.. because that's what we are supposed to, but it was like through constant conversations and practical things like 'let's try this a bit differently' that we think it was actually our school improvement.

The school leadership team at School D described their school improvement planning in a similar way to Principal C. Diane, the deputy principal described the experience of planning for school improvement in a developing school asserting "it is different in a developing school maybe…like are you forced into reflection all the time." As a developing school, they started with just Junior Infants and had built up to having two streams of each class, up to sixth class. She describes their reflective processes for school improvement below:

> Everything we ever did had to be constant self-evaluation and school improvement based as in you know the first time, we did handwriting in Junior Infants at the end of it you're like right we're going into the second year of doing Junior Infants now do we do it the same or are we doing it differently.

Principal D described how this such collaboration has always been a feature of working in the school. She recalled how the founding principal had developed a system whereby you planned with the teacher next door on a daily basis. She described how this practice is still influencing their school improvement processes stating:

> from that I think came a culture of professional dialogue that I hadn't been used to and that then created a very informal and yet very professional way of reflecting that didn't have to be like oh we are doing SSE now, so this is the list, and this is what we have to pick.

Principal D went on to describe how extensive informal, professional collaboration amongst staff seems to be informing the priorities for school improvement. She described how priorities for school improvement had been identified the previous year as follows:

last year now we would have at one of the staff meetings we would have had a mentimeter to try and figure out what was coming up a lot in terms of what people needed support with or what we wanted to prioritise and generally, maybe because of the conversations that people are having all the time they tended to be the same things.

Similar to Principal C, school leaders in School D see meaningful school improvement arising from professional collaboration amongst staff. Ann, an APII observed "I think the fact that everyone knows the why makes it easier for them not to question it but to get more involved and be like we have the same goal here." Principal D explained written planning for school improvement as "putting paperwork around some of the things that we were doing but it was definitely not the sum total." It seems that developing schools require extensive collaboration in the early stages of development meaning that school improvement arises through professional dialogue and that written school improvement planning is merely a formality. It was clear that Principal A was struggling with written planning for school improvement, however this was less of an issue in both developing schools. It would appear that meaningful school improvement can arise from extensive and consistent professional collaboration which underpins formal planning processes.

At School B the school leadership team described how collaborative planning for school improvement was influenced by the DEIS status of the school. Shane, an APII, explained "school self-improvement was one of the things we looked at and tied that in with our DEIS planning down through the years to inform our DEIS plan." DEIS planning normally follows a three-year cycle however Principal B explained that the school improvement planning process had been hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic asserting:

> we would normally have started our new DEIS process, but it has taken us, you know with our spellings program for example, you know we did test it out, but we were completely hindered by Covid in actually activating it.

Principal B described how the circumstances had been unusual, but they had spoken to the inspector about challenges in school-wide assessment and implementation of the program. They had a current plan for school improvement which was informed by planning for the seven areas of DEIS and LAOS (DE, 2016). The principal explained how LAOS (DE, 2016) has become inherent in their DEIS planning stating "so the Looking at Schools documentation definitely would be what we are guided by in putting our whole DEIS plan together, and we actually just know it now at this stage." Shane an APII agreed that the LAOS (DE, 2016) are a valuable resource for leadership and management of school. He described how after school leadership team meetings team leaders would collaborate with the staff either via email or through informal conversations to get them involved in school improvement initiatives.

It is evident that formally appointed leaders are collaborating with their leadership team and/or teacher leaders and their staff to plan for school improvement. The nature of professional collaboration amongst staff for school improvement is influenced by situational constraints. The case of teaching Principal A highlighted some of the challenges facing teaching principals in terms of staff turnover, having time to engage fully with LAOS guidelines and develop a school improvement plan. The case of the DEIS school demonstrated how the structure of the DEIS planning process supports school leaders in planning for school improvement. The case of both developing schools demonstrated that extensive collaboration could foster meaningful school improvement and lessen the burden associated with planning for school improvement.

External Support Services

This sub-theme presents findings on school leaders' engagement with external support services available to them for school improvement. School leaders were found to engage with a range of support services including NCSE, PDST, university lecturers and the inspectorate. In some cases, school leaders provided financial support and opportunities for teachers to engage with professional learning development if it was in line with the school improvement plan. Of critical interest in this study was whether engagement with those services influenced school leaders' subsequent leadership or school-based professional collaboration or not. This section describes some of the experiences described by school leaders and their subsequent influence on leadership for school improvement.

School leaders at each site were availing of sustained support from the PDST to support various foci for school improvement. They described how PDST collaborated with school leaders and teachers on an ongoing basis to identify their professional learning needs. At School D an assistant principal II described one such experience stating "they came in to give us support in EAL, but they didn't give us just anything. They sat down and they listened, and they took down 'what do you need from us?' and then they're going to come back to us". PDST also provided sustained support at School D for the primary language curriculum. Principal D praised the sustained model of support in comparison to offsite professional learning development stating:

> what we found especially from sustained support was that they were giving us practical tools for using in the classroom and then teachers were feeding back to us about what was going well and what wasn't.

The ongoing collaboration between school leaders and staff meant that when the PDST cuiditheoir returned they were able to clarify what was going well and identify where they needed professional learning support to improve practice.

The school leadership team at School B described a similar experience whereby the cuiditheoir responded to class teachers' specific requests for guidance in advance of their school-based planning day for the primary language curriculum. PDST supported School B in implementing their digital strategy and Principal B described how this had motivated some teachers to seek out further professional learning development opportunities in their own time. Principal C described how PDST had supported school improvement in different areas, although their experiences varied. The principal found that training they received in Restorative Practice did not meet their professional learning needs and the staff completed another course with a different provider. They derived six statements from that course which they used as a stimulus for collaboration about restorative practice at each staff meeting. They received sustained support from the PDST which helped them to develop their school improvement plan for Aistear. They had support from a university lecturer who provided them with readings on Aistear which further supported their collaborative planning for school improvement. PDST facilitated three sessions on the Guidance & Preparation for Teaching & Learning policy which aimed to support long-term, whole-school collaborative planning.

Principal A described how she would arrange for staff to collaborate with the PDST cuiditheoir both individually and then collectively with the advisor at a staff meeting. Principal A found that engaging external support services motivated school leaders as follows:

> I found that kind of gave a new lease of life and then to carry on from that when teachers take on a role, when they are the role models, for instance the vice principal with the iPads and the ICT, just sharing and collaboration that gives everybody oh I haven't thought how to use that app, oh can you do that and oh could you put it up on Google classroom?

It is evident from the findings at each site that PDST are supporting the practice of shared school leadership for school improvement. Prior research had raised concerns that the school-based work of PDST was reflective of a transmission mode of teacher learning and queried if this was influencing subsequent collaborative whole-school processes or not. It is evident that PDST have developed a need-driven model of professional support which is influencing subsequent collaboration amongst school leaders and their staff.

School leaders reported positive experiences of inspection and recognised the potential of the inspectorate as a support service. However, fear of inspection among teachers was recognised by some school leaders as a barrier to engagement with inspectors. Principal A described feeling supported the inspected and had had several inspection visits to support SSE. The inspector had visited the school routinely and provided support in PE which was the focus of their school improvement plan at the time. Principal A felt the inspector did support and influence their practice at the time. Principal B described the school leadership team's experience of engaging support from the inspectorate to support school improvement planning. She described a meeting between the school leadership team and the inspectors which formed the basis for the school improvement plan as follows:

> all the In-School Management Team were at it and (names previous Assistant Principal I) was taking notes and the inspectors just started talking and we just started listening and writing and going… I wanted to be very clear what she was talking about, with the targets, ahhh you know what was expected of us.

Principal B felt the collaboration between the school leadership team and the inspectors really supported them and contributed to a positive inspection experience during their subsequent DEIS inspection. Principal C described the lived fear of inspection and

expressed hope for a more collaborative arrangement with inspectors going forwards stating:

> I know we have had two inspections since… in the two years that we've opened ahhh but you still…and I really try…I really want to change that, I really want to kind of have a more open conversation with the inspector.

Principal C was hoping to discuss the work on teaching and planning which they had completed with sustained support from PDST with the inspector and described fear of inspection among teachers as a barrier to school improvement. He expressed the need for change in terms of inspection and expressed the view that inspectors should be there to provide support. School leaders at School D had not engaged with the support services of the inspectorate. Similar to School C, they described an overall positive experience in terms of feedback and reports from their last inspection. However, the principal described the ongoing need to dispel fear of the inspector amongst the staff. The deputy principal echoed the sentiments of Principal C when she commented "I don't think you're supposed to fear the inspector. I think you're supposed to view the inspectorate as, as an assistance and as a consultancy". Evidently, the inspectorate was providing support to school leaders for school improvement in some instances. However, there is a need for consistency in how inspectors collaborate with school leaders and teachers for school improvement if they are to make a meaningful contribution to school improvement in the long term.

Overall, the findings within this theme support the assertion that school leadership teams work collaboratively with their staff to plan school improvement foci and engage with DE policy documents to support that process. The practice of collaborative planning for school improvement was being influenced by situational and policy factors such as the type of school and sanctioning and appointment of teachers to formal school leadership roles. School leaders at each site were engaging sustained

support from PDST and reported a largely need-driven model of professional learning support from teachers. This engagement was influencing subsequent leadership of school-based professional collaboration and motivating teachers to seek external CPLD opportunities. School leaders are engaging support from other external agencies to meet their school improvement needs. School leadership teams reported positive experiences of inspection and recognised the potential of the inspectorate as a support service. However, fear of inspection amongst teachers was recognised by some school leaders as a barrier to engagement with the inspectorate as a support service.

School-Based Professional Collaboration

This theme illustrates how school leadership for school improvement was found to be influencing school based collaborative CPLD. Of critical interest to this study was whether opportunities for collaborative CPLD for school improvement were being provided by school leaders or not. The findings indicated that structures for formal professional collaboration amongst teachers for school improvement were in place at each site. School leaders recognised the importance of creating a collaborative culture within and between schools. School leaders planned and led formal, professional collaborative activities of varying levels of engagement to foster teacher CPLD within their schools. The following sections report the findings within two sub-themes: developing a collaborative culture and school based collaborative CPLD for school improvement.

Developing a Collaborative Culture

This sub-theme presents findings on school leaders' conceptualisations which were underpinning the development of a collaborative culture in their schools. School leaders identified the importance of school-based professional collaboration and the

need for greater collaboration with other schools for school improvement. Staff meetings were identified as a fundamental building block for the development of a collaborative culture at each site. At School A the principal described supporting the development of a collaborative culture by providing staff with opportunities to collaborate on specific aspects of school improvement at staff meetings. She explained that they would have a general meeting and then break into small groups to collaborate on particular areas of need. The focus of meetings would be on leadership and management of the organisation and professional collaboration was very often led by the SET given the high enrolment of children with special educational needs in the school. Principal B articulated communication, collaboration, and collegiality as key to the development of a collaborative culture in their school. She commented "it's our own little triangle you know, we collaborate, and we're collegial with one another, you know, and great things can happen." The school has regular staff meetings which have been broken down into class units and this is described by Andrew, an APII, as particularly advantageous because it allows for greater collaboration and coordination among class groups as follows:

> One of the advantages is that there is greater collaboration on a smaller scale and more people have perhaps a voice in their smaller groups. So, there's greater coordination between say the 6th class teachers because they are sitting beside each other with their SNAs and so on, so they can get into detail on how they would do things.

The importance of creating a space for professional collaboration and allowing everyone to have a voice were articulated as important features of a collaborative culture at School C and D.

At School C the principal articulated the importance of listening to everyone's opinion and giving everyone an opportunity to try things out even if there was a possibility that their idea might fail. He stated the importance of the ability to challenge

and be challenged and creating the space for that as an important element of bringing about change. He remarked “if everyone is to buy into something they have to in some way agree with it on some level and for that they have to be able to be heard and have the ability to challenge and be challenged but I suppose I suppose it’s just creating that space where that can happen”. Principal D expressed similar beliefs about the need to create a safe professional space where there is a freedom to disagree and debate issues. She stated, “I think the freedom to disagree and to debate and to argue points and making sure that discussion is very separate to your personal life in the staffroom.” Principal D described the necessity for openness and vulnerability from school leaders and a willingness to say ‘I don’t know what to do here’ as important particularly when trying to target professional learning development through professional conversations. Principal C described how he has begun to have professional conversations with staff, on an individual basis, about how things are going and where they think change is needed. He envisioned professional conversations, both formal and informal, as an important aspect of the development of a collaborative culture for school improvement as the school develops.

Principal D described the importance of planning steps to ensure that all staff are allowed a voice. She explained that since her transition to the role of administrative principal she has time to put formal structures in place to allow opportunities for staff to be heard and for her to analyse their feedback. She stated, “so allowing a voice for everybody definitely helps and that again, being admin, you have time for the newsletters and the google forms and analysing answers that come up in staff feedback forms.” Similar to Principal C, she facilitates formal professional conversations with staff to talk about changes that need to happen in the school. She described the format of such conversations as follows:

> They come and talk, we have some targeted questions, sort of like coaching questions really, usually about what they would change, and you know what is going well. And that has been really, really valuable because sometimes in those conversations people don't even know what they are thinking until they start talking about it.

Interestingly, the use of such formal professional conversations were a feature in both developing schools which also reported the necessity of high levels of collaboration from the early stages of their development. However, extensive professional collaboration can prove challenging for some teachers. Diane, the deputy principal at School D commented "we are not dealing with legacy, we are not dealing with a historical way of doing things…and we have definitely come up against resistance in that, like we've had people who've joined the staff and really have not settled with the collaborative way of doing things." Perhaps support is required to help teachers transition to a more collaborative way of working for school improvement. Principal C described how he engaged the support of PDST to help him formalise professional collaboration in his school for the future. He remarked:

> like you know, because obviously as our staff gets bigger, I can't say, 'Can everyone just stay behind for an hour now, can we talk about this?' It will have to be more formal; it will have to be more streamlined.

While external support services could perhaps support schools in developing a collaborative culture, school leaders also recognised the need for collaboration between schools as a feature of the development of a collaborative culture. Principal A spoke about challenges enacting the Primary Language Curriculum commenting "I've spoken to other principals about this, and you do feel like are we doing the right thing? What's the school up the road doing? Have they other ideas? Could we share or that?" Principal B and Principal D described how their membership of the IPPN offers them the opportunity to collaborate with principals. However, Principal D described this as a problem-solving forum rather than an opportunity for meaningful staff professional

collaboration. She discussed the need for opportunities for collaboration amongst staff members as follows:

> I would love to see more of a…I suppose that culture of (sighs) SETs meetings once or twice a month to discuss how they are getting on. SENCOs meeting to discuss what's working well in their school, what good practice looks like for them.

She expressed concerns that without wider professional collaboration between schools that they could become more 'insular' and less reflective.

It was evident that school leaders recognised the benefits of the development of a collaborative culture for school improvement. The following sub-theme provides further insight to how school-based collaborative activities to foster teacher CPLD for school improvement were described by school leaders.

School-Based Professional Collaborative Activities

The findings presented in this sub-theme indicate that school leaders plan and lead collaborative activities of varying levels of engagement to foster continuing professional learning and development (CPLD) for school improvement. The types of collaborative activities described commonly involved teachers being beside each other but not necessarily interacting, and/or co-operative activities with opportunities for collaboration about common issues such as curriculum. Collaborative activities which engaged teachers on issues of context, values and action which would likely result in transformative practice were less common. However, it is important to note that not all professional learning and development must be transformative and that some skills may be best learned through transmissive modes (Kennedy, 2014). This sub-theme outlines some of the formal professional collaborative activities described by school leaders to foster CPLD in their schools.

Staff meetings, or 'Croke Park Hours' as referred to by some participants, provided the main platform for formal professional collaborative activities at each school. However, on occasions, school leaders made arrangements to release teachers from class to engage in professional collaborative activities. At School A the teaching principal described how the SET would collaborate formally with staff on an ongoing basis. This was an important focus of their school improvement activity because there was a high enrolment of children with special educational needs in the school. The special education teacher (SET) had a pivotal role in collaborating with the NEPS psychologist, SNAs and teachers about the needs of the children in the school. She explained that the SET had completed a course on special educational needs. Principal A described how at each staff meeting they would allocate time to collaborate about special educational needs. She described what the professional collaboration would look like as follows:

> I might do a general meeting, a general update for everybody including the SNAs and she (the SET) might go off with the SNAs, and she'd always be meeting with the SNAs and one particular class teacher because all the children with needs, it just happens that they are all in the one class, so they kind of sit together and then we'd all kind of split up.

Principal A described how when they split up, the SET would work with the infants' teacher, and she would work with the other teachers and that the SET would move between both groups to discuss how things were going throughout the allocated meeting time. She also described how the deputy principal would sometimes lead IT activities during meetings. The principal described their experience of collaborative activities led by the deputy principal using large interactive iPads as follows:

> she'd be updating like anything new on those and myself and the other teacher have the older versions, so we've updated those as well, so looking…kind of giving us continuing professional development, giving us ideas, what we can do with the class.

She described how this influenced their teaching and learning practice by supporting children to produce their own work using IT and not just focusing on the use of specific applications. She described how she drew on her own leadership experience in a DEIS school to support teachers in understanding the primary language curriculum. However, Principal A had found it difficult to maintain momentum in leading the Primary Language Curriculum owing to staff turnover and had been hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Principal C had described the need for extensive collaboration with his staff because the school was in the early stages of development. The staff did undertake regular staff meetings where they would discuss areas for school improvement such as handwriting, Aistear, and restorative practice. They had conducted focus group interviews with parents for Aistear and were deciding on measures for future evaluation. He described how they engaged in intensive professional collaboration for Aistear because it is possible to engage a child-led or a teacher-led approach. He explained how his staff had differing opinions as to which approach was best to take. They engaged with a university lecturer, and he explains how that led to really good conversations of the staff as follows:

> we had good conversations about what, what are the disadvantages of it, this child-led and what could we do to counteract those. So, there was a real kind of compromise there if you know what I mean so we were not losing sight of where we were going.

This meant that staff were engaged in professional collaboration which focused on issues of values and action in context.

At School B the staff meetings reflected the DEIS status of the school opening with the principal's report and followed by an update from the HSCL coordinator. The

principal would allow time for team leaders to speak about the seven areas of DEIS. The DEIS coordinator would often contribute, for example at the June staff meeting she would often collaborate with the staff about standardised test scores and teachers would be given an opportunity to reflect on them. Principal B remarked "I think every class teacher should take a look and get the opportunity to have a look at their scores, where the needs are. Like we do use them, you know hugely to decide where we are going." Andrew, an APII at School B described how Principal B has agreed to the class teachers' requests to have time to formally collaborate on the Primary Language Curriculum on a monthly basis. Andrew described what that professional collaboration looked like stating "they collaborate together, and they plan together, they discuss what works, what doesn't work and what ideas they, what new to bring in to meet the various learning objectives." Principal B described how collaboration helped teachers to overcome anxiety about the primary language curriculum. She remarked "I think it has given everyone a lift. It has taken the not the fear but maybe the anxiety maybe out of the Primary Language Curriculum that everybody is talking together, we are in the same boat, shared practice, and all of that." Staff at School D described how they had spent a day sitting together to collaborate on the Primary Language Curriculum. Ann, an APII, described what that looked like commenting "we sat in the staffroom, and we had the curriculum, and we just tore it to pieces, as in when we looked through it we said, 'what can we use this for, what can we use that for?'" As well as sitting together to collaborate about the primary language curriculum Principal D described how they specified aspects of the curriculum to target for CPLD such as phonological awareness from Junior Infants up to senior classes. School leaders at School D discussed the benefits of professional collaboration in context and the opportunities for CPLD which can arise from teaching practice in their own school. Principal D commented "I would

have thought previously that you had to look outside of your school for CPD and what we are realising is that within the school community there are so many opportunities for professional development once people are comfortable to say, 'God I'm really stuck on like problem-solving in fourth class and I don't know any good approaches." School leaders had provided opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share ideas after school but more recently they had begun the process of 'open-door staff sharing' during school hours. School leaders remarked that creating opportunities for professional collaboration helped them to identify CPLD needs in their own context. Diane, the deputy principal commented "if you can get that conversation started then that's professional development. That's better than any education centre can provide because it is real contextual stuff that we are addressing for our own context." School leaders expressed the view that bringing external experts in to speak to staff during Croke Park meetings held some value. However, Principal D described the value of sharing practice in their own school "I was never great for Maths so when I see some of my teachers exploring Maths in their class, I'm blown away by just the smallest things so in a way that a webinar can't access I think or even a face-to-face seminar." School leaders at School D emphasised the benefits of school-based professional collaboration for meaningful school improvement.

Conclusion

This chapter presented findings to illustrate how school leadership for school improvement is influencing professional collaboration to foster teacher CPLD in four Irish primary schools. It was evident that shared leadership is a central tenet of school leadership for school improvement. There was clear evidence that there is collaboration between school leaders and teachers to plan for school improvement. School leaders are engaging external support services for school improvement. The PDST were

influencing subsequent leadership of professional collaboration in schools. School leaders noted that fear of inspection, on the part of teachers, was a barrier to engaging with the inspectorate as a support service. There is evidence that school leaders lead professional collaborative activities of varying levels of engagement for school improvement. The following chapter discusses and further interprets the significance of these findings.

Chapter Five

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis was to explore if school leadership for school improvement was influencing teacher professional collaboration to foster continuing professional learning and development in Irish primary schools or not. The research question was how is school leadership influencing collaborative teacher professional learning in Irish primary schools? This chapter is an analysis of the findings presented in Chapter Four. It is structured around four factors, which correspond to the three theme key themes (See Figure 5.1). The factors presented in here present lessons learned which were posed "at a higher conceptual level than that of the specific case(s)" (Yin, 2014, p.68). The four factors are: integrated leadership for school improvement; CPLD for school improvement policy, professionalism v professionalisation, and forms of professional learning.

Figure 5.1 Four Factors from Data Analysis and Corresponding Themes

Integrated Leadership for School Improvement

Exploring 'integrated leadership' (Shen et al., 2019, p.402) provided insight to the 'interactive nature' (Printy & Liu, 2021, p. 292) of school leadership and its contribution to the culture of the school. Prior research found evidence of a 'disconnect' between distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2006) and the 'genuine distribution' of power and agency in Irish schools (Lárusdottie & O' Connor, 2017, p.434). The findings on school leadership in this study are somewhat reflective of the findings of Lárusdottie & O' Connor (2017). Lárusdottie & O'Connor (2017) identified a disconnect between distributed leadership (DL) theory as outlined in the literature by Spillane (2006) and the practice of school leadership in Irish schools. In this study, there was evidence of a form of DL characterised by the use of collaborative school structures within predominantly hierarchical cultures. However, there was evidence of greater reciprocity between formally appointed school leaders for school improvement than previously identified by Lárusdottie & O'Connor (2017). This has perhaps arisen from more recent policy requirements which specify that formally appointed leaders should, in line with the principles of distributed leadership, work in teams to collaborate and share responsibility for school improvement (DE, 2018). Spillane & Diamond (2007) iterate that from a distributed perspective aspects of the situation are 'constitutive' (p.10) of leadership and management practice. The circumstances of the case schools were influencing the activities of school leaders in this study. While there was evidence of collaborative structures for SLSI at each site, what they looked like and their potential for genuine distributed leadership was influenced by the situation, culture, and context of the school.

Principal A was working as a teaching principal with two formally appointed leaders absent on approved statutory leave. Ordinarily, collaborative structures for

school leadership were in place meaning she would engage with other formal school leaders to plan for school improvement, particularly in advance of staff meetings. This practice placed formally appointed school leaders in 'hierarchical positions' (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008, p.332) relative to other teaching and non-teaching staff. However, the principal did emphasise transparency and collaboration amongst all staff for the enactment of school improvement policy and attributed this to the small number of teachers on staff. In the absence of formally appointed school leaders, Principal A faced significant challenges in distributing leadership beyond her own role as principal. Staff expressed reluctance to step up to vacant formal leadership positions particularly because the roles were perceived as being busy or the possibility that they would have to step up to the role of principal. The 'change factor' (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p.97) associated with the relative instability of school environments can hinder the development of leadership capacity in schools. The remaining teachers were willing to undertake teacher leadership roles, without remuneration, and supported the principal in planning for school improvement. The undertaking of additional responsibilities became a 'personal favour' (Sugrue, 2015, p.250) rather than arising from a sense of professional obligation. This provided little stability for the principal who was intermittently reliant on the goodwill of staff to lead school improvement. Consequently, the principal was left in a situation where she was striving to maintain the good will of teachers. The exercise of a 'soft power dynamic' (Sugrue, 2015, p.250), which the circumstances demanded of the principal, appeared to be inhibiting attempts to effectively distribute leadership. Attempts to distribute leadership were further exacerbated by staff turnover which Principal A described as a feature of small schools. New teachers required support from school leaders to learn the routine of the school meaning it was impractical to assign leadership responsibilities to them.

Critically, ‘sustainable change’ (Sugrue, 2015, p.245) is developed over time. Principal A was attempting to distribute school leadership for school improvement but was consistently hindered by the challenges outlined above. This was inhibiting attempts to build leadership capacity which is considered crucial if school improvement is to be more than a ‘temporary phenomenon’ (Stoll, 2009, p. 122). The case of a teaching principal demonstrated the challenge of ensuring sustainable school improvement because of the challenges around distributing leadership and embedding it within the culture of the school.

Similarly, the DEIS status of School B was ‘constitutive’ (Spillane & Diamond, 2007, p.10) of leadership and management practice and this permeated established collaborative structures. Participants gave accounts of the work of individuals who had a ‘hand’ in the leadership and management of school, framing practice as a ‘product of the interactions’ of school leaders, followers, and aspects of the situation (Spillane & Diamond, 2007, p.7). However, the genuine distribution of power and agency within the collaborative structures of the school was questionable. Principal B engaged her ‘positional power’ (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p.128) in response to the systemic requirements of DEIS policy. The ‘power-distance’ (Sugrue, 2015, p.208) dynamics, both internal and external to the school, determined seven priority areas for DEIS planning, and influenced how the principal conceived responsibilities for school leaders. The HSCL coordinator had significant influence in determining the priorities for the school arising from her collaborative role with parents. School leaders were assigned to lead teams in accordance with the priorities of the DEIS plan and teacher leaders joined those teams of their own ‘volition’ (Printy & Liu, 2021, p.293). Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009) contend that the ‘positional power’ of the principal and the ‘personal power’ (p.128) of school leaders can be of benefit when both work

collaboratively. Shane, an assistant principal at School B, described how school leaders exercised personal power by drawing on relationships with teachers to identify their strengths and involving them in school improvement initiatives. Team meetings were described as providing opportunities to help teacher leaders identify the needs of the school and pass that information on to other teachers. It is apparent that the external and internal prioritisation of areas to be addressed in this DEIS school has created a climate of 'managed leadership and managed leaders' (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008, p. 335). This has contributed to the development of hierarchical collaborative structures within the school focused on advancing 'organisational legitimacy' (Spillane & Anderson, 2016, p.3) of external and internal policy. It appears that teacher leadership may have become a 'management strategy' which serves to further 'cement' hierarchy (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008, p. 335). Printy & Liu (2021) found that hierarchy has a negative relationship to a school culture that would support genuine distributed leadership. These hierarchical structures bear resemblance to distributed leadership but are more reflective of delegation wherein responsibility for tasks is 'handed down the hierarchy' (Hall, Gunter & Bragg, 2013, p.187). The policy requirement to adopt a team approach to school has resulted in a 'transactional' rather than 'transformative' (Sugrue, 2015, p.249) mode of collaboration amongst school leaders. It was evident that attempts were being made to cultivate a culture of collaboration amongst school leaders and teacher leaders. However, it is essential that school leaders understand the purpose of such 'cultural shifts' (Sugrue, 2015, p.249) as a means to build leadership capacity by distributing leadership responsibility across the school community.

The approach to developing a leadership team for school improvement at School C arose from the demand for high levels of collaboration in the early stages of development of the school. Principal C had reached an agreement with the two other

teachers on staff that being the first three teachers in the school was a leadership in itself. The teachers were 'thrust into leadership' (Printy & Liu, 2021, p.293) and extensive collaboration by the circumstances of the school, becoming informal leaders. The necessity for extensive professional collaboration posed problems for Principal C because he had to focus on maintaining the good will of the teachers. He described the guilt he experienced asking teachers to stay behind. This meant that efforts to collaborate arose as more of a 'personal favour' to the principal rather than from a sense of 'professional obligation' (Sugrue, 2015, p.250). These circumstances were hindering efforts by the principal to 'deal constructively' (Ammann & Schratz, 2023, p.2) with the external requirements of school improvement policy. Principal C expressed frustration at the lack of time and the unavailability of a formally appointed leadership team. This hindered him because he recognised the importance of research for local policy development but was limited in what he could ask other teachers to do. However, he did recognise that the situation was temporary and that his school leadership team would expand as the school developed and he could focus on building leadership capacity. Nevertheless shared-decision making was a key feature of leadership practice because Principal C recognised that it was not feasible for one person to make decisions that impacted everyone. He was focused on having professional conversations with teachers about what school leadership would look like as the school developed. He recognised the benefit of working without the 'legacy of past principals' (Gurr, Drysdale & Goode, 2021, p.32) and the importance of developing leadership capacity through the concept of all teachers as leaders. It was evident that leadership responsibility was being distributed at School C, although this arose chiefly because of the circumstances of the school. Nevertheless, Principal C was

committed to the concept of all teachers as leaders with potential for genuine distributed leadership for the future.

At School D the approach to shared leadership arose from the evolving contextual demands of the school. Similar to Principal C, the principal and deputy principal had described the necessity for extensive collaboration amongst school leaders as the school developed. The demands of doing things for the first time meant that it was impractical for responsibility to lie solely within one formally appointed leader. The deputy principal described the benefit of operating without history or the 'millstone of legacy' (Sugrue, 2015, p.250) in the development of a collaborative culture in the school. School leaders recognised the importance of developing and sharing a vision for the development of the school and 'jointly agreed-upon goals' (Ammann & Schratz, 2023, p.2). An APII at the school described the benefits of teachers understanding the 'why' in establishing shared goals. The shared vision and delineation of shared goals contributed to the development of leadership capacity at the school. While there were hierarchical collaborative structures in place, such as committees and teams, the focus of their work was on whole-school problem solving. Principal D described how the in-school management team was not 'elevated' above anybody else. The deputy principal described how they had a cohort of young teachers who were willing to undertake shared leadership responsibilities and participate on teams and committees. The shared school vision and delineation of shared goals was building leadership capacity and creating stepping stones for genuine distributed leadership (Lárusdottie & O' Connor, 2017, p. 434). Ann, an APII at the school, described how in leading a small group of teacher leaders, they seemed to appreciate that there was someone they could approach, aside from the principal, who had the positional power to collaborate and share responsibility with them. Hunzicker (2017)

describes how the influence of teacher leaders can expand over time, from influencing a few people 'to influencing many people' (p.2). The leadership of small groups of teacher leaders provided an opportunity for them to work privately toward a shared vision, which when developed would become public as it was used "for more teachers to collaborate institutionally and professionally" (Huang, 2016, p.232). This power dynamic, whereby the hierarchy had been 'flattened' (Gregory, 2017, p. 141) to some extent is not without challenges. Principal D described the challenge of 'holding the reins' whilst allowing school leaders to 'draw their own carriages'. The principal still 'retains overall responsibility' (Gregory, 2017, p. 142) for everything that happens in the school. Even in situations where responsibility for school leadership is distributed, there remain 'disparities in power' (Gregory, 2017, p.142) which can influence trust and the development of relationships in schools. The development of trusting relationships between school leaders and teachers is essential for the development of an effective collaborative culture for teacher professional learning and development.

It was evident from the findings that school leaders are attempting to enact the requirements of national policy (DE, 2018) by adopting a team approach to school leadership. However, policy enactment is 'context-sensitive' meaning that school leaders must negotiate policy requirements and attempt to 'integrate them into their 'respective' (Ammann & Schratz, 2023, p.2) school lives. Exploring school leadership as 'integrated leadership (Shen et al., 2019, p.402) provided greater insight to the work of all the individuals who have a 'hand' (Spillane, 2006, p.7) in leadership practice at each site. The potential for genuine distributed leadership appeared greater in schools that were not burdened by the 'millstone of legacy' (Sugrue, 2015, p.250) and established hierarchical structures. It is vital that school communities fully understand

the principles of genuine distributed leadership as a basis for meaningful and sustained school improvement.

CCPLD for School Improvement Policy

This factor addresses how school improvement policy was being enacted by school leaders at each site. It focuses on whether CCPLD, as advocated in national policy, was happening or not. School improvement policy specifies the requirement to develop a collaborative culture to underpin school improvement practice in schools (DE, 2016). The challenge in developing a collaborative culture is to get everyone talking together, planning together, and working together to mobilise 'collective expertise' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.114). As noted in Chapter Two, there is dissonance between DE and TC policy. DE policy for school improvement envisages the development of schools as Professional Learning Organisations (PLO)s (DE, 2016; DE, 2016a), while TC policy advocates the development of schools as Professional Learning Communities (PLC) (TC, 2016). PLOs arise from the need to drive school improvement through organisational learning, by placing emphasis on 'strategies and mechanisms' (Clenn et al., 2005, p.149). The PLC is the place where 'strong and positive' collaboration (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.127) can play out through shared leadership, decision making, shared practice, collaborative inquiry, and evolving relationships (Carpenter, 2017).

The potential for 'authentic professional collaboration' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 125) is questionable when it is based on external agendas and decisions are made by senior leaders. At School A the principal and deputy principal collaborated to make decisions about the focus of school improvement. Principal A described informal collaboration with the deputy principal, particularly in the mornings, to discuss

ongoing leadership and management issues in the school. However, there was limited evidence of informal collaboration amongst school leaders and teachers which is a critical component of the formation of an authentic collaborative culture (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Shared leadership and decision-making are critical to the 'shared workspace dynamics' and a prerequisite for 'transformative learning' (Carpenter, 2017, p. 1072). There was limited evidence of involvement of the staff in decision making for school improvement although Principal A described the importance of transparency around decision-making for school improvement when formally collaborating with staff. As noted previously, the absence of school leaders on statutory leave meant the principal was reliant on teachers to collaborate with her for school improvement planning. Consequently, the collaboration between the principal and staff at meetings was often focused on 'doing policies' and this practice was necessitated by the absence of other school leaders. This practice was reflective of 'contrived collegiality' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.118) whereby Principal A was opting for a form of collegiality that could be controlled through meetings with an agenda. The risk of such practice is that professional collaboration emerges as a beneficial byproduct of attempts to comply with policy rather than a genuine effort to mobilise 'truly collective action' (Little, 1990, p.519) for sustained and meaningful school improvement. The potential for authentic collaboration is less likely at School A because decisions about school improvement have been made by formally appointed school leaders in advance of wider staff collaboration. The risk of such a contrived approach is that it will achieve little more than bureaucratic compliance. However, the situation could potentially 'kick-start' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.119) collaborative relationships, opening up opportunities to build a sustained collaborative culture in the school. The sources of strength for an effective collaborative culture are 'informal' (Hargreaves & Fullan,

2012, p.114) in relationships where trust comes first. The evolution of trusting relationships (Carpenter, 2017) creates the capacity for 'joint work' (Little, 1990) that can lead to meaningful improvement through the exploration of 'challenging questions' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.112) about practice together. By putting teacher development at the centre of practice for school improvement, Principal A could build the necessary leadership capacity to overcome challenges identified such as the development of the school improvement plan in a more meaningful way.

Principal B recognised the importance of developing a collaborative culture emphasising the practice of communication, collaboration, and collegiality in the school. As noted previously, leadership practice at School B was heavily influenced by the DEIS status of the school. This underpinned collaboration amongst formally appointed leaders for school improvement planning and subsequent collaboration on school leadership teams for specific areas of the DEIS plan. The requirements of DEIS meant that professional collaboration was heavily based on 'external agendas' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.125) that have been decided at the level of national policy. Principal B and the school leadership team collaborated with the inspectorate to support the planning and evaluation of targets for DEIS. School leaders collaborated and engaged with the LAOS Guidelines (DE, 2016) to develop the DEIS plan, however collaboration around paperwork does little to build a 'sense of a shared mission' (Sugrue, 2015, p.142) for meaningful school improvement. The overall focus is reflective of a 'top-down' 'outside-in' (Reynolds, 2014, p.272) approach to school improvement planning, inadvertently curtailing the development of an authentic collaborative culture for collective transformative learning.

There were deliberate arrangements for collaboration amongst teachers at School B. Staff meetings provided an opportunity for teachers to collaborate with other

teachers working with the same class level. The DEIS coordinator would make an annual contribution to staff meetings, giving teachers an opportunity to reflect on standardised test scores to inform the direction of future school improvement planning. Principal B facilitated time for planning meetings for teachers for the primary language curriculum. Principal B described how these provided opportunities for shared practice, and for teachers to talk and plan together, practices which can support the development of a collaborative culture. These forms of 'arranged collegiality' can 'sharpen the focus' of joint work (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.119) and extend opportunities for teacher collaboration. However, they can pave the way for contrived collegiality whereby professional collaboration becomes a 'slick administrative surrogate' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.119) for the development of an authentic collaborative culture. The external requirements of the DEIS scheme pose challenges for the development of strong and positive collaboration and are more reflective of the development of schools as PLOs rather than PLCs.

At School C shared leadership and decision-making (Carpenter, 2017) and extensive collaboration had arisen out of necessity given the early developmental stage of the school. This contributed to the development of a strong and positive collaborative culture amongst teachers for school improvement. The shared leadership approach paved the way for authentic collaboration and potentially transformative learning. Principal C described how the staff had set broad agreement on values for the development of a collaborative culture within which disagreement was encouraged to some extent. Disagreement is a strong feature of strong, collaborative cultures but this is only made possible by a 'bedrock of fundamental security' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.113) on which staff relationships rest. However, trust and respect which are essential to the evolution of 'rich, deep, professional relationships' (Carpenter, 2017,

p.1072) need time to develop. Principal C created platforms where 'spontaneous collaboration' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.114) could occur and made efforts to build trust and mutual respect by allowing everyone to have a voice. He recognised the importance of both informal and formal collaboration with teachers as the basis for the development of a collaborative culture for school improvement.

Decisions about the focus of school improvement arose from the learning needs of the children and teachers in the school. Given the early stage of development the teachers were working with Junior and Senior infants only. The focus of school improvement was Aistear and parents had been consulted through focus group interviews. Principal C demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that teachers worked on becoming 'better practitioners' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.127) by allowing opportunities for them to become well informed about Aistear. This was achieved by engaging with a university lecturer, the PDST and problem solving amongst teachers themselves to help them to determine whether a child-led or teacher-led approach to Aistear would be most effective. Principal C explained that the school improvement plan was written out of a necessity to comply with policy requirements. He described how meaningful school improvement arose from collaboration and inquiry into practice. The approach placed professional collaboration and opportunities for transformative teacher learning at the centre of the school improvement process. The development of a collaborative culture at School C reflected several of the characteristics of a functional PLC (Carter, 2017). As the school develops it will be necessary to find 'continuity in change' to the point where 'change is the continuity' (Sugrue, 2015, p.251). While ongoing learning and reflection are a feature of practice at School C the challenge will be to 'renew and replenish' (Sugrue, 2015, p.251) those constants to continue to build school leaders capacity to transform.

Principal D described how the tendency to engage in informal conversations had originated with the founding principal and had remained a feature of practice for school improvement. Informal relationships and conversations can be an 'underlying source of strength' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.114) for the development of a collaborative culture. The risk of informal collaboration is that if left unchecked it can become 'loose', 'unfocused' and 'inward looking' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.112). The challenge for school leaders is to 'synchronise and sequence' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.112) the formal and informal aspects. Principal D makes use of newsletters to inform staff about matters relating to the general running of the school. Google forms provide a formal mechanism for teachers to provide the principal with feedback on a formal basis. The purpose of this was to free up time so that opportunities for professional collaboration and CPLD became the agenda for staff meetings. Once a year, Principal D would collaborate formally with teachers, on an individual basis, to elicit their views on specific areas of school improvement. The balance of informal and formal conversations underpins shared decision making in the school. Principal D described how extensive collaboration amongst staff meant that writing the school improvement plan became a mere formality. The practice of shared leadership and shared decision is one key characteristic of an effective PLC (Carpenter, 2017). There was little evidence of a collaborative inquiry approach, however, Principal D described how they were beginning the process of shared practice. Shared practice is another key characteristic of an effective PLC wherein one of the features is transformative learning processes (Carpenter, 2017). While the school was in the early stages of developing this process and efforts were being made to share pedagogical practices, it is difficult to envisage how this could contribute to transformative professional learning, without a well-established collaborative inquiry process. The

development of professional relationships is a key feature of an effective PLC. While shared leadership and professional collaboration for school improvement are established practices at School D, the collaborative approach did prove challenging for some new teachers. School leaders, at this stage of school development, may have begun to develop 'cultural baggage' (Sugrue, 2015, p.250), overlooking the need to continue building the 'bedrock of fundamental security' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.113) on which staff relationships rest.

It was evident that school leaders recognised the importance of professional collaboration to lead school improvement. However, the approach to developing a collaborative culture (DE, 2016) varied and was influenced by the situation, culture, and context of the school. The leadership approach to CCPLD for school improvement in established schools was reflective of the development of schools as PLOs, focusing on mechanisms and strategies for policy compliance. A high level of collaboration was evident in the developing schools, necessitated by the evolving nature of both schools. Both principals described how meaningful school improvement arose through strong and positive collaboration, with the writing of the school improvement being a mere formality. Consequently, the leadership approach to CCPLD for school improvement in developing schools bore resemblance to some of the characteristics of an effective PLC.

Professionalisation v Professionalism

This section analyses how schools' social patterns can either limit or restrain the work of teaching and teacher education through the concepts of professionalisation and professionalism (Hoyle, 2001). The professionalisation of teaching means that those tasked with responsibility for teacher education must "seek ways to consistently

provide teachers with key opportunities to learn the professional knowledge and skills that allow them to be effective" (Tatto, 2021, p.40). There has been a growth in understanding among policymakers and academics that in order to achieve 'professionalisation of the workforce' (McMahon et al., 2015, p.162) teacher learning should be structured over the phases of a career long continuum and linked to school improvement (TC, 2016). Cosán, the national framework for teachers' learning, conceptualises the development of a profession that is "responsive to emerging needs and to school improvement" (TC, 2016, p.4) emphasising the need for collective reflection and teacher autonomy to plan collectively for their professional learning. The practice of teaching and teacher education are situated within 'broader bands of structural relations' (Popkewitz, 1994, p.13) both internal and external to schools. There is a close association between approaches to school leadership and opportunities for collaborative continuous professional learning and development (King, 2016). Some principals may adopt an approach reflective of 'managerial professionalism' (Sachs, 2003, p.153) or 'organisational professionalism' (Evetts, 2011) whereby CCPLD in schools is 'mandated and prescribed' (King, 2016, p.579) by senior leaders. Conversely, some principals may choose an approach reflective of 'democratic professionalism' (Sachs, 2003, p.153) or 'occupational professionalism' (Evett, 2011) which emerges from teachers themselves and is characterised by collaborative decision-making, and collective action between teachers and other educational stakeholders. Managerial and democratic professionalism are not 'mutually exclusive' and there is research evidence of the emergence of 'hybrid forms of professionalism' (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008, p.10) as school leaders respond to new pressures and challenges. The 'delineation' of managerial versus democratic professionalism provides a framework for understanding the 'transmissive' and 'transformative'

purposes of teacher professional development (Kennedy, 2014a). An organisational approach to CPLD, whereby it is 'mandated and prescribed' (King, 2016, p. 579) can arguably result in transmissive modes of professional development. An occupational approach to school leadership for school improvement is characterised by collaborative-decision making and collective action in which teachers should feel or understand a 'sense of ownership' (Hall, Gunter & Bragg, 2013, p.187) and 'collective autonomy' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.80). This section aims to critically evaluate the perspectives on professionalism evident in the practice of school leadership for school improvement at each site and their implications for CCPLD.

The school leadership approach at School A was characteristic of a managerial approach to school improvement. The focus of leadership practice was on compliance with policy and the approach to decision-making was top-down (Reynolds, 2014) with the principal and deputy principal, when present, collaborating to plan for school improvement and communicating decisions to teachers at staff meetings. This meant that teachers' school-based professional learning was mostly influenced by senior leaders' decisions derived from the need to comply with school improvement policy. The risk is that school leadership for school improvement could become "bureaucratic in the name of professionalisation" (Popkewitz, 1994, p.4), unintentionally undermining the role of the teacher and the central importance of teacher education for meaningful school improvement. The high enrolment of children with SEN meant that there was a high level of engagement with external agencies such as NEPS. The SET would meet with external agencies and then collaborate with the teachers, and SNAs about the needs of the children. The circumstances necessitated input from external agencies, and while this is an instance where the transmission of knowledge was required, it is difficult to elicit where opportunities were put in place for collective

decision-making with external stakeholders. The overall focus of leadership practice was on compliance with school improvement policy and the transmission of information about decisions made by senior leaders and from external agencies. This meant that opportunities for professional collaboration and CPLD were both 'mandated' and 'prescribed' (King, 2016, p. 579) by senior leaders enacting the requirements of school improvement policy. There was limited evidence of teacher autonomy to plan collectively for their professional learning needs. This organisational approach to school leadership can mean that professional collaboration can become 'forced' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.125). Professional collaboration needs to be led effectively and the challenge is to balance 'top-down/bottom-up' and 'inside-out/outside in' (Reynolds et al., 2014, p. 272) change over time. The opportunity lies in the fact that Principal A recognised the need to distribute leadership and put collaborative structures in place. The challenge is to put opportunities for transformative professional learning at the centre of school leadership practice for school improvement.

At School B, the principal had adopted an approach to school leadership which was reflective of managerial professionalism (Sachs, 2003) to enact the requirements of DEIS policy. This was evident in the tiered leadership structure wherein senior leaders made decisions about priorities for the DEIS plan and shared them with teams of teacher leaders and subsequently involved teachers and the children in initiatives. The collaborative structures in place meant that teachers were informed about shared goals for DEIS. The risk of handing tasks 'down the hierarchy' (Hall, Gunter & Bragg, 2013, p.187) in this manner is that teachers can feel that they 'lack a sense of ownership' over their practice and professional learning (Hall, Gunter & Bragg, 2013, p.187). The 'rationalisation' (Popkewitz, 1994, p.4) of schools as professional learning

organisations (DE, 2016) and the requirements of DEIS appear to be restraining the work of teaching and teacher education. Teacher autonomy and trust are essential if schools are to provide the transformative professional learning experiences that bring about meaningful and sustainable improvement in schools. Teacher autonomy, trust, and the ability to make informed judgements are key features of high-performing systems which have the least difference between 'children from better-off and poorer families' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 81). This success is further underpinned by developing 'collective capacity' (Azorín & Fullan, 2022, p. 139) for school improvement. While the school leadership team at School B recognised the importance of building a collaborative culture, it involves more than enacting external policy requirements (Azorín & Fullan, 2022). Indeed, it is apparent that greater teacher autonomy, trust, and opportunities to make informed judgements are vital components in supporting effective teacher education for educational disadvantage. While national policy has linked school leadership for school improvement and CCPLD (DE, 2016; TC, 2016), compliance with the school improvement element is the priority for school leaders at School B. This means that the approach to CCPLD is a beneficial byproduct of attempts to enact policy rather than a key focus of leadership practice for school improvement. The challenge is to balance a top-down (Reynolds et al., 2014, p. 272) school leadership approach with a bottom-up approach to collectively plan for collaborative teacher professional learning so that neither teachers nor school leaders 'override the other' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.125).

At School C collaborative professional learning was at the centre of school improvement processes. Planning for professional learning was driven by identifying the needs of the children in the school and through collective decision-making between Principal C and the other teachers in the school. They had conducted focus group

interviews with parents to support their choice of focus for school improvement. Principal C articulated that it was not possible for one person to make the decisions for the entire school and so a democratic form of professionalism (Sachs, 2003) was evident. The early developmental status of the school meant that the choice of focus for school improvement and professional learning was focused on the needs of infant classes. While the choice of focus was relatively straightforward this could present more of a challenge as the number of formally appointed leaders and teachers in the school grows. Nevertheless, Principal C hoped that when he had a formally appointed school leadership team that he could ask them to research issues of importance for school improvement. He had established the importance of creating a space for professional collaboration (Carpenter, 2017) in which teachers' 'professional beliefs and values' (Parker et al., 2016, p.142) could be challenged. This was providing key opportunities for teachers to bring their own experience to the table through inquiry and reflection (Parker et al., 2016; Tatto, 2021). The creation of a space for professional collaboration and the opportunity to challenge teachers' professional beliefs and values are key aspects of the development of a collaborative culture. However, engaging in challenging professional conversations can pose problems if time has not been invested in developing relationships as new teachers join the school. There is a risk that what is perceived as necessary and challenging to existing school staff could come across as 'downright offensive' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.114) to newer teachers. As the school develops there is a risk that the leadership structures could become more hierarchical although Principal C had begun working on establishing the concept of everyone as a leader into his leadership practice. Principal C had planned professional learning opportunities that enabled teachers to inquire into the philosophies which underpin Aistear. This practice enabled teachers to become 'more

knowledgeable' and 'better practitioners' (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, p.127) by working together by using a range of approaches such as university links, research, and engagement with external professional development services. Principal C adopted a leadership approach reflective of democratic professionalism, evident in the emphasis on collaborative-decision making and collective action between teachers (Sachs, 2003). This can establish a sense of 'collective autonomy' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.80) and 'ownership' (Hall et al., 2013, p.187) amongst teachers for their professional learning and teaching practice. The leadership approach at School D has established a basis for the development of an effective professional learning community. The challenge is to ensure that shared leadership and decision-making (Carpenter, 2017) for teaching and teacher professional learning remain at the centre of leadership practice as the school develops.

At School D the high level of informal collaboration and professional conversations were informing formal opportunities for teachers to choose the focus for school improvement. There was evidence of consistent professional collaboration and reflection and teacher autonomy in the choice of focus of school improvement. As such, leaders adopted an approach to school leadership for school improvement that was more reflective of democratic professionalism (Sachs, 2003). Principal D planned formal opportunities to collaborate with staff, on an individual basis, about aspects of change that they felt needed to be addressed. In this way, there were opportunities for teachers to identify aspects for change both individually and collectively. However, the focus of these conversations was on change for school improvement rather than allowing teachers opportunities to discuss their professional learning needs either individually or collectively. While the high levels of collaboration were perceived by school leaders to be the 'bedrock' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.113) of school

improvement there was limited evidence of how the professional collaboration was influencing the professional learning and development of teachers.

The school leadership team at School D were beginning to develop structures to support shared practice for school improvement. They had described how this practice was enabling them to identify teachers' professional learning needs specific to their own context. Staff willingness to engage in open-door sharing of practice, shared leadership and extensive collaboration is evidence that some characteristic features of a professional learning community (Carpenter, 2017) were emerging in the school. However, there is a need to progress collaborative processes towards professional collaborative inquiry if transformative learning and real teaching and learning innovations (Carpenter, 2017) are to emerge. The greatest risk is that the extensive focus on professional collaboration will remain a focus for school improvement and development rather than placing collective professional learning needs at the forefront of school leadership practice. While school leaders at School D had adopted a democratic approach to school improvement, they adopted a managerial approach to CCPLD which was prescribed by school leaders. Overall, the leadership approach adopted was reflective of a 'hybrid form of professionalism' (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008, p.10) perhaps arising from the challenge of converging the practice of school leadership for school improvement and CCPLD. The practice of informal and formal collaboration and the autonomy afforded to teachers to choose the focus of school improvement could be extended to incorporate teacher autonomy to collaborate and plan collectively for their professional learning.

It was evident that school leaders at established schools were adopting an approach that was more reflective of 'managerial professionalism' (Sachs, 2003, p.153). Decisions about the choice of focus for school improvement had been made by

formally appointed school leaders and communicated in a 'top-down' (Reynolds, 2014, p.272) manner. Subsequent opportunities for CCPLD were focused on ensuring compliance with the requirements of school improvement policy meaning they were largely 'mandated and prescribed' (King, 2016, p.579). This meant that school leaders were inadvertently undermining the role of the teacher and overlooking the centrality of teacher education in meaningful school improvement. At the developing schools, there was evidence of a more democratic approach to the choice of focus for school improvement by school leaders. At School C, the approach to CCPLD further encompassed a democratic approach focused on collaborative decision making and collective action. At School D, the approach to CCPLD was influenced by decisions made by school leaders and more reflective of a 'managerial approach' (Sachs, 2003, p.153). The hybrid form of professionalism evident at School D would suggest that CCPLD could fall into the malleable category (Kennedy, 2014) with teachers having autonomy for the choice of focus for school improvement but less so for the approach to their professional learning.

Forms of Professional Learning

This factor draws on Kennedy's (2011) three levels of collaborative engagement to evaluate the influence of the leadership of professional collaborative activities for school improvement on teacher professional learning and development at each site. These levels of engagement are co-location (transmissive); co-operation (malleable) and collaboration (transformative) and are aligned with corresponding purposes of continuing professional development. Milton & Morgan (2023) define 'impactful' professional learning as "transformational for thinking, practice, and learners (Kennedy, 2014) and as being a process that provides opportunities for questioning, critical consideration of and reflection on practice" (p.3). It was evident that school

leaders were facilitating various levels of collaborative engagement for teacher professional learning and development each site. School leaders were also collaborating with external support services such as the PDST, the inspectorate and NEPS to support school improvement. The inspectorate, where engaged by schools, focused predominantly on collaborating with school leaders to support planning for school improvement. The work of NEPS focused on meeting the needs of children with SEN in the school and where this was happening, they collaborated with school leaders or the SET. The PDST engaged in various forms of collaborative engagement with teachers and school leaders to support school improvement. This factor considers the approaches employed by school leaders at each site to support the professional learning of teachers for school improvement.

At School A opportunities for collaborative engagement varied between teachers sitting beside each other at staff meetings, and the arrangement of opportunities for teachers to talk with each other about areas of common interest such as SEN, IT, or the primary language curriculum. These collaborative arrangements, centred around co-location and co-operation (Kennedy, 2014), were aligned with transmissive and/or malleable purposes of teacher professional learning and development. The purpose of collaborative engagement was to transmit information about decisions made by formally appointed school leaders to enact school improvement policy. This was consistent with "traditional school organisation and management tasks" (Lynch, Peddell, McGuigan, Willis, Yeigh & Marcoionni, 2023, p.2) centred around compliance with school improvement policy rather than identifying and addressing teachers' professional learning needs. There was limited evidence of opportunities for 'critical dialogue' or engagement in processes of 'collective learning' (Parker et al., 2016, p.142) at staff meetings, rather the focus was on putting the

'shoulder to the wheel' to meet policy requirements. At School A, the requirements of school improvement policy have determined the 'goals of education' shaping the priorities for professional learning and the context in which "leadership for professional learning (was) undertaken" (Poekert, Swaffield, Demir & Wright, 2020, p.548-549). This approach overlooked the 'social and situated nature' of professional knowledge development and opportunities for the leadership of 'meaningful professional learning' (Milton & Morgan, 2023, p.2) relevant to the school context.

It was evident that the PDST has some influence on the leadership of professional learning at School A. Drawing on 'external expertise' can be an important element of "designing effective professional learning experiences" (Brennan & Gorman, 2023, p.8). Principal A had observed how the PDST had influenced the motivation and leadership of professional learning by the deputy principal for IT. She designed opportunities for teachers to engage in active learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) by providing them with strategies for using iPads and allowing them to engage in the same style of learning as their students. It is essential that school leaders develop leadership skills that extend beyond "traditional school organisation and management tasks" (Lynch et al., 2023, p.2) to incorporate skills for professional development leadership (Perry, 2020).

At School B opportunities for collaborative engagement arose at staff meetings and planning meetings for teachers. Staff meetings were structured around the principal's report and allowing school leaders to update the staff in the seven areas of DEIS planning. This approach appeared to 'control and limit' (Kennedy, 2005, p. 237) the agenda to ensure compliance with external policy. The communication of information for DEIS reflected a transmissive purpose of professional development. However, this could be overcome if school leaders opted to engage in 'critical

dialogue' (Parker et al., 2016, p.142) with staff thereby providing a 'scaffold' (Kennedy, 2005, p. 237) to identify collective professional learning needs relevant to the context of the school. Staff were co-located according to the class level they teach during meetings, and this offered them an opportunity to discuss issues as they arose. This was an opportunity to transmit information or facts rather than engage in meaningful collaboration that could form the basis for professional learning and development for school improvement.

The PDST collaborated with school leaders to identify teachers' professional learning needs for the primary language curriculum. School leaders recognised the benefit of identifying teachers professional learning needs in advance, although this was influencing the design of professional learning experiences (Brennan & Gorman, 2023) lead by the PDST rather than by school leaders. Subsequently, school leaders responded positively to teachers' requests for monthly planning meetings to collaborate for the primary language curriculum. The purpose of the meetings was to alleviate anxiety and provide an opportunity for teachers to share practice. Teachers discussed what worked and didn't work and ideas to meet the learning objectives of the curriculum. This was reflective of the malleable category of purpose (Kennedy, 2014a) wherein there was evidence of teachers working within a community of practice (Parker et al., 2016) which adopted, in this case, transmissive rather than transformative purposes. While there was evidence of planning for effective teacher professional learning by the PDST, it is imperative that school leaders are supported to develop as teacher educators capable of coordinating, designing, and facilitating (Perry, 2020) CCPLD activities for school improvement.

Principal C described various levels of collaborative engagement amongst his staff for school development and improvement. While some elements of his leadership

practice necessitated transmissive modes of collaboration the typical levels of collaborative engagement fell into the malleable category (Kennedy, 2014). Transmissive practices were engaged to enact the development of mandatory policies such as child protection safeguarding and the admissions policy. Collaborative activities for Aistear were indicative of a more intentional transformative purpose (Kennedy, 2014), oscillating between various levels of collaborative engagement. Principal C ensured teachers were 'aligned and engaged' to specific goals that 'promote teacher autonomy' (Lynch et al., 2023, p.3) for their professional learning. He engaged the support of a wide range of external experts. This included engaging sustained support from the PDST, and a university lecturer which supported professional collaboration about the advantages and disadvantages of child-led or teacher-led approaches to Aistear. Principal C was engaging with teachers on issues of context, values and action, an approach which was more likely to result in potentially transformative practice (Kennedy, 2014a). The teachers at School C were able to recognise that their professional learning needs were not being met through training they had received in Restorative Practice. The process of evaluating their shared professional learning experience enabled them to evaluate their collective professional learning needs and ensured they accessed the necessary support for their continuing professional learning and development. The engagement of teachers in critical dialogue within an emergent community of learners, allowed teachers to collaboratively generate knowledge about teaching practices (Parker et al., 2016, p.146), which was indicative of a transformative purpose for teacher professional learning and development. Principal C had created a space which promoted teacher autonomy for collaborative professional learning and development for school improvement. Principal C was engaging the support of external experts to support him to coordinate, facilitate

and design (Perry, 2020) collaborative professional learning and development experiences for school improvement.

The levels of collaborative engagement at School D fall predominantly into the malleable category. Some collaborative activities necessitated a transmissive purpose while others were intended to provide opportunities for transformative professional learning. Principal D recognised the importance of staff meetings and shared practice (Carpenter, 2017) to allow opportunities for formal professional collaboration and professional learning and development. School leaders brought external experts in to speak to the staff and while they found it was of value, they believed that teachers were benefiting more from shared practice because it was job-embedded and contextualised (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p.7). The shared practice approach was in the early stages of development however efforts to link professional learning and development to teachers' classrooms and students are 'key' in the transformative learning process (Carpenter, 2017, p.1072). Principal D described how engaging in this active learning process enabled her to gain a 'clear vision' (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p.5) of what effective teaching practice in Maths looked like. The deputy principal articulated that the shared practice approach was enabling them to identify professional learning needs relevant to their own context. Similarly, school leaders described how sustained collaboration with the PDST helped them to evaluate their professional learning needs in several areas. It was evident that the leadership approach to CCPLD was evolving at School D. The focus was on identifying the professional learning needs of teachers, with the support of the PDST facilitators and through professional conversations around shared practice. It was apparent that the PDST can support school leaders in the professional development leadership (Perry, 2020) aspect of their role.

There were notable differences between the leadership of collaborative professional learning and development in established schools and developing schools. At the established schools the leadership approach to professional learning was consistent with greater 'adherence to system-level values' (Lynch et al., 2023, p.4) and compliance with school improvement policy. Where there was some evidence of effective professional learning experiences, these were influenced by the support of PDST facilitators rather than by school leaders. It is essential that professional development of school leader is supported to create the conditions that can lead to 'impactful professional learning' (Milton & Morgan, 2023, p.1) in their own contexts. At the developing schools there was evidence of strong and positive informal and formal professional collaboration and school leaders perceived this as the 'shared space' (Carpenter, 2017, p.1069) where school improvement happened. School leaders at both schools were demonstrating capacity to "make professional learning decisions that best support the professional learning needs of their teachers" (Lynch et al., 2023, p.1) for school improvement. Both principals had ensured that teachers were 'aligned and engaged' (Lynch et al., 2023, p.3) to agreed goals and this promoted greater teacher autonomy at both sites. The shift to leadership of professional learning means that school contexts are 'pivotal' in supporting teachers' professional learning 'via leadership support' (King, Poekert & Pierre, 2023, p.6). Therefore school leaders need to develop their skills as professional development leaders (Lynch et al., 2023; Perry, 2020; Perry & Boylan, 2018) for school improvement and this is essential for the effective CCPLD of teachers.

Conclusion

School leadership for school improvement was influencing collaborative teacher professional learning to foster teacher professional development in Irish primary schools. However, the findings from this multi-site case study indicate that obstacles and challenges exist which could hinder the enactment of meaningful and sustainable school improvement and opportunities for transformative professional learning and development in Irish primary schools. Principals at each site were attempting to distribute leadership but challenges remain if genuine distributed leadership is to become a reality in Irish primary schools. Of critical importance is how continuing collaborative professional learning and development is understood and enacted by school leaders for school improvement. The nature of professional collaboration for school improvement was influenced by the leadership approach to school improvement. At sites where a managerial approach was adopted, there was evidence of 'arranged collegiality' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.119) which could serve to develop or undermine collaborative relationships. At sites where school leaders adopted a more democratic approach, through informal and formal collaboration, there was potential for authentic professional collaboration, which could form the basis for an effective professional learning community over time. It is apparent that the continuing professional learning and development of school leaders as professional development leaders is crucial if transformative teacher professional learning and development for sustained and meaningful school improvement is to become a reality in Irish primary schools. The following chapter will discuss the limitations of this study and the implications of these findings for future policy and research.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The global discourse on school improvement has called for job-embedded, collaborative professional development led by teachers through models of distributed leadership (Asia Society, 2016; Asia Society, 2017; Asia Society, 2019; Burns & Darling-Hammond, 2014; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner & Espinoza, 2017; Kennedy, 2014; McMahon, Forde & Dickson, 2015; Schleicher, 2012). Distributed leadership is considered an efficient approach to school improvement based on the assumption that sharing responsibility among principals and teacher leaders removes the concept of the 'solo, heroic' school leader (Copland, 2003; McKenzie & Locke, 2014; Woods, 2004). A systematic review and synthesis of research on school leadership, spanning the period 2008-2018, Murphy (2019) identified a significant dearth in national research in terms of how school leadership influences professional collaboration and in-service teachers' professional development within schools. In addition, research findings have indicated that collaborative practices and professional development which are 'essential components' of school improvement are "often treated as separate entities in the literature with little research available on the convergence of these concepts in practice" (King, 2011, p.153). The purpose of this research study was to explore the perspectives of formally appointed school leaders as they attempted to lead collaborative teacher professional learning for school improvement in Irish primary schools. The main research question was: How is school leadership influencing collaborative teacher professional development in Irish primary schools or not?

This thesis has demonstrated that school leadership plays a significant role in the practice of collaborative teacher professional learning and development. The impact of leadership was influenced by the situational and policy context of each

school. This chapter summarises the research approach and draws together the research findings from the data analysis. The limitations of the study and implications for future research, policy, and practice are discussed. The chapter concludes with recommendations as to how efficacious collaborative continuing teacher professional learning and development can be placed at the forefront of leadership practice for school improvement.

Summary of the Research Process

This research set out to investigate a relatively under researched phenomenon in Irish primary schools. It sought to explore the influence of school leadership for school improvement on teacher professional development in Irish primary schools. Given that the research was exploring the 'convergence' (King, 2011, p.153) of school leadership for school improvement and collaborative practices for teacher professional development it was necessary to explore these essential 'components' (King, 2011, p.153) of practice in the literature review. The literature review explored three waves of school reform, to elicit understanding of changing conceptualisations of school leadership and how professional development for school improvement was envisaged in each: the School Effectiveness Movement; the School Improvement Movement; the Pursuit of Future Excellence. Subsequently, key characteristics of effective professional development and models of continuing professional development were explored to identify what school leadership of effective collaborative teacher professional learning and development for school improvement should look like in practice.

Given the need to explore and understand the central phenomenon this research, merited a qualitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, a multi-site

case study approach was deemed most appropriate given the purpose of this study was to explore a phenomenon about which not much was known (Ashley, 2012). The methodological approach employed qualitative interviews with formally appointed school leaders. This was a multi-site case study, and several steps were taken to develop high-quality research. A case study protocol was developed which contained the procedures and general rules that had to be followed in using the instrument at each case study site. This was a 'major tactic' (Yin, 2009, p.63) in increasing the reliability of the research. The interview protocol was piloted in a one-to one interview with a principal, and a group interview with a deputy principal and an assistant principal, separate to the four actual cases for the study. A detailed electronic audit trail of the data analysis was maintained in NVivo 14 (Braun & Clark, 2021). This study also engaged multicase analysis worksheets (Stake, 2006) which operated as a protocol for data analysis. Reflexive researcher journaling was recorded electronically, in NVivo 14, throughout all stages of data generation, analysis, and write-up. The qualitative data analysis followed a six-step reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clark, 2006; 2017; 2021) (See Appendix F) and the audit trail for data analysis incorporated steps for cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006) to address the research question (See Appendices G-I).

Limitations of the Research

Aside from the limitations of a multi-site case study approach, addressed in Chapter Three, there were several circumstantial challenges which created limitations in the conduct of this research. At the time of data generation, schools remained under restrictions arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant that data had to be generated via Zoom interviews. The demands on school leaders during Covid-19 posed significant challenges in trying to gain access to schools. One benefit of the use of

Zoom was that it provided access to a wider geographical spread of potential participants. This supported the purposive sampling approach which incorporated 'maximum variation sampling' to illustrate a "range of the dimensions of interest" (Coe, 2012, p.49). Another limitation of the study was trying to gain access to a sufficient number of school leaders at sites with a formally appointed school leadership team in situ. At School A, aside from the teaching principal, all other school leaders were absent on approved leave. At Schools B and D, I had to coordinate interviews around demands on school leaders personal and professional time to ensure I had a sufficient number of participants. At School C, they had not been sanctioned for any formal leadership positions outside the role of the principal. In spite of the limitations outlined in this section, the research findings provide key recommendations for school leadership of collaborative continuous professional learning and development for school improvement in Irish primary schools. The following sections provide a summary of the key findings from this study and recommendations.

Summary of the Key Findings

The binding concept in this study was delineated from national policy documents as the overarching requirement that teams of formally appointed school leaders are required to lead professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development for school improvement in Irish primary schools (DES, 2016; DES 2016a; DES 2018; TC, 2016; TC, 2016a). The presentation of findings in Chapter 4 was reflective of a 'typical format' (Stake, 2006, p.100) for a multicase study, wherein a detailed descriptive report (See Appendix) of each case and themes were provided. The themes were developed around the conceptual structure derived from the cross-case analysis (See Appendix H & Appendix I). The discussion in Chapter 5 discussed more widely found 'variable(s) of interest' (Stake, 2006, p. 64) beyond the situation of the cases. Figure 6.1 presents an

overview of the four factors, presented in Chapter 5, which formed connections across the cases. The four factors are presented alongside the corresponding themes that were presented in Chapter 4 and are discussed in the following sections.

Figure 6.1 Four Factors from Data Analysis and their Corresponding Themes

Factor 1: Integrated Leadership for School Improvement

The concept of 'integrated leadership' (Shen et al., 2019, p. 402) was used as a lens to explore the practice of school leadership and school improvement processes. There was evidence of collaborative structures for school leadership at each site, but what they looked like and their potential for genuine distributed leadership was influenced by the situation, culture, and context of the school. At more established schools there was evidence of a form of distributed leadership characterised by the use of collaborative school structures within predominantly hierarchical cultures. At School C there was potential for genuine distributed leadership arising from the fact that there were no formally appointed school leaders, aside from the principal, and the principal was focusing on the concept of everyone as a leader. At School D the approach to shared leadership arose from the evolving contextual demands of the school. The focus on a

shared vision and purposes contributed to a somewhat flattened hierarchy, more characteristic of genuine distributed leadership, with the principal holding overall responsibility for school improvement. Although school leaders were striving to distribute leadership tasks and responsibilities the practice of school leadership was influenced by situational, policy, and contextual constraints.

Factor 2: CPLD for School Improvement Policy

Exploring the practice of school leadership at each site provided insight into what collaborative teacher professional learning, as suggested in national policy, looked like. The findings showed that at more established schools, decisions about the focus for school improvement were made by formally appointed school leaders and communicated to staff through collaborative structures. However, the potential for authentic collaboration was unlikely as senior leaders were making decisions about school improvement needs in isolation from their staff. Both schools prioritised compliance with the requirements of school improvement policy, rather than collaborative teacher professional learning. This 'top-down' and 'outside-in' (Reynolds, 2014) approach to school improvement was inadvertently curtailing the development of an authentic collaborative culture for collaborative teacher professional learning. Conversely, the demands of leading a developing school meant that high levels of informal and formal collaboration were borne out of necessity. Both principals described meaningful school improvement as arising from ongoing professional collaboration with paperwork becoming a mere formality. The findings of this study suggest that meaningful school improvement can arise by placing collaborative professional learning to the forefront of leadership practice.

Factor 3: Professionalism v Professionalisation

This factor evaluated the perspectives on professionalism evident in the practice of school leadership at each site, and their implications for collaborative teacher professional learning. At the more established schools, decision-making by formally appointed school leaders and an emphasis on compliance with the requirements of school improvement policy was reflective of the development of schools as Professional Learning Organisations. This reflected managerial professionalism whereby decisions about school improvement were 'mandated and prescribed' (King, 2016, p. 579). There was limited evidence of teacher autonomy to plan collectively according to their professional learning needs. At School C there was evidence of democratic professionalism where teachers were involved in the evaluation of their professional learning needs and decision-making for school improvement. Collective planning for collaborative professional learning, which emerges from teachers themselves, is reflective of democratic professionalism and can form the basis for transformative professional development. At School D informal collaboration amongst staff was influencing collective decision-making for school improvement but there was little evidence of collective decision-making for teacher professional learning. This was reflective of a hybrid form of professionalism as school leaders responded to the challenge of leading collaborative professional learning. The findings at School C suggest that prioritising collective planning for collaborative professional learning could form the basis for transformative professional learning and meaningful school improvement.

Factor 4: Forms of Professional Learning

The practice of collaborative professional learning across the four sites fell into the malleable category (Kennedy, 2014) and demonstrated a greater tendency towards

transmissive rather than transformative purposes. This was particularly evident at the long-established schools, where the overall focus of leadership practice was on compliance with school improvement policy. Where there was any evidence of teacher autonomy it arose externally through PDST facilitators asking teachers to identify their professional learning needs. At the developing schools, there was evidence of strong and positive professional collaboration among school leaders and teachers. Principal C collaborated with teachers at the school to identify both the focus for school improvement and their professional learning needs. He engaged with an array of external facilitators to plan, coordinate, and design collaborative activities. This leadership practice increased the "capacity for supporting teacher autonomy" (Kennedy, 2014, p.336) and the potential for transformative collaborative professional learning and development. At School D, the focus was on developing shared practice which helped school leaders identify teachers' professional learning needs through professional conversations. School leaders at each site were engaged with external facilitators, predominantly the PDST and the Inspectorate. School leaders at long-established schools engaged the inspectorate to support them with planning for policy compliance. School leaders at developing schools identified fear of inspection as a barrier to school improvement. School leaders at each of these sites believed that the inspectorate should be a consultancy service to support them in their work. School leaders relied heavily on PDST cuiditheoirí to identify teachers' professional learning needs and to facilitate collaborative professional learning. These findings suggest that school leaders need to develop independent skills as leaders of collaborative professional learning.

Recommendations for Policy, Practice & Future Research

The systematic implementation of Cosán (TC, 2016), the national framework for teachers' professional learning, by 2027, is a key objective of the Teaching Council. It has been established that Cosán (TC, 2016) will be enacted in collaboration with the DE, it's support services and national stakeholders (www.teachingcouncil.ie). Oide is a new, integrated, Department of Education, support service which incorporates the professional learning support services of the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) and the PDST. Oide aims to support the professional learning of teachers and school leaders in Ireland through high quality, innovative and responsive professional learning (www.oide.ie). As of 2023, schools are expected to commence a three-year SSE plan in line with the most recent LAOS (DE, 2022) Quality Framework for Primary & Special Schools. It is notable that LAOS (DE, 2022) continues to conceptualise the development of schools as PLOs, promoting constructive collaborative practice, whereas Cosán (TC, 2016) promotes meaningful collaboration for the advancement of PLCs. The findings of this study suggest that strong and positive professional collaboration can increase capacity for teacher autonomy and support transformative purposes of collaborative professional learning and development. If efficacious collaborative learning is to become a reality in Irish schools, there needs to be greater cohesion between policy emanating from the DE and the Teaching Council.

The convergence of school leadership for school improvement and CPLD means that school leaders need to acquire the necessary skills to lead professional learning beyond 'traditional' (Lynch et al., p.2) leadership and management tasks. The professional learning of school leaders as professional development leaders (Perry,

2020) is crucial if they are to create the conditions for ‘meaningful professional learning’ (Milton & Morgan, 2023, p.2) in local contexts. Fitzpatrick Associates (2018) found that distributing leadership roles and responsibilities was ranked as a ‘critical’ (p.40) area of need by principals and deputy principals. It was evident in this study that such professional development is necessary to ensure that genuine distributed leadership becomes a reality in Irish primary schools. Similarly, primary school leaders had identified the development of a collaborative culture as a high priority for their professional development. It is vital that school leaders learn how to lead and develop authentic collaborative cultures in their schools to improve the learning of teachers and students (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The ‘shift’ (Lynch et al., 2023, p.2) to professional learning means that school leaders must learn to critically consider how the adoption of particular perspectives on professionalism can influence the development of teachers’ professional knowledge.

This study found that external facilitators can influence the practice of school leaders for school improvement and teacher professional learning and development. The support services of the inspectorate were engaged in the more established schools where the focus was predominantly on policy enactment rather than teachers’ professional learning. Consideration will need to be given to the role of the inspectorate in supporting school leaders as professional development leaders for school improvement as schools move into the next three-year cycle of SSE planning. The PDST supported school leaders in identifying teachers’ professional learning needs and developing their professional knowledge in multiple areas. The inception of Oide, which incorporates the PDST, could provide essential support for school leaders in their role as professional development leaders. However, it is also necessary to develop school leaders' professional knowledge as professional development leaders so that

they develop the capacity to lead transformative professional learning and development in schools. Perry (2020) conceptualises professional development leaders as coordinators, facilitators, and designers of professional development activities. Perry & Boylan (2018) reported on a pilot program 'rooted' (p.254) in a cycle of action research offering a model for professional development for professional development leaders which could prove useful in the context of each of the schools in this study.

The convergence of school leadership for school improvement and collaborative practice for teacher professional learning and development is a rapidly evolving area of policy and practice in Ireland. This study provides a starting point for future research, particularly at national level, that may corroborate the findings and further influence the development of policy and practice on school leadership of continuing collaborative teacher professional learning and development for school improvement. This could include further exploration of the role of external facilitators; the school-based professional learning experiences of teachers and in time the experiences of school leaders as professional development leaders.

Conclusion

This study has provided some interesting findings regarding the influence of school leadership for school improvement on professional collaboration for teacher professional development in Irish primary schools. I hope that this work will benefit school leaders by highlighting the need for policy to focus on their role as teacher educators and their professional learning and development needs inherent therein. It was evident throughout my time in the field that the school leaders at each site were deeply committed to their roles, responsibilities, and school communities. I believe school leaders are the fulcrum for meaningful change in the school system, but they

must be fully supported by stakeholders and external agents if the systematic changes needed are to become a reality. The potential for future research in this area is vast, particularly with the commitment of the Teaching Council and the DE to collaborate for the enactment of Cosán by 2027. The hope is that genuine distributed leadership for meaningful school improvement, centred around transformative purposes of teacher professional learning and development, will become an everyday reality in Irish primary schools.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Advertisement

Attention School Principals: Research Participants Required

A request for schools who are interested in participating and a doctoral thesis research project on school leadership of professional development for school improvement. The researcher, Tríona Cunnane, is a student attending the School of Policy and Practice, DCU Institute of Education. I am conducting a multi-site case study in four primary schools to explore the perspectives of principals, deputy principals and assistant principals on whether school improvement is influencing teacher professional development in schools or not. I intend to conduct and audio record group interviews via Zoom with members of the school leadership team in each school to establish your experiences of leading school improvement and to yield information from multiple school types on whether school leadership for school improvement is influencing teacher professional development or not. The group interviews will be approximately 45 minutes duration followed by an individual interview with the school principal lasting approximately 30 minutes to further explore topics addressed during the group interviews.

If you and a sufficient number of school leaders in your school are interested in participating in this research project, please contact me on this email address: triona.cunnane3@mail.dcu.ie

Please note participants have the right to withdraw from their participation in this research at any stage.

Appendix B

Plain Language Statement

Dublin City University – Plain Language Statement for Participants

Name of Researcher: Tríona Cunnane

Supervisors: Professor Catherine Furlong & Dr. Alan Gorman

Contact Details: triona.cunnane3@mail.dcu.ie

School: School of Policy & Practice, DCU Institute of Education, DCU St. Patrick's Campus, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

Research Title: An exploration of school leadership of teacher professional development for school improvement.

Declaration: This research is partially funded by a DCU, Institute of Education, Postgraduate Bursary Award.

Dear Participant,

As part of my studies on the Doctorate of Education (EdD) in DCU Institute of Education, I am conducting a multi-site case study in four primary schools to explore the perspectives of principals, deputy principals and assistant principals on whether school improvement is influencing teacher professional development in schools or not. I intend to conduct and audio record group interviews via Zoom with members of the school leadership team in each school to establish your experiences of leading school improvement and to yield information from multiple school types on whether school leadership for school improvement is influencing teacher professional development or not. The group interviews will be followed by a one-to-one interview with the school principal in each school to explore the overall leadership of the school.

As the interviews will yield personal data, I am compelled to explain data protection procedures and GDPR compliance in relation to personal data. DCU Institute of Education will be the data controller and in order to maintain confidentiality only the main researcher, Tríona Cunnane, will maintain access to the raw data generated during this research project, with my supervisors having access to anonymised data. While every effort is made to protect participants' identities, participants will not be anonymous to each other in the group interview setting. Nevertheless, the use of data collected during this research project will be used only for the purposes outlined and for which consent has been obtained.

Information gathered during the group interviews will be transcribed and checked with you prior to being anonymised and coded using letters and numbers by the researcher. The schools and participants involved will not be identified and no real names will be used in the thesis or in any presentations or publications arising from it. The transcripts will then be analysed using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software package. The NVivo Support team is employed by DCU to provide technical support to students and therefore have access to anonymised data during the technical support

process. All information gathered will be saved on the researchers DCU Google Drive with the exception of Zoom audio recordings which will be stored on the Zoom Cloud feature on DCU's licenced version of Zoom. Information will be held for a period of five years from the date of collection, after which the researchers will delete any digital data from her DCU Google Drive and Zoom Cloud.

The DCU Data Protection Officer is Mr. Martin Ward (dataprotection@dcu.ie Ph: (01) 7005118/7008257). Should you have any reason to, you are entitled to lodge a complaint with the Irish Data Protection Commission. You have the right to access your own personal data and this can be done by contacting the DCU Data Protection Unit.

The potential risks are limited to you, given your role and responsibilities as a primary school leader, although I acknowledge that for whatever reason you might wish to withdraw participation in the research study. If you wish to withdraw from participating in this study you can contact me, Tríona Cunnane at the email address listed above. In this event, I will follow protocols outlined in my ethical approval, respecting your right to withdraw from participating in this project, at any time without any consequences. Your participation in every stage of this project is voluntary and should you choose to withdraw no further data collection will take place and previously collected data will be destroyed.

Expected benefits for you as a participant include an opportunity to reflect on your school leadership role and your capacity to lead teacher professional development in your school.

Confidentiality of information can only be protected within the limitations of the law i.e. it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact me through my email address: triona.cunnane3@mail.dcu.ie . A summary of the findings of this research study will be made available to all participants on request. If you are willing to participate in this research study, please complete the informed consent form which is attached. You will not be able to participate in the group or individual interviews until you have provided consent.

Yours faithfully,

Tríona Cunnane

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: **The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail** rec@dcu.ie

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Research Study Title: An exploration of school leadership of teacher professional development for school improvement

Researcher: Tríona Cunnane, School of Policy & Practice, DCU Institute of Education.

Supervisors: Professor Catherine Furlong & Dr. Alan Gorman, School of Policy & Practice, DCU Institute of Education.

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this research is to yield information from multiple school types on whether school leadership for school improvement is influencing teacher professional development or not.

Participant Requirements:

Participant – please complete the following (Indicate Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me). Yes/No

I understand the information provided. Yes/No

I understand the information provided in relation to data protection. Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study. Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions. Yes/No

I am aware that my interview will be audio recorded via Zoom. Yes/No

I have been informed that Dublin City University is the data controller for this research project. Yes/No

I have been informed that personal data being processed for this research project will be used for the researcher's ED.D. thesis or in any presentations or publications arising from it. Yes/No

I confirm that my participation in this research is voluntary. Yes/No

I understand the arrangements that have been made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information is subject to legal limitations. Yes/No

I understand that data will be retained for a period of five years after which it will be disposed of by the researcher. Yes/No

I confirm my consent to participate in Zoom interviews which will be audio recorded and saved to the Zoom Cloud for the purposes of this research project. Yes/No

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Witness:

Date:

Appendix D

Zoom Interview Protocol

The DCU licensed version of Zoom and the researcher's DCU Gmail account will be used during this research project. Zoom settings are configured at a DCU corporate level as follows and cannot be tailored to individual settings.

Interviewees will have been fully informed by the researcher of:

- How and why, I intend to use Zoom as part of the research project;
- What will happen to the information produced as a result of the Zoom interview (e.g. any recordings, notes, transcripts, etc.);
- How long any such information will be kept and the reasons for keeping it; and
- How the information will be destroyed at the end of the retention period.
- Interviewees will be given the opportunity in advance to consider whether they wish to participate in the Zoom interview; and
- Interviewees will be given the opportunity to decline or later withdraw from the interview process.
- Interviewees will be informed in advance of their data protection rights, including: the right of access to personal data relating to them, and the right to object to the processing of personal data relating to them.

Accessing a Zoom meeting

- Participants will not be allowed to join before the Host.
- Unique meeting IDs will be provided for each scheduled or instant meeting (rather than using a Personal Meeting ID (PMID).
- Participants will be unable to re-join a meeting if the Host has removed them.

- Telephone numbers masked.

Recordings & Transcripts

- Participants will not be able to save a transcript of the call.
- Meetings are not recorded automatically: only the Host may do this and access these recordings.
- Recording to local files is not allowed (cloud only).

Other security measures

- Files cannot be transferred via chat.

Zoom's instant messaging/chat feature for written communications while using Zoom will not be used. Instead, the researchers DCU Gmail account will be used as an alternative, reliable and secure method of communication.

Setting up of Zoom meetings

- When setting up the Zoom meetings, links will not be shared publicly, including on social media.
- A meeting password will be used, and the passwords will be changed for each interview, including for individual interviews with school principals
- A unique link will be used for each meeting.
- Registration will be required, and the meeting link will be circulated approx. 30 minutes beforehand.
- The 'Waiting Room' feature will be used, and only people who are registered for the call will be allowed in.

Audio, video, chat and screen sharing settings

- Audio settings will be changed so that only the Host can control the audio.
- I will set the chat setting, so that participants can only message the Host.
- I will set screen sharing to “Host only”. (The default setting on Zoom allows all participants to share what's on their screens with the group, replacing the host's own camera feed, so this will need to be changed immediately.)
- I will disable the “Join before host” feature.
- I will enable encryption to protect privacy during the meeting.
- I will begin the call with all video and audio muted.
- I will avoid using my Personal Meeting ID (PMI) to host public events.

Managing the Zoom Meetings

Managing attendees: I can manage attendees in the following ways.

- Request that a participant unmutes.
- Stop a participant's video.
- Rename a participant.
- Put a participant on hold if enabled.
- Lock the meeting to prevent anyone new from joining.
- Place participants in the waiting room and admit/remove them from the waiting room.

Appendix E

Case Study Protocols

Interview Schedule: Group Interview with School Leadership Team

Interview Protocol

Interview Information

Date & Time _____Location_____

Interviewer _____Interviewee_____

Projected Length of Interview _____

File Name for Database _____

Introduction

Briefly introduce self, review Zoom protocols with participants. Read the plain language statement and ask participants to verbally affirm that they have signed and returned the Informed Consent form and that they are happy to proceed. Allow time for any questions that participants might have.

1. Can you outline some of the school improvement/DEIS planning processes that you engage in as team? If so, what do these activities look like? If so, can you describe how these influence your individual practice as school leaders? If not, what planning processes are engaged for school improvement/DEIS planning?
2. Are there any national policies or guidelines that either support or hinder you in your school leadership work? If so, can you provide further detail. If not, what do you think so?
3. Can you describe some formally organised school improvement activities that are led by school leaders in this school? If so, do they allow opportunities for

teachers to collaborate? Do you think these activities support teacher professional development in any way? If you do not organise formal school improvement activities why not?

4. Do external support services e.g. the PDST, or the inspectorate influence your leadership of school improvement? If so, in what ways? If not, why is this so? Are there any elements of your own professional development experiences that support you in leading school improvement?
5. Do the requirements of school improvement policy lend themselves to professional collaboration among teachers in your school? If so, can you describe what those professional collaborative activities look like? If not, can you think why this might be so?
6. Does school leadership influence teacher professional development through school improvement activities? If so, what does that look like in your school? If not, why do you think this is so?
7. How would you describe the development of this school as a Professional Learning Organisation? Do school improvement/DEIS planning processes contribute to the development of the school as a Professional Learning Organisations? If so, can you provide further detail of this? If not, why do you think this is so?
8. Is there any further information about your experience that you would like to share that we have not covered?

Principal Interview Protocol

Interview Information

Date & Time _____Location_____

Interviewer _____Interviewee_____

Projected Length of Interview _____

File Name for Database _____

Interview Schedule: One-to-One Interview with School Principals

1. Can you describe the overall school improvement/DEIS processes that you engage in as a school principal? Do you think the school improvement planning processes in this school promote the professional development of school leaders and teachers? If so, in what ways? If not, why do you think this is so? Does the Board of Management have any involvement with the development of school improvement processes in the school? If so, what do they look like? If so, how do they contribute to the development of the school as a Professional Learning Organisation? If not, why do you think this is so?

2. Are there any particular policies or guidelines that either support or hinder you in your overall leadership role in this school? If so, can you provide further detail?

3. Can you describe some formally organised school improvement/DEIS activities that are led by school leaders in this school? If so, do they allow teachers an opportunity to collaborate? Do you think these activities support teacher professional development in any way? If you do not organise formal school improvement activities, why not?

4. How do you envisage the development of this school as a Professional Learning Organisation? How are the roles and responsibilities of school leaders co-ordinated?

Do formal school leaders have a role to play in the development of this school as a professional learning organisation? If so, what does that role look like? If not, why do you think this is so? Outside of formally appointed school leaders, do other teachers contribute to the development of this school as a Professional Learning Organisation? If so, in what ways? If not, why do you think this is so?

6. Do external support services e.g., the Primary Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the inspectorate support you in the overall development of this school as a Professional Learning Organisation? If so, in what ways? If not, why is this so? Are there any elements of your own professional experiences and/or professional development education that support you in leading school improvement? If so, could you provide further detail on this. Are there any other professional support services that support you in the overall leadership of this school? If so, could you provide further detail of them and how they influence your leadership of this school. If not, can you think of any other support that would help you in developing this school as a Professional Learning Organisation?

7. Overall, do the requirements of school improvement/DEIS policy lend themselves to professional collaboration among teachers in your school? If so, can you describe the potential benefits of those professional collaborative activities for teacher professional development? If not, can you think why this might be so? Do any other policies or guidelines influence professional collaboration in this school? If so, in what way? If not, what do you think this is so?

8. Overall, is school leadership influencing teacher professional development through school improvement activities in this school? If so, what does that look like? How do school leaders make decisions and plan for such activities? If not, why do you think

this is so? Are there mechanisms in place within the school to evaluate the effectiveness of school improvement/DEIS activities? If so, what do they look like? If not, why do you think this is so?

9. Is there any further information about your experience that you would like to share that we have not covered?

Appendix F

Multi-Site Case Study Code Book

Phase 1 - Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes.

Phase 2 - Systematic data coding. (open coding)

Name	Description	Files	References
Additional Responsibility	Opportunities for teacher leaders to take on responsibilities.	4	6
All Teachers are Leaders	The leadership activity of teachers outside of formally appointed roles.	3	6
Appointing Leaders	Challenges in appointing leadership roles.	5	11
Board of Management	The influence of the BOM on school leadership for school improvement.	4	14
Challenges in Teacher PD	Obstacles to teacher professional development in schools.	4	19
Challenging External Policy	Challenging policy/buffering the school.	1	2
Collaborative Planning	Description of collaborative planning among members of staff	2	10
Covid 19	The impact of Covid 19 on school leadership of professional development for school improvement.	4	23
Croke Park Hours	The structure, organisation, and leadership of Croke Park hours.	6	21
Curriculum Leadership	References to Curriculum Leadership	5	46
Decision Making	School processes for decision making.	2	16
DEIS Target Setting	DEIS targets.	1	2
Developing School	Supporting teacher professional development in a developing school.	3	43
Advantages	School Leaders Articulate Advantage of their Context	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Policy Development	Reference to policy development specific to developing school	1	1
Time	Time Management in a Developing School	1	3
Engaging children	The role of pupil voice in school improvement.	1	1
Engaging Research	Policy and Research informing practice.	3	7
Engaging Staff	Instances where school leaders have spoken about engaging staff for school improvement processes.	5	18
Evaluative Measures	Self-evaluation of processes for school improvement.	4	8
External Support Services	Professional Bodies & Experts who support school leaders.	6	57
Hindrance	Aspects that hinder school leaders in their roles.	6	31
Informal Professional Collaboration	Informal collaboration among staff	2	2
Inspection Experience	Inspection Experiences.	4	9
Leadership and Management	Planning leadership and management activities.	6	54
Leadership in DEIS	Leadership experiences specific to DEIS requirements.	2	22
Leadership Model	Models of School Leadership.	5	12
Leadership of SSE	Use of documents, leadership roles and experiences.	6	60
Leading a Small School	The challenges and experiences of teaching principals in established and developing schools.	2	22
Mandatory Policies	Mandatory policies which must be completed initially at the outset in developing schools.	3	9
Networking among Schools	Opportunities to network with other school leaders.	4	13

Name	Description	Files	References
Parents	Engaging with parents for school improvement.	2	7
Passion for school improvement	Motivation for School Leadership for School Improvement	2	2
Patron Support	Support from the school patron	3	3
Planning for Teacher Professional Development	Planning and processes for teacher professional development.	4	15
Planning for the Future	Planning for the future of a developing school.	3	18
Policy Guidelines	Engaging policy documents to support leadership work.	5	26
Policy on Appointment of Leaders	Challenges in appointing school leaders.	2	7
Policy Requirements	Policy requirements and expectations of school leaders.	6	16
Prioritising	School leaders prioritise what is needed	2	9
Problem Solving	Approaches to problem solving	2	9
Reflection	Reflection amongst staff	2	8
Roles and Responsibilities	School leaders assigned duties	5	39
School as Professional Learning Organisation	School leaders' perceptions of schools as professional learning organisations.	6	41
School Context		1	4
School Culture	Developing and existing school cultures.	4	24
School Description	Overall description of school and staffing.	4	12
School Improvement Focus	Chosen focus for school improvement.	3	18
School Leaders Accountability	Accountability mechanisms for school leaders.	3	7
School Leaders Needs	Supports needed by school leaders to lead school improvement.	3	13
School Leaders Professional Collaboration	Collaboration among school leaders.	6	25

Name	Description	Files	References
School Leaders Professional Development	Professional Development experiences of school leaders.	6	24
School Leaders Professional Experience	Discussion of prior professional leadership experience	4	11
School Leadership Culture	School culture specific to school leadership activity.	5	23
School Leadership Processes	School leadership processes that support teacher professional development.	5	54
School Leadership Team	Experiences of school leaders as part of a school leadership team.	6	40
School Vision	School leaders' vision for their school.	3	15
Shared Leadership	Formal school leadership and teacher leadership	3	16
Staff Professional Collaboration	Opportunities for staff to collaborate for school improvement.	6	94
Teacher Leadership	Opportunities for teacher leaders to lead.	5	18
Teacher Professional Development	School-led opportunities for teacher professional development.	6	44
Challenging Beliefs	School leaders understanding of effective teacher professional development.	1	3
Experimentation	School leaders' beliefs about effective professional development.	1	2
PD Needs	School leaders recognise professional development needs of staff.	1	3
Values	School leaders' articulation of specific values.	4	28

Phase 3 - Generating initial themes from coded and collated data. (developing categories)

Name	Description	Files	References
Formal School Leadership		6	112
Policy on Appointment of Leaders	Challenges in appointing school leaders.	2	7
Roles and Responsibilities	School leaders assigned duties	5	39
School Leaders Professional Collaboration	Collaboration among school leaders.	4	19
School Leaders Professional Development	Professional Development experiences of school leaders.	6	24
School Leaders Professional Experience	Discussion of prior professional leadership experience	4	11
School Leadership Culture	School culture specific to school leadership activity.	5	23
Leading a School Culture of Collaboration	School Culture influences how staff collaborate	4	24
Collaborative School Culture	Developing and existing school cultures.	4	24
Models of School Leadership	Models of school leadership enacted by participants	6	27
Leadership Model	Models of School Leadership.	5	12
Shared Leadership	Formal school leadership and teacher leadership	2	15
School as PLO	School leaders describe the development of the school as a PLO	6	45
School as Professional Learning Organisation	School leaders' perceptions of schools as professional learning organisations.	6	43

Name	Description	Files	References
School Context	School leaders refer to the influence of school context on their activities	6	107
Developing School	Supporting teacher professional development in a developing school.	3	43
Advantages	School Leaders Articulate Advantage of their Context	1	1
Policy Development	Reference to policy development specific to developing school	1	1
Time	Time Management in a Developing School	1	3
Leadership in DEIS	Leadership experiences specific to DEIS requirements.	2	22
Leading a Small School	The challenges and experiences of teaching principals in established and developing schools.	2	22
Patron Support	Support from the school patron	2	2
Planning for the Future	Planning for the future of a developing school.	3	18
School Improvement Process	Processes described by school leaders to enact school improvement requirements	6	410
Board of Management	The influence of the BOM on school leadership for school improvement.	4	14
DEIS Target Setting	DEIS targets.	1	2
Engaging Staff	Instances where school leaders have spoken about engaging staff for school improvement processes.	5	18
Evaluative Measures	Self-evaluation of processes for school improvement.	4	8
External Support Services	Professional Bodies & Experts who support school leaders.	6	57
Hindrance	Aspects that hinder school leaders in their roles.	6	31
Inspection Experience	Inspection Experiences.	4	9

Name	Description	Files	References
Leadership and Management	Planning leadership and management activities.	6	54
Leadership of SSE	Use of documents, leadership roles and experiences.	6	60
Mandatory Policies	Mandatory policies which must be completed initially at the outset in developing schools.	3	9
Networking among Schools	Opportunities to network with other school leaders.	4	13
Parents	Engaging with parents for school improvement.	2	7
Passion for school improvement	Motivation for School Leadership for School Improvement	2	2
Patron Support	Support from the school patron	3	3
Policy Guidelines	Engaging policy documents to support leadership work.	5	26
Policy Requirements	Policy requirements and expectations of school leaders.	6	16
School as Professional Learning Organisation	School leaders' perceptions of schools as professional learning organisations.	5	28
School Improvement Focus	Chosen focus for school improvement.	3	18
School Leaders Accountability	Accountability mechanisms for school leaders.	3	7
School Leaders Needs	Supports needed by school leaders to lead school improvement.	3	13
School Vision	School leaders' vision for their school.	3	15
School Leaders Professional Collaboration	School leaders collaborate to lead and manage the school	6	57
Decision Making	School processes for decision making.	2	16
Planning for Teacher Professional Development.	Planning and processes for teacher professional development.	4	15

Name	Description	Files	References
Prioritising	School leaders prioritise what is needed	2	9
Problem Solving	Approaches to problem solving	2	9
School Leadership Practice	Formal school leadership practice	6	168
Challenging External Policy	Challenging policy/buffering the school.	1	2
Covid 19	The impact of Covid 19 on school leadership of professional development for school improvement.	4	23
Curriculum Leadership	References to Curriculum Leadership	5	45
Engaging Research	Policy and Research informing practice.	3	7
Leadership and Management	Planning leadership and management activities.	6	54
Prioritising	School leaders prioritise what is needed	2	9
Values	School leaders' articulation of specific values.	4	28
Teacher Leadership	Engagement of teacher leaders	6	30
Additional Responsibility	Opportunities for teacher leaders to take on responsibilities.	4	6
All Teachers are Leaders	The leadership activity of teachers outside of formally appointed roles.	3	6
Teacher Leadership	Opportunities for teacher leaders to lead.	5	18
Teacher Professional Collaboration		6	132
Collaborative Planning	Description of collaborative planning among members of staff	2	10
Engaging Staff	Instances where school leaders have spoken about engaging staff for school improvement processes.	5	18
Informal Professional Collaboration	Informal collaboration among staff	2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Reflection	Reflection amongst staff	2	8
Staff Professional Collaboration	Opportunities for staff to collaborate for school improvement.	6	93
Teacher Professional Development		6	154
Challenges in Teacher PD	Obstacles to teacher professional development in schools.	4	19
Croke Park Hours	The structure, organisation, and leadership of Croke Park hours.	6	21
Planning for Teacher Professional Development.	Planning and processes for teacher professional development.	4	15
School Leadership Processes	School leadership processes that support teacher professional development.	5	54
Teacher Professional Development	School-led opportunities for teacher professional development.	6	44
Challenging Beliefs	School leaders understanding of effective teacher professional development.	1	3
Experimentation	School leaders' beliefs about effective professional development.	1	2
PD Needs	School leaders recognise professional development needs of staff.	1	3

Phase 4 - Developing and reviewing themes. (coding on)

Name	Description	Files	References
School Improvement Processes	This theme is about school improvement processes engaged by school leaders which are influencing professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development in schools;	6	277
External Support Services	The role of external support service providers in supporting the school improvement process through collaboration with school leaders and/or	6	66

Name	Description	Files	References
	directly by facilitating school-based professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development.		
External Support Providers	Professional Bodies & Experts who support school leaders.	6	57
Inspection Experience	Inspection Experiences.	4	9
Hindrance	Aspects that hinder school leaders in their roles.	6	32
School Leaders Needs	Supports needed by school leaders to lead school improvement.	3	13
Leaders of School Self-Evaluation	Describes how decisions are made about evaluative measures, enactment of policy, and planning for school improvement are influencing staff professional collaboration and decisions about professional development needs.	6	179
Challenging External Policy	Challenging policy/buffering the school.	1	2
Leadership and Management	Planning leadership and management activities.	6	54
Leadership of SSE	Use of documents, leadership roles and experiences.	6	57
Evaluative Measures	Self-evaluation of processes for school improvement.	4	8
School Leaders Accountability	Accountability mechanisms for school leaders.	3	7
School Improvement Focus	Chosen focus for school improvement.	3	18
Policy Enactment	Participants describe how they enact policy in their own context.	6	51
Mandatory Policies	Mandatory policies which must be completed initially at the outset in developing schools.	3	9

Name	Description	Files	References
Policy Guidelines	Engaging policy documents to support leadership work.	5	26
Policy Requirements	Policy requirements and expectations of school leaders.	6	16
The Board of Management	The influence of the Board of Management on staff professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development.	4	14
Board of Management	The influence of the BOM on school leadership for school improvement.	3	12
Teacher Professional Collaboration	Describes what teacher professional collaboration looks like in practice.	6	93
Staff Professional Collaboration	Opportunities for staff to collaborate for school improvement.	6	92
Collaborative Planning	Description of collaborative planning among members of staff	2	10
Engaging Staff	Instances where school leaders have spoken about engaging staff for school improvement processes.	5	18
Reflection	Reflection amongst staff	2	8
Teacher Professional Development	Teacher Professional Development activities that are being influenced by school leadership for school improvement and how they look in practice.	6	109
Challenges in Teacher PD	Obstacles to teacher professional development in schools.	4	19
Formal School-Based Professional Development	What formal school-based professional development looks like.	6	21
Planning for Teacher Professional Development.	Planning and processes for teacher professional development.	4	15
School Leadership Processes	School leadership processes that support teacher professional development.	5	54

Name	Description	Files	References
The Development of Schools as Sites of Professional Learning	Describes how school leaders envision the development of the school as a professional learning organisation and/or professional learning community.	6	100
Building a Collaborative Culture	Describes the processes that formal school leaders engage to develop a collaborative culture in their schools.	5	26
Collaborative School Culture	Developing and existing school cultures.	5	25
Professional Learning Communities	Opportunities to network with other school leaders.	4	13
School as PLO	School leaders describe the development of the school as a PLO	6	46
School as Professional Learning Organisation	School leaders' perceptions of schools as professional learning organisations.	5	28
School Vision	School leaders vision for their school.	3	15
The Practice & Experiences of Formal School Leadership	This theme describes how formally appointed school leaders operate to influence professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development in schools.	6	292
Leadership & Management in Context	School leaders refer to the influence of school context on formal leadership activities which influence staff professional collaboration and decisions about school based professional development.	6	85
Developing School	Supporting teacher professional development in a developing school.	3	43
Advantages	School Leaders Articulate Advantage of their Context	1	1
Patron Support	Support from the school patron	3	3
Planning for the Future	Planning for the future of a developing school.	3	18

Name	Description	Files	References
Policy Development	Reference to policy development specific to developing school	1	1
Time	Time Management in a Developing School	1	3
Leadership in DEIS	Leadership experiences specific to DEIS requirements.	2	21
Leading a Small School	The challenges and experiences of teaching principals in established and developing schools.	2	21
Models of School Leadership	Models of school leadership enacted by participants	5	11
Leadership Model	Models of School Leadership.	5	11
Shared Leadership	Formal school leadership and teacher leadership	2	15
School Leaders Professional Collaboration	School leaders collaborate to lead and manage the school	6	58
Decision Making	School processes for decision making.	2	16
Planning for Teacher Professional Development.	Planning and processes for teacher professional development.	4	15
Prioritising	School leaders prioritise what is needed	2	9
Problem Solving	Approaches to problem solving	2	9
School Leaders Professional Development	Professional Development experiences of school leaders.	6	26
School Leaders Professional Experience	Discussion of prior professional leadership experience	4	11
School Leadership Practice	Formal school leadership practice including approaches to curriculum leadership at staff meetings and school-based professional development for curricular change.	6	112

Name	Description	Files	References
Covid 19	The impact of Covid 19 on school leadership of professional development for school improvement.	4	23
Curriculum Leadership	References to Curriculum Leadership	5	45
Engaging Research	Policy and Research informing practice.	3	7
Prioritising	School leaders prioritise what is needed	2	9
Values	School leaders' articulation of specific values.	4	28

Phase 5 - Refining, defining, and naming themes. (developing a thematic framework)

Name	Description	Files	References
School Improvement Processes	School improvement processes describes the school improvement foci at each site. It describes how school leaders engage with external support services to drive school improvement. It identifies aspects of school leaders' roles that can hinder school improvement processes	6	110
Aspects that hinder School Leadership for School Improvement	This sub-theme describes aspects of their roles and responsibilities which school leaders have indicated can curb school improvement planning and related processes.	6	26
Engaging with External Support Services	This sub-theme describes how school leaders engage with external bodies and how they in turn, influence school improvement either through collaboration with school leaders or directly through professional collaboration with staff and/or school-based professional development activities.	6	40
School Improvement Planning	This sub-theme describes decision making around school improvement planning at each site and the enactment of policy which forms the basis for staff professional collaboration and the planning of professional development activities.	6	44
Shared School Leadership	This theme describes how school leadership teams collaborate to lead within and beyond the requirements of school improvement policy in their unique contexts. It describes various	6	81

Name	Description	Files	References
	approaches to shared leadership across the school, outside of formal school leadership roles.		
Leadership & Management in Context	This sub-theme describes how decisions about school leadership are influenced by the school context.	6	30
Models of School Leadership	This sub-theme describes how school leaders engage various models to empower school leaders and other teachers as leaders.	6	28
School Leaders Professional Collaboration	This sub-theme describes how school leaders collaborate to plan for whole-staff school improvement activities.	6	23
The development of schools as sites of professional learning	This theme describes school leaders' perceptions of the development of schools as sites of professional learning. It outlines what staff professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development in schools looks like. It demonstrates how school leaders understand the development of a collaborative culture within their school. School leaders made specific references to curriculum leadership which contributed to the construction of this theme.	6	91
Curriculum Leadership	This sub-theme describes approaches to curriculum leadership and school-based professional development for curricular change.	5	18
Leading & Developing a Collaborative Culture	This sub-theme is about how school leaders are leading a developing collaborative culture within their schools and how they envisage the development of schools as sites of professional learning.	6	41
Staff Professional Collaboration & School-based Professional Development	This sub-theme is about what staff professional collaboration to foster teacher professional development looks like in practice.	6	32

Appendix G

Case Report Schools A-D

School A Case Report

Case Study Title: An exploration of the influence of school leadership for school improvement on professional collaboration to foster teacher professional learning development in Irish primary schools.

Author: Tríona Cunnane

Analyst's Synopsis: This is a case study of a small school led by a teaching principal in an urban area. The focus is on school leadership for school improvement and its possible influence on professional collaboration to foster teacher professional learning development in schools. At this site the teaching principal ordinarily has a formally appointed leadership team in situ because the deputy principal and assistant principal are both absent on secondment and statutory approved leave. The school has a staff of five including the principal and several teachers are undertaking teacher leadership roles. The school engages in shared leadership activity for school improvement and engages the support of external agencies to lead school self-evaluation. These activities in turn are influencing professional collaboration which aims to foster teacher professional learning development in the school.

Situational Constraints: The principal has explained how problems recruiting existing staff to undertake formally appointed school leadership roles is influenced by the size of the school. This means that teachers are concerned about having to take over the responsibilities of the principal if needed. The small size of the school means that remuneration of the role of deputy principal is the same as that of an assistant principal position and thus there is no financial award for increased formal school leadership responsibilities. The principal explained that it is the nature of a small school to have a high turnover of staff meaning that the leadership team changes on a regular basis. The principal has explained that the LAOS policy document is quite large for such a small staff to get through and feels they would benefit from a more condensed version. The school has an unusually high enrolment of children with special educational needs in the junior classes and this influences some of the practice of school leadership for school improvement.

Uniqueness among other cases: This report indicated that there are some challenges in appointing and maintaining formally appointed school leaders in a small school. Nevertheless, there is a willingness on the part of teachers to undertake teacher leadership roles and responsibilities.

Prominence of Theme 1 in this case: Prominent particularly through discussion of shared leadership.

Prominence of Theme 2 in this case: Prominent although discussion of inspection less so.

Prominence of Theme 3 in this case: Prominent - definitive discussion of the structures for development of a collaborative culture and provides specific examples of collaborative activities which aim to foster teacher professional learning development.

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 1: Significant

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 2: High significance

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 3: Significant

Conceptual Factors: school leadership, school improvement, shared leadership, teacher leadership, inspection, external agencies, collaborative culture, professional collaboration, professional learning development.

Findings:

1. The principal collaborates with formally appointed school leaders in advance of staff meetings. The school leadership team engages the PIEW model to control and manage the flow of initiatives in the school. The Covid-19 pandemic meant the staff regularly collaborated on Zoom. Policy on remuneration for school leaders has impacted the motivation of staff to apply for formal school leadership roles.
2. The principal provides opportunities for teacher leadership by allowing teachers to take responsibility for various initiatives. Although there is a formally appointed school leadership team, she views her staff as a team of five and describes transparency among staff with respect to decisions about school improvement and other formal school leadership activity. The Board of Management liaise with the principal and the staff representative to the board usually around the development of policy such as the admissions policy.
3. When the principal began working in the school initially, she would collaborate with the deputy principal to plan for School Self-Evaluation. However, the focus now is on the whole staff working on policy together during staff meetings. The school has had several foci for school improvement in recent years including P.E., Child Protection, Special Educational Needs, and I.T.
4. Overall, the principal finds the Looking at Our Schools guidelines are a hindrance in a small school. She said they help them to know what they should be doing but it would be helpful if they were more condensed so that they would be more suitable for a team of five.
5. The principal finds the LAOS guidelines are useful because they inform them what they need to do. Simultaneously, she says that they are a hindrance for a staff of five teachers and feels it would be helpful if they were condensed more.
6. The school engages with several external agencies. This includes NEPS, the teacher for the deaf and the NCSE to meet the high level of special education needs in the school. The SET routinely collaborates with these agencies and then the principal, teachers and SNAs about improvements relating to special education needs.

7. The school has engaged support from the PDST and Kamara to help develop the I.T. focus of school improvement and this support was beneficial during the Covid-19 pandemic in particular. The school received support as part of the enactment of the Primary Language Curriculum. The principal observed that this subsequently influenced school leaders to lead professional collaborative activities among staff to support professional learning particularly in I.T. and the PLC.
8. The school was supported by their several inspection visits to support School Self-Evaluation. The inspector visited the school routinely and provided support in the area of P.E. which was the focus of their school improvement plan at the time. The principal felt that this did influence their practice.
9. The principal supports the development of a collaborative culture by providing staff with opportunities to collaborate on specific aspects of school improvement at staff meetings. The staff has a general staff meeting and then breaks into smaller groups to collaborate on particular areas of need. The principal recognises the need to network with other schools to find out what they are doing as a means to support practice in their own school.
10. School leaders are leading professional collaborative activities for school improvement with varying levels of collaborative engagement. The principal describes these as influencing the professional learning development of teachers.

Possible Excerpts for the Multicase Report:

"I would have met with the in-school management team and then we would have met with the whole staff but to be honest with you, because there is so much good will, everything is quite transparent in the school to do with policy."

"Initially, when we started off it was me and the vice principal and we did most of the work together and did the school self-evaluation".

"There is an awful lot of good will and free will and putting the shoulder to the wheel and just doing it. Doing policies together, sitting down together during Croke Park hours".

"When PDST or someone came in I found that kind of gave a new lease of life and then to carry on from that when teachers take on a role, when they are role models for instance the vice principal with the iPads and the ICT, just sharing and collaborating".

"Like…so supported to an extent but you feel like they could be more condensed."

"It's a moveable feast all the time. So, you're hitting on bits and pieces of it but my one criticism of it, there is an awful lot in it for a small…for everybody, you know, especially for a team of five teachers".

"I might do a general meeting…and she might go off with the SNAs…so they all sit together and then we'd all split up".

"What's the school up the road doing? Have they got other ideas? Could we share?"

“We were able to have two interactive iPads…she’d be updating like anything new on those and myself and the other teacher have the older versions and we’ve updated those as well…so looking…because the iPads are...they only came in two years ago…asking us what we are…kind of giving us continuing professional development, giving us ideas what we can do with the class”.

Commentary

With special attention to the case of a small school led by a teaching principal, the report describes how the principal leads formally appointed school leaders and teacher leaders. There is clear evidence of shared leadership for school improvement. The staff engage with multiple external agencies to meet the needs of children and teachers in line with their school improvement planning. External agencies influence and motivate school leaders to lead professional collaboration and act as role models for other teachers in areas identified for school improvement. There are formal structures in place to facilitate the development of a collaborative culture particularly at staff meetings. School leaders lead professional learning activities with varying levels of collaborative engagement which are influencing PLD to varying degrees.

School B Case Report

Case Study Title: An exploration of the influence of school leadership for school improvement on professional collaboration to foster teacher professional learning development in Irish primary schools.

Author: Tríona Cunnane

Analyst's Synopsis: This is a case study of a large DEIS Urban Band One school, led by an administrative principal, deputy principal and a school leadership team consisting of one AP1 and three APII positions. Given its DEIS status the school had a designated Home School Community Liaison Coordinator (HSCL). The HSCL scheme aims to improve educational outcomes for children through supporting parents/guardians. It is a central component of the Department of Education and Skills DEIS scheme, and Tusla Education Support Service has responsibility for the scheme which is only available in DEIS schools. The HSCL coordinator is ordinarily a teacher from the school who provides support to children and parents in attaining their educational goals. The school engages in shared leadership for school improvement through it's DEIS planning. DEIS is on the agenda of every Board of Management meeting. Formally appointed school leaders lead teams of teacher leaders to meet the objectives of DEIS planning. Opportunities are provided for teachers to lead other initiatives in the school if they so choose. These leadership activities allow opportunities for staff professional collaboration and contribute to the overall development of the school as a professional learning organisation.

Situational Constraints: The principal explained that historically the school had a much larger, formally appointed school leadership team which consisted of three API and six APII positions. She praised her formally appointed school leaders for taking on extra roles and learning extracurricular activities. However, she felt hindered in leading the overall leadership of the school because there is only so much she can ask the existing school leadership team to do. She described challenges with DE policy around staff allocations for the following school year as a hindrance to planning for school improvement.

Uniqueness among other cases: This report indicated some unique features of school leadership for school improvement in a DEIS setting. There are six DEIS themes and DEIS action planning for improvement is expected within each of these six themes: attendance, retention, progression, literacy, numeracy and partnerships with parents and others. The HSLC role is considered key in the planning processes in a DEIS school and in this school the HSLC is a formally appointed school leader although this is not necessarily the case in all DEIS schools. The DEIS planning process underpins the work of formally appointed school leaders who in turn lead teams of teacher leaders to enact DEIS action plans in this school.

Prominence of Theme 1 in this case: Prominent particularly through team structures for formally appointed school leaders and opportunities for teacher leadership.

Prominence of Theme 2 in this case: Prominent through DEIS planning for School-Self Evaluation and the engagement of external agencies.

Prominence of Theme 3 in this case: Somewhat prominent with specific consideration given to the development of a collaborative culture and opportunities for

teachers to engage in professional collaboration to foster professional learning development.

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 1: Very high

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 2: High significance

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 3: Significant

Conceptual Factors: DEIS, school improvement, school leadership, shared leadership, school self-evaluation, professional collaboration, professional learning development, teacher leadership.

Findings:

1. The principal collaborates with the formally appointed in-school management team in advance of staff meetings. She assigns school leaders as team leaders in various roles and establishes that they should report back to her. She assigns responsibilities and specific tasks for team leaders to lead at staff meetings or elsewhere in the school. The in-school management team meetings provide an opportunity for her to touch base with school leaders in advance of staff meetings. School leaders describe a sharing, collaborative culture among school leaders and these meetings can act as a support mechanism, a sharing of news and ideas, and a sharing of solutions to problems put forward. HSCL & Board of management engage in shared leadership for school improvement unique to the DEIS status of the school.
2. The principal describes how once specific actions have been decided upon with a team leader teachers are given the opportunity to share leadership on various teams. School leaders lead teams in areas such as literacy, numeracy and attendance and are responsible for organising team meetings. The team meetings provide a chance for the team to see where the needs of the school are, to discuss any initiatives that they might start to ensure they begin with the teachers. An assistant principal describes the element of distributive leadership as a feature of school leadership in their school whereby teachers and other staff are empowered to take on different initiatives based on their strengths and interests. School leaders collaborate with teachers via email or by chatting to them to get them involved in initiatives. Efforts are made to involve teachers that are not on teams by getting them involved in school-wide initiatives.
3. The requirements of DEIS underpin the structures in the school for shared leadership and drive the planning processes for school improvement. The principal describes how DEIS is the vehicle that they have been using for the last few years to develop their school improvement plan. Planning for School-Self Evaluation is a cyclical process whereby school leaders gather evidence and test out new approaches. This could be evaluated e.g., by collaborating on standardised test scores at a staff meeting. A teacher leader on the staff acts as DEIS co-ordinator and collates and communicates evaluative information to the whole staff and the Board of Management. The school leadership team uses the LAOS document to inform their planning processes for their DEIS plan and they have proven beneficial to support planning for both teachers and school leaders.
4. The school leadership team have collaborated with the inspectorate since the principal took over. Initially, the principal invited the inspector to the school to

support the development of their new DEIS plan. The inspector met with the school leadership team and provided guidance on target-setting and overall approaches to planning. School leaders make use of the SSE website and the principal stated that regular SSE bulletins from the inspectorate have proven very useful in supporting their planning.

5. The school engages with multiple external agencies with PDST having the greatest influence on school improvement initiatives. The school has had multiple visits from PDST cuiditheoirí to support enactment of the new Primary Language Curriculum. The school leadership team described how the cuiditheoir did an introduction to the curriculum and then responded to class teachers' specific requests for guidance. The cuiditheoir used the feedback from teachers to plan for their needs at their next school-based planning day. The PDST have supported the school in implementing their digital strategy as well. The principal described how this motivated staff to seek out further professional learning development opportunities. The principal says the PDST have helped staff to overcome anxiety about the new primary language curriculum and has resulted in them talking together and sharing practice.
6. The principal articulated communication, collaboration, and collegiality as the bedrock for the development of a collaborative culture in the school. The school has regular staff meetings which act as a vehicle to trial out new initiatives. The teachers have monthly planning meetings which are led by team leaders and allow them an opportunity to learn about and bring back new ideas to their own classrooms. Staff meetings have been broken down into class units and this has been advantageous because it provides for greater collaboration and greater coordination among class groups. The principal is a member of the IPPN, and this provides her with opportunities to collaborate with other principals.
7. School leaders describe collaborative activities which were developed to support professional learning development for the DEIS plan in numeracy. Information on a six-week numeracy initiative is emailed to the staff and they have the opportunity to trial activities at the staff meeting. The classroom teachers are given time each month to plan collaboratively for the primary language curriculum. The school draws on external professional development in Maths Recovery and assessment to support school improvement.

Possible Excerpts for the Multicase Report:

"We have our in-school management teams. I try to do them the week before the staff meeting so that we are all very clear what has to be done and where we're going and what everyone is going to do".

"And then I would say the element of distributive leadership as well where other teachers and other staff members are empowered to take on different initiatives and something that they are interested in and have a strength in".

"We would refer to the…Looking at Our Schools documentation. That's all about the SSE process so we would do that cyclical…you know, gather the information, test it out. And I suppose this year has been a bit unusual. We would have normally…we have started our new DEIS process for example, you know we did test it out, but we were completely hindered by Covid in actually activating it".

"We were selected for you know our digital strategy and our creative schools and so that has now come to an end this year. A PDST advisor came out and support the

teachers ahmm how that was all done, and it was a great success and I think getting Lego We Do…getting the children…the interest was phenomenal, and you know again we had staff who went on further and continued their own professional development".

"It's hard to know when you haven't been outside your school, but we know that like it is the bedrock…communication and collaboration is the bedrock and collegiality".

"In recent times staff meetings have been broken down into class units and ahm that has proved .... there have been advantages and disadvantages to it. One of the advantages is that there is greater collaboration on a smaller scale and more people perhaps have a voice in their small groups".

"We had great numeracy this year after our DEIS plan, the numeracy games…the numeracy committee were excellent at that. They out the information via email to all the staff, you know they made up amen maths games that all the children were doing…during for you know I think it was a six-week period and the children were tested before and after".

Commentary

With special attention to the case of a DEIS school led by an administrative principal and a formally appointed school leadership team, the report describes various team structures within the school that allow for planning and collaboration among school leaders. School leaders work as team leaders and lead teams of teacher leaders to lead various initiatives in line with DEIS planning. There is clear evidence of shared leadership for school improvement. The school leaders have collaborated with the inspectorate to develop their targets and support the development of their DEIS plan which is their vehicle for school improvement. The staff engage with the PDST to support their school improvement planning particularly in the enactment of the new primary language curriculum and their digital strategy. The principal articulated collaboration, communication, and collegiality as the bedrock for the development of a collaborative culture in the school. Staff meetings are structured so that teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with staff in the same class level. Team leaders lead monthly planning meetings which allow teachers an opportunity to ask them about ideas relating to new initiatives. School leaders lead professional learning activities with varying levels of collaborative engagement. School leaders draw on external providers of professional development in assessment and Math Recovery.

School C Case Report

Case Study Title: An exploration of the influence of school leadership for school improvement on professional collaboration to foster teacher professional learning development in Irish primary schools.

Author: Tríona Cunnane

Analyst's Synopsis: School C is a developing school situated in a rapidly growing urban community. At the time of data generation, the school was approaching the end of its second year in development. At that time there were three teachers employed, two mainstream teachers and a Special Education Teacher. The mainstream classes were Junior Infants and Senior Infants. The school was expected to expand and become a seven-teacher school the following year. The principal was working as a teaching principal in a special education setting. The principal anticipated that he would move to an administrative principal role the following year, once the school became a seven-teacher school. At the time of data generation, the school had not been sanctioned for any formal school leadership positions outside the role of the principal.

Situational Constraints: The principal describes how a high level of collaboration has been a necessity particularly in the first two months that the school opened. He described the challenge of not having a formally appointed school leadership team, yet he still needed to collaborate with the staff because decisions about the school were impacting them. He explained that he felt guilty asking teachers to stay back after school to collaborate. However, he said there was a lot of goodwill amongst the staff and a commitment to the overall development of the school. He said it was a struggle to develop leadership capacity as it has been very much a race to get things done. He described how the school had had two inspections within the first two years of opening and that these had focused on the development and enactment of mandatory policies such as the Admissions policy, Child Protection, and the Anti-Bullying policy. The focus on mandatory policies has meant that policies in areas pertaining to the more immediate needs of the school have not yet been developed. As such, the staff have developed procedures in areas such as homework and healthy eating rather than official policies. The school is starting from scratch and school improvement processes are driven by the need to fulfil mandatory requirements and the immediate needs of the school.

Uniqueness among other cases: This report indicates the challenges facing school leaders in leading the early stages of development of a new school. It describes some of the limitations facing school leaders for school improvement and how these challenges are overcome particularly through collaborative engagement with staff. The requirement to develop and enact mandatory policy is influencing the practice of school leadership for school improvement and staff professional collaboration.

Prominence of Theme 1 in this case: Somewhat significant.

Prominence of Theme 2 in this case: Prominent through discussion of planning for school improvement and the engagement of a range of external support services to support school leadership for school improvement.

Prominence of Theme 3 in this case: Prominent because the development of the school is reliant on extensive collaboration amongst staff; however, the level of collaborative engagement and how it fosters teacher professional learning is questionable.

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 1: Significant

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 2: High significance

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 3: High Significance

Conceptual Factors: School leadership, teaching principal, school improvement, teacher leadership, developing school, mandatory policy requirements, inspection, external support agencies, professional collaboration, professional learning development.

Findings:

1. The principal is the only formally appointed school leader however he reached an agreement with the other teachers on the staff that given their environment as a developing school that is a leadership in itself. The principal thinks of everyone as a leader however he does not feel that everyone's leadership capacity is being developed in the school at present because it is very much a race to get things done. The school leadership team engages the PIEW model to control and manage the flow of initiatives in the school. The principal describes his relationship with the Board of Management. He reports to them on a monthly basis and leaves each meeting with an action plan for the month. However, he does not feel that they are facilitating school improvement in any practical way at present, and this is something he would like to get more training and support on. School Self-Evaluation, school improvement and school development are on the agenda at every board meeting.
2. The principal describes how extensive collaboration has been the modus operandi since the school opened. He describes how there are many decisions to be made which impact all of the staff and that it would not be possible to make those decisions in isolation. However, he relies on the good will of staff describing how he asked them to stay back for over 36 hours within the first two months of the school opening. He described feeling guilty about asking staff to do this although he says they were happy to do it and committed to the development of the school.
3. The staff have struggled with the term school improvement because they are starting from scratch. The principal describes the advantage of being able to decide everything from the outset; however, it is also challenging because there are so many areas to work, and their time is limited. The principal recognises the importance of using research to inform policy development within the school but the lack of a formally appointed school leadership team and competing demands means they are developing procedures and/or tailoring policies. The school enrolment is infants only and so play has been a focus of

their school improvement planning through Aistear. Restorative practice and the development of school policy on communication, healthy eating, homework, the behaviour policy, the inclusion policy, a handwriting policy and fundraising procedures are among the areas the staff have been working on for school improvement. The principal has described how the necessity to enact mandatory policies means that policies that reflect the immediate needs of the school have been developed as procedures rather than formal policies.

4. The school has received ongoing support from external agencies including PDST and from a lecturer in one of the Institutes of Education. The principal expects that they will engage with the NCSE as they are due to open a special class the following year. He plans to ask them to come to the school for an advisory visit to support planning with the staff.
5. PDST has supported school improvement in different areas although the experiences have varied. The principal found that the training in Restorative Practice didn't meet their needs and they completed a different course on Restorative Practice. They derived six statements from that course, and they continue to collaborate on Restorative Practice at each staff meeting. The principal requested support for School Self-Evaluation and the focus was on Aistear. They received sustained support from the PDST which helped them to develop their school improvement plan in Aistear. They received support from a university lecturer who provided them with readings on Aistear which further support the development of the school improvement plan. PDST facilitated three sessions on the Guidance on Preparation for Teaching & Learning policy from the Department of Education which supported the development of planning templates for classroom teachers and for whole- school long term planning.
6. The school has undergone two inspections since they have opened, and the focus has been on the enactment of mandatory policies. The principal is hoping to discuss the planning work completed with sustained support from PDST with the inspector and describes fear of inspection among teachers as a barrier to school improvement. He believes that change is needed in terms of inspection and that inspectors should be there to support.
7. The principal articulated the importance of listening to everyone's opinion and giving everyone a chance to try things out even if there is a possibility that their idea might fail. He stated the importance of the ability to challenge and be challenged and creating the space for that as an important element of bringing about change. He has begun to have professional conversations with staff, on an individual basis about how things are going and where they think change is needed. He envisions formal and informal conversations with individual staff members as an important aspect of developing a collaborative culture for school improvement. The staff do have monthly staff meetings where they have an agenda and type up minutes however, he recognises the need for formal whole school collaboration to be better coordinated as the school develops. PDST

have provided the staff with practical support on how to formalise professional collaboration in a more structured way for the future.

8. The staff collaborate extensively on a range of areas such as handwriting, Aistear and the Primary Language Curriculum to foster teacher professional learning development.

Possible Excerpts for the Multicase Report:

"We chatted about it as the three of us that look, even if the three of us aren't formal leaders at least (pauses) being the first three teachers in the school there is a leadership by or in itself".

"I'd like to think of everyone as a leader in some way. Like I-I would love it if everyone had, felt they had a role outside their class or their just teaching responsibility and SNAs…I would include SNAs in that as well".

"We follow the PIEW mode so the P this year the pilot is Aistear and creating outdoors in particular, whereas the I is it implement (coughs) is cursive writing so it's still on the agenda so the ideas would be that in two years time that would be embedded in the school, there would be someone who would be in charge of it still amen but we wouldn't have to be coming back to it all the time".

"I would love to say yeah they are and that everyone feels that their leadership capacity is being developed but no because it's very much a race to get things done".

"I'd say we did thirty-six Croke Park hours in the first, definitely in the first two months I'd say because there is just so much and it's like one person can't just sit down and make every decision for the whole school because everything impacts everyone".

"So, you're really relying on the goodwill of the other teachers, and we don't have anyone else on our leadership team until this September so that goodwill has been really relied on".

"Yeah, there isn't effective collaboration between the board and the school staff at the moment and like I think there could be but I just, I'm…I'm it's just I think a confidence thing like I said I just haven't been able to really know what to do there yet".

"We have to have procedures in place for everything. We, because we started from nothing, there's no piece of paper there which in a lot of ways is great because we can really develop everything. We don't have to hear that phrase 'oh this is just the way we do things here' because we can decide everything from the start but at the same time it means you can't spend a lot of time on anything".

"I would like to think that maybe when we have an expanded leadership team that we could sit down, and we could research ourselves. Like at the moment, to be honest we are looking at our school's policies and we are tailoring them. Honestly, I would love…I would love to say that we sat down, and we researched the policy, and we started it and we made it our own from scratch it's just time".

“The mandatory policies straight away well you get a letter saying well I’m looking at this policy and this policy so they kind of have to be right and they are not the ones that always really affect the school that much”.

“We got sustained support from the PDST, and we cobbled together a school improvement plan but to be honest the school improvement plan is…we did it for…because that’s what we’re supposed to, but it was like through constant conversations and practical let’s try this a bit differently that we think it was actually our school improvement if you know what I mean”.

“That fear of the inspector, it just won’t go away. Like and I mean, I’m okay, I’m not too, I’m okay about it and I keep saying well listen if-if there is something wrong it’s me who has to deal with it, you know it’s me who’s going to get into trouble you know. But it’s just endemic you know what I mean. I think it is a massive thing that you know inspectors have to change, that they’re there to support”.

“Yeah, like I think they’d have to be a lot more formal, a lot more planned. Like I mean it’s very Lucy-Goosey at the moment”.

“Like you know, because obviously as our staff gets bigger, I can’t say ‘listen can everyone just stay behind for an hour now, can we talk about this’. It will have to be more formal; it will have to be more streamlined. So that really is what PDST helped us with, making things practical for the future”.

“If everyone is to buy into something they have to in some way agree with it on some level and for that they have to be able to be heard and have the ability to challenge and be challenged but I suppose it’s just creating that space where that can happen”.

“So, what we decided this year we did, we did one course on Restorative Practice as a team and it gave…it had, it had six statements in it. So, every staff meeting we talked about one of those statements, what does it mean for us? What do we think it means and what could we do with it at the school?”

“So, one of the decisions we had to make with regard to Aistear was whether we were doing the old-fashioned Aistear where everyone (pauses) where there’s a timetable and everyone goes to their different station or was it totally child-led where any child could do whatever they want”.

“Some of us still weren’t decided and we read a little of both and we chatted about it, we had good conversations (pauses). What are the disadvantages of it, of this child-led approach and what could we do to counteract those? You know so there was a real kind of compromise there if you know what I mean. So, we were not losing sight of what we were working towards”.

Commentary

With special attention to the case of a developing school led by a teaching principal, the report describes how the principal has engaged teacher leaders in professional collaboration for school improvement. There is clear evidence of shared leadership for school improvement. The staff engage with multiple external agencies, and this forms the basis for professional collaboration for school improvement. There are formal

structures in place to facilitate the development of a collaborative culture at staff meetings. The principal recognises the importance of formally structured professional collaboration and informal collaboration for the development of the school. School leaders lead professional learning activities with varying levels of collaborative engagement which are influencing PLD to varying degrees. The work in Aistear reflects the use of PDST and a university lecturer to influence professional collaboration which fosters professional learning development. The principal recognises the importance of using research to support policy development for school improvement.

School D Case Report

Case Study Title: An exploration of the influence of school leadership for school improvement on professional collaboration to foster teacher professional learning development in Irish primary schools.

Author: Tríona Cunnane

Analyst's Synopsis: School D is a developing school which, at the time of data generation, had been open for seven years. The school catered for all classes from Junior Infants to Sixth Class with two streams of every class. The school was scheduled to move to a permanent premises in the coming months. The school leadership team consisted of an administrative principal, a deputy principal and two APII positions. The principal expected the school leadership team to expand in the coming months under the restoration of middle management posts by the DE as per circular 0043/2022.

Situational Constraints: The principal describes how her leadership of school improvement has varied at different times owing to situational constraints. She describes how the school was a two-teacher school, a five-teacher school, and a nine-teacher school and how now as an administrative principal she has more time and headspace to deal with policies and circulars. The school has faced challenges with SNA allocation owing to the fact that the school is a developing school. There has been a policy of maintaining the SNA allocation in schools to provide certainty for schools as per DE circular 0035/2022. This has meant the school has had to apply for an exceptional review of SNA allocation which they say set them back six weeks approximately. The principal and deputy principal described how this has inhibited their overall progress up until October 2022 when a new allocation was given.

Uniqueness among other cases: This report indicates how collaboration has been a key feature in school leadership practice in a developing school from its origins as a two-teacher school to it's current stage of development. The principal describes the overall leadership of the school as different in a developing school. She says the nature of the teaching job is different because everything is being done for the first time. It is not possible for the post holders to make all of the decisions and there is a necessity to collaborate with all staff and have them on board for any new initiatives in the school.

Prominence of Theme 1 in this case: Significant with school leaders articulating a clear vision of shared leadership across the school.

Prominence of Theme 2 in this case: Significant with school leaders clearly describing the process they engage for school improvement planning, their perceptions and experiences of inspection and their engagement with external support services.

Prominence of Theme 3 in this case: Very Significant with school leaders articulating clear views on the development of a collaborative culture and their leadership of collaborative activities to foster professional learning development.

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 1: Significant

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 2: Significant

Expected utility of this case for developing Theme 3: High Significance

Conceptual Factors: Developing school, inspection, professional collaboration, professional learning development, shared leadership, formal school leadership, teacher leadership, school improvement, school self-evaluation.

Findings:

1. Shared leadership has been a feature since the early stages of development of this school. In the initial stages school leadership between the principal and deputy principal consisted of ongoing informal collaboration. As the formally appointed school leadership team has begun to expand, the deputy principal has described the benefit of sharing the cognitive load and the importance of sharing and creating the vision for the development of the school with other school leaders. The focus of school leadership activity is very often driven by new issues that come their way as a developing school. School leaders describe how various issues arise which need immediate attention and they must prioritise and collaborate to find their way through some issues for the first time.
2. Formally appointed school leaders lead smaller teams of teacher leaders in specific areas of need. The assistant principal struggled with guilt around sharing the leadership because she was aware that other teachers were not getting remuneration, however there is a culture of shared responsibility among the staff, and they recognise the benefit of having more than one school leader they can approach with questions. School leaders engage in professional conversations and when it comes to committees, they try to focus on what the most important thing to do is from a leadership and management perspective.
3. The principal describes how in a developing school they are forced into reflection all the time. She describes how the formal SSE process has been a case of putting paperwork around some of the things they have been doing but that it is not the sum total of their school improvement activities. The focus of school improvement has been influenced by informal and formal professional collaboration amongst staff and the use of a mentimeter at staff meetings to identify areas of need and to prioritise areas for school improvement. The school has focused on various areas as the school has developed including handwriting in infant classes, the school ethos, Gaeilge, English as an Additional Language and the Primary Language Curriculum.
4. The school principal describes how her engagement with the LAOS guidelines has changed as the school developed. She found that when the school was smaller, and she was working as teaching principal with the deputy principal they did not have the luxury of sitting with the guidelines or target setting. However, as the school leadership team grew, they began to examine the LAOS statements in greater detail and use them to guide leadership work on committees. She describes how now, as an administrative leader she is able to lead differently, set targets and come back at the end of the term and review

progress. She describes the LAOS guidelines as a lens to look at what is going well.

5. School leaders have found sustained support from PDST in the school to be very effective in improving classroom practice. They describe how PDST cuiditheoirí have listened to their needs and come back to the school with appropriate support. The principal describes how the sustained support model with the whole staff has been more beneficial in meeting school improvement priorities rather than an individual attending a course in an education centre and bringing back information to the staff. The sustained support has provided teachers with practical tools to use in the classroom and teachers collaborate with school leaders about what is working or not. School leaders then collaborate with PDST to address issues and describe how this has really helped in terms of practice.
6. School leaders have not engaged with the support services of the inspectorate. They describe having an overall positive experience in terms of feedback and reports from inspectors. However, the principal describes the necessity to be proactive with staff to dispel the fear of the inspector. The deputy principal believes the inspectorate should be more of a consultancy service but recognises that there are essential requirements of school and that it is helpful to get feedback on areas for improvement particularly in a developing school.
7. School leaders describe significant challenges in special education teaching, predominantly owing to the change in policy around the allocation of SNAs. They describe challenges in dealing with the NCSE and NEPS, the lack of a roadmap for school leaders.
8. School leaders describe professional collaboration as a significant part of working in the school. In the early days, the founding principal encouraged a culture of professional dialogue between teachers. The current principal describes how this led to an informal yet professional way of reflecting outside of the formal requirements of school improvement policy. The deputy principal describes how they are not dealing with an historical way of doing things, however they have encountered challenges when new teachers have joined the staff and resisted the collaborative way of doing things.
9. School leaders describe several important aspects in the development of a collaborative culture in their school. An assistant principal describes how she has the opportunity to ask teachers what they need, to understand why they are doing things and shared goals as important features of the collaborative way of doing things. The principal describes the necessity of a vulnerability from school leaders, a willingness to say ‘I don’t know what to do here’ as important particularly when trying to target professional learning development through professional collaboration. School leaders recognise the importance of allowing a voice for everyone and following committee work plan the next steps to ensure this happens. There are several mechanisms to allow a voice for everyone including school newsletters, google forms for staff feedback which

are subsequently analysed by school leaders. The principal arranges annual meetings with each member of staff as an opportunity for formal feedback. She uses coaching type questions to collaborate with staff and identify issues that need to be addressed. The principal recognises the importance of creating a professional space where there is a freedom to disagree and debate issues separate to personal lives and the staffroom. She recognises the value and benefits of school-based professional collaboration for building staff confidence.

10. The school is part of a network of schools through IPPN although the principal describes this as a problem-solving form rather than an opportunity for professional collaboration. She has concerns that without wider professional collaboration between schools they could become insular and less reflective.
11. The school has been engaging with the new Primary Language Curriculum since 2015 and they have found the process seamless because it was in the early stages of the school development and all of the staff went to college with the curriculum. The assistant principal describes how they spent a day as a staff working through the curriculum documents collaboratively and that she found this much more beneficial than sitting through webinars. School leaders plan very specific professional learning development activities for enactment of the Primary Language Curriculum and the focus was on phonological awareness in the junior classes whereas now they focus on areas such as morphology and etymology in the older classes.
12. The assistant principal describes how committee meetings, particularly in developing the school ethos, were very much focused on what they needed to do and how although she was working from a template the meetings themselves became the policy through the facilitation of critical thinking and collaboration. School leaders recognise the importance of allowing a voice for everyone and following committee work plan the next steps to ensure this happens.
13. The school has regular staff meetings and in addition to that have been working on the process of sharing practice among staff. They have done after school sharing of practice, visiting each other's classes to see examples of good practice, and are working towards a model of proper open-door staff sharing of practice. The principal emphasises the importance of authentic sharing of practice and professional conversations that identify professional learning development needs and considering how these needs can be met using existing expertise in the school.

Possible Excerpts for the Multicase Report:

"It's sharing the cognitive load. It's not just the jobs, it's like the thinking ahead parts".

"So, I think the big thing for us about post holding is actually less about individual jobs and more about sharing the vision or actually creating the vision first and then sharing it".

“So, I do think it’s different in a developing school because before anyone has a post the nature of the job is different. Like Patricia said, everything is being done for the first time. It’s not realistic that that could only be the responsibility of post holders in a developing school”.

“So, when I got the post, I was like right okay what am I doing? What am I in charge of? Whereas now I know that it’s not okay you’re up here and you’re in charge of it. It’s exactly like what you said like (addresses Diane) sharing the vision and like, not, yeah, I suppose and leading a smaller team”.

“But then getting rid of the guilt as well and of being like oh no we can all share this even though I’m getting paid for it still like (pauses). That’s what I found hard. I thought that somebody would be like but you’re getting paid for it, you do it. Whereas I think everyone here is of the mentality let's all do this together but let’s have somebody that’s not Principal D to ask questions and to kind of share the responsibility”.

“The leadership and management team aren’t elevated above everyone else, that like this is a whole (pauses) so like they might be dealing with leading the problem-solving or the committees but it's a whole school issue”.

“Now it’s three sixty and like it’s very busy and I’m not in the class as much as I would like to be at all but in terms of like having time and headspace then to deal with things like policies and really look at circulars”.

“We would have at one of the staff meetings, we would have a mentimeter to try and figure out what was coming up a lot in terms of what people needed support with or what we wanted to prioritise generally, maybe because of the conversations that people are having all the time they tended to be the same things”.

“Then when we entered the formal SSE process it was pretty much just the paperwork involved. Putting paperwork around some of the things that we were doing but it was definitely not the sum total”.

“Whereas, when they were in the school, and what we found especially from sustained support was that they were giving us practical tools for using in the classroom and then teachers were feeding back to us about what was going well and what wasn’t”.

“So, when they came back for the next visit, we were like right we actu…this is working well and that’s great, but we have this one issue. Sure, they knew exactly what the issue was and that I think, that really, really helped in terms of practice”.

“There is one thing I loved actually and while I have it in my mind is that they came in to support us in EAL, but they didn’t give us anything. They sat and they listened, and they took down ‘what do you need from us?’”.

“I don’t think you’re supposed to fear the inspector. I think you’re supposed to view the inspectorate as, as an assistance and as a consultancy”.

“There is no roadmap for leaders. The goalposts keep changing. The NCSE are a nightmare to deal with. NEPS, amen, our psychologist is very good but it’s like their idea of what they should be providing is changing as time goes on”.

“Like what inhibited our progress was the-the change in allocation for SET up until right now”.

“So, I would say anything in terms of special educational needs is a challenge for a leader and certainly takes up a lot of time”.

“I would think collaboration is a huge part of working in the school”.

“From that I think came a culture of professional dialogue that I haven’t been used to and that then created a very informal and yet professional way of reflecting that didn’t have to be like oh we are doing SSE now, so this is the list, and this is what we have to pick”.

“And we have definitely come up against resistance in that, like we have had new people who’ve joined the school and haven’t settled with the collaborative way of doing things”.

“I think part of it is also about a vulnerability from leadership down, that’s really important if you really want to target professional development in professional conversations. It has to start with something which I didn’t have, which is me being open and saying, ‘well I don’t know what we are doing here so let’s try and figure it out’”.

“I think the fact that everyone knows the why makes it easier for them not to question it but to get more involved and be like ‘oh we have the same goal here, what can I do to help?’”

“I think unless you are being intentional about being reflective in your practice and talking to other principals and finding out what’s happening, it’s easy to live in a little insular, you know, environment where you don’t hear about other things”.

“We’re only starting on our journey of proper open-door staff sharing. We’ve done after school staff sharing. We’re only just starting on the whole like popping into each other’s classrooms to see good practice but that would be difficult to do in a school where you feel like you have to put on a show”.

“So, where there are conversations, and that’s what I think feeds into what we need to look at in terms of professional development”.

“We are realising that within the school community there are so many opportunities for professional development once people are comfortable to say, ‘God I’m really stuck on problem-solving in fourth class and I don’t know any approaches to try and then someone else is like I’ve actually tried something”.

“So, if you get that conversation started then that’s professional development. That’s better than any education centre can provide because it’s real contextual stuff that we are addressing for our own context”.

Commentary

With special attention to the case of a developing school led by an administrative principal, a deputy principal and two Assistant Principal IIs the report describes the

development of a collaborative culture in this school. There is clear evidence of shared leadership for school improvement and there are committees of teacher leaders led by formally appointed school leaders. The staff engage with multiple external agencies in line with their school needs although the benefits of engagement with these agencies has varied. PDST have worked with school leaders to identify professional learning needs and school leaders have found that sustained support has been very beneficial. The school has encountered challenges in their allocation of support for special educational needs and this has been a consequence of national policy. School leaders have found that this has taken up a lot of their time and hindered their overall school improvement. School leaders articulate key features they believe are important in the development of a collaborative culture including the importance of a voice for all and structures are in place to allow for this. They have met resistance from people joining the staff who have not settled with the collaborative way of doing things. The school has developed a culture of shared practice amongst staff, and this has proven to be beneficial in identifying professional learning development needs. The principal describes how the practice of professional dialogue around these experiences has opened up opportunities for professional learning development in the school. The deputy principal sees this as particularly beneficial because it is professional learning development in context.

Appendix H

Multicase Assertions for the Final Report

Cross Case Assertions	Related to Which Themes?	Evidence, Persuasions, Reference in Which Cases?
CCA1 Having historically identified the school principal as the solo, heroic school leader, formally appointed school leaders work as teams to share school leadership responsibility for school improvement. It is evident that school leaders engage in reciprocal relationships which underpin the DE policy requirements for school improvement.	Theme 1	**Case A** "So, I would have met with the in-school management team and then we would have met with the whole staff". **Case B** "We have our in-school management teams. I try to do them the week of the staff meeting so that we are all clear on what needs to be done and where we're going and what everybody is going to do". "It's not so much one person leads but rather coordinates I think is the better word that reflects the truth of how we do things here. So, it's a culture that we have here where everybody chips in with their effort and their time if they have it and just gets things done." This describes the team approach to school leadership for school improvement. "It offers a support mechanism as well so if one person might be having issues or need support the rest of the management team would rally around them". "Like in the (names previous principal's) time we had a huge leadership team. We had three API posts and we had something like five or six APII posts and I (pauses) there's five including me on the leadership team". "You are hindered though because you can only ask people to do so much, and they can only do so much". **Case C** "We chatted about it as the three of us that look, even if the three of us aren't formal leaders at least being the first three teachers in the school there is a leadership by or in itself". It is important to link this with the evidence from the other developing

		school. This describes the measures necessary to share leadership in the early stages of the development of a school. “I’d say we did thirty-six Croke Park hours in the first, definitely in the first two months I’d say because there is just so much and it’s like one person can’t just sit down and make every decision for the whole school because everything impacts everyone”. There was evidence in the other developing school that a high level of collaboration amongst school leaders was necessary in the early stages of development. I’m trying to consider if this evidence supports further understanding of the quintain or if it is unique to developing schools? This evidence is important overall because it supports understanding of what school leadership for school improvement looks like. **Case D** “It’s sharing the cognitive load. It’s not just the jobs, it’s like the thinking about, it’s the thinking ahead parts”. “So, I think the big thing for us in terms of post holding is actually less about individual jobs and more about sharing the vision, or actually creating the vision first and then sharing it”. There is a clear description here of the benefits of sharing school leadership responsibilities and the importance of creating a shared vision for the school among formally appointed school leaders. Overall there is evidence, of varying degrees of significance which contribute overall to understanding of general processes for shared leadership. This persuasion occurred on the grounds that at each site there was clear evidence of shared leadership.
CCA 2 It is six years since national research found that school leaders articulated that their roles were positional rather than influential with roles	Theme 1	**Case A** “But to be honest with you, because there is so much good will, everything is quite transparent in the school to do with policy and stuff

dominated by management rather than leadership tasks. There is clear evidence that formally appointed school leaders and teacher leaders at each site are given widespread opportunities to participate in school leadership activities for school improvement. However, school leaders encounter various challenges relating to policy around the appointment of formal school leadership teams at local level. (There is some overlap between Assertion 1 & 2 and the structure of this will need consideration during writing)		because there are only four class teachers and one SET teacher, we are all in it together". "We have two other teachers and one of the teachers has stepped up to take over P.E. which is brilliant. We're just kind of getting into our groove now. And the other teacher has stepped up to do music". The principal is describing how teachers were willing to step up to teacher leadership roles but there was a lack of willingness to apply for formal school leadership roles. There were two main reasons for this, the first was that they were concerned that if the principal was absent, they would have to step up to the role. The second was the level of remuneration, an assistant principal and a deputy principal receive the same remuneration in a small school. **Case B** "I would say the element of distributive leadership as well where other teachers and other staff members are empowered to take on different initiatives and something that they are interested in". "Well, it no it (pauses) it's very open so we'll say the team leader for literacy will decide what is going to be the literacy…what is the action? Then there is a team brought together and that's opened up to members of staff; who wants to be on the Literacy Team, who wants to be on the Numeracy Team? And that gives everyone an opportunity, it's providing the opportunity to go on the team". "Then coming away from our meetings as well I think it's important to spread the word to the rest of the staff so be that by email or by actually going and chatting to the teachers, and getting them, the rest of the teachers that are not on the committee, getting them involved in school initiatives". The school leaders are describing the structures they have in place

		which allow school leaders to lead teams of teacher leaders for school improvement. “We do have a DEIS coordinator and that is one of the teachers in the school who I work very closely with in what we have to do for the plan going forward”. **Case C** “Now I was very fortunate in that the other two teachers in this school were really committed to the development of the school so they were more than happy to do it but that was definitely a challenge. And like I mean I felt guilty about it you know, like I was asking them to stay behind for an hour”. He is talking about the level of Croke Park hours in the first two months of opening the school and the guilt he experienced because they were not formally appointed school leaders. “I’d like to think of everyone as a leader in some way. Like I would love if everyone had, felt they had a role outside their class or just teaching responsibility”. “Just giving people a chance to try out something whether it’s they want to start up a football team, or they want to create a gardening club. Anything, do you know what I mean? Giving them that space where they can try and if it fails it fails and I-I what I’ve started to do is just to have formal enough professional conversations with each staff individually”. **Case D** “So, I do think it's different in a developing school because before anyone has a post the nature of the job is different. Like Principal D said, everything is being done for the first time. It is not realistic that it could only be the responsibility of post holders in a developing school”. This is coming up at two sites but is a feature for the teaching principal at site A as well. Principal A had a

		staff who were willing to engage in teacher leadership but did not want to be in a formally appointed role. Each of these principals was relying on the good will of staff to engage in school leadership activity outside of formally appointed roles. There are issues in teacher leadership that do contribute to understanding of the quintain. There is a willingness among staff to participate in teacher leadership activities without remuneration although the underlying motivations seem to vary between sites. “But then getting rid of that guilt as well and of being like, oh no we can all share this even though I’m getting paid for it, it’s still like (pauses) I found that hard”. “So, when I got the post I was like ‘Right, okay what am I in charge of?’ It’s like what you said (addressing the Deputy Principal). Sharing the vision and like, not…yeah, I suppose and leading a smaller team”. “The leadership and management team aren’t elevated above everyone else, that like this is a whole (pauses) so like they might be dealing with the problem-solving on the committees but it’s a whole-school issue”. “I think here everyone is of the mentality of let's all do it together but let’s have somebody that we can go to that isn’t Principal D to ask questions and to kind of share the responsibility”. “So, everybody is on board for Junior Infants induction day, everybody is on board for everything you do, every special week, every Seachtain na Gaeilge, everything that requires thought at the start requires all the heads together”. The school leaders are describing the reality of sharing leadership in their school. The fact that the school is a developing school does call for

		shared leadership particularly because there is no historical way of doing things. This links with the evidence from School C where the principal described how there were so many decisions to be made that impact everyone. This meant that there was a need to share decision making. The school leaders are also describing the challenge around remuneration when trying to lead committees but that there is a recognition among the staff of the value of shared formal school leadership. The principal of School B described challenges with the size of her formally appointed school leadership team. The evidence provides insight to the generic processes of shared school leadership e.g., the leadership of committees, wider shared school leadership which is a feature in School B beyond the work of committees. School leaders at each site were encountering challenges around the management of their school leadership teams which were a reflection of current policy. I'm not sure if I can explicitly separate this into another cross-case assertion as the issues are very much integrated with the evidence about shared leadership. I have decided to adapt the cross-case assertion to include this as common across the cases but needs to be thought about in terms of what is happening in the individual cases. This persuasion occurred on the grounds that there is evidence of shared responsibility for leadership activities that goes beyond management tasks. There was evidence at each site that there were challenges around the development of school leadership teams which were related to policy issues.
CCA 3 School leadership teams work collaboratively with staff to plan school improvement foci and enact the requirements of school improvement policy.	Theme 2	**Case A** "Initially, when we started off it was me and the vice principal and we kind of did most of the work together

		and did the School Self-Evaluation, we looked at P.E." "We did the Child Protection, we did a lot, we'd had a lot of people coming in because PE was our first focus for School Self-Evaluation". "That was one thing we got developed, we got iPads for the school". "So, there's quite intense need in one class, we had to do a lot of work around exceptional reviews". "I'm really looking at the PI the PIEW model; piloting, implementation, embedding, waiting list projects because a small school is great, you can say yes to more things". "Now we are being very careful to say hang on a minute here can we take this on?" PIEW is a model from the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) designed to support school leaders in their planning for new initiatives. "There is an awful lot of good will and free will and putting the shoulders to the wheel and just doing it. Sitting down together during Croke Park hours and that". "Like supported to an extent but you feel like they could be more condensed". "Yeah, they're hindering (pauses) they're hindering…they're supporting us because we, we look, we know we have to do it and we're looking at it but sometimes they can be overwhelming to be honest with you". "My one criticism of it is that there is an awful lot in it for a small… for everybody, you know, especially for a team of just five teachers". **Case B** "DEIS is basically the vehicle we have been using for the last few years to coordinate on a whole school basis the various improvements that we are making". "When we have done any of our planning we have looked to the

		guidelines, and we would refer to the LAOS documentation. That's all the SSE process so we would do that cyclical, you know, gather the information, test it out". "We would normally have started our new DEIS process, but it has taken us, you know, with our spellings program for example, we did test it out, but we were completely hindered by Covid". "In DEIS, like I mean there are seven areas so like we would have the home school." "We have our literacy committee, our numeracy committee, attendance committees amongst others so the leaders of those would organise committee meetings". "The teachers get a change at the committee to see where the needs are in the school". "The Home School doesn't have to be, she just happens to be on the management team but if she wasn't that person would still be involved in the process". "So, the Home School would be a big part of DEIS and the home-school update is always delivered after the principal's report. That's how important we see it." "You know, what is the engagement outside of school, and within the community, so that is hugely important". **Case C** "So, this year we decided our school improvement, like we struggled a little bit even with that phrase because everything we do is from scratch. So, it's nothing to improve, it's the school beginning but because play is really important to us, to all of us as teachers in the school and because we only have infants, so all of our work is just with infants we decided on Aistear". "We got sustained support from PDST, and we cobbled together a school improvement plan but to be honest the school improvement plan is, we did if for, because that's what

		we are supposed to but it was like through constant conversations and practical let's try this a bit differently that we think it was actually our school improvement". "So, the mandatory policies, straight away well you get a letter saying well I'm looking at this policy and this policy so they kind of have to be right and they are not the ones that always really affect the school that much". "Yeah, ones that make a difference to the school, like communication, the communication policy, the fundraising procedures, you know a proper homework policy, those ones that can be really embedded in the practice of the school". "In our school we follow the PIEW model so the P this year the pilot part is Aistear and creating outdoors in particular. Whereas the I, is it implement? (coughs) is cursive writing so it's still on the agenda. So, the idea would be that in two years time that would just be embedded in the school". PIEW is a model from the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) designed to support school leaders in their planning for new initiatives. "Everything is so busy, and I would like to think that maybe when we have an expanded leadership team we could sit down and we could research ourselves". **Case D** "In terms of priorities we would, we say last year now we would have at one of the staff meetings we would have had a mentimeter to try and figure out what was coming up a lot in terms of what people need support with or what we wanted to priorities generally, maybe because of the conversations that people were having all the time they tended to be the same things". The principal is describing how informal collaboration amongst staff can inform decisions about the focus for school improvement.

		"It is different in a developing school because you are forced into reflection all the time". "So, for us, we're just learning something, something new is being thrown at us every day" "There is a lot of finding our way for the very first time in things, so I think that we are a very verbose school". "We started with just Junior Infants and then we built up. So really then everything we ever did had to be constant self-evaluation and school improvement based on, as you know, the first time we did handwriting in Junior Infants". "Then when we entered the formal SSE process it was pretty much just the paperwork involved. Putting paperwork around some of the things that we were doing but it was definitely not the sum total". "When I was a teaching principal, I didn't have the luxury of sitting with LAOS as much as I do now and that's probably why I think, we're finding is that when we started and I was a teaching principal and you were deputy principal and we had the same jobs and you know a much smaller school" This cross-case assertion does provide generic understanding of the processes around school improvement, in particular the engagement with policy documents and the identification of foci for school improvement. There is evidence in each case that school leaders collaborate with teachers as part of the wider process of school improvement planning. This persuasion occurred on the grounds that there is persistent evidence of choice of focus and collaborative processes in place for school improvement planning.
CCA 4 Prior research had raised concerns that the school-based work of the PDST was reflective	Theme 2	**Case A**

of a transmission mode and queried how this influenced subsequent collaborative whole school processes.It is evident that PDST have developed a needs-driven model of support which is influencing subsequent whole-school collaboration.		"So, we have a lot of PDST support, we've signed up for the primary language curriculum input". "I would ask the PDST advisor to have time with each class teacher and to have time with me. And then we'd try and have it on a Wednesday and then after all of that has happened, we would meet as a staff and meet the advisor and pull it all together". "When PDST or someone came in I found that kind of gave a new lease of life and then to carry on from that when teachers take on a role, when they are the role models, for instance the vice principal with the iPads and the ICT, just sharing and collaboration that gives everybody 'oh I haven't thought how to use that app, oh can you do that and could you put it up on Google classroom?" **Case B** "But Cuidtheoir A did an introduction to the Primary Language Curriculum and then Cuiditheoir B responded to class teachers specific requests for guidance". "So, she just said, the feedback, she was able to follow through exactly, she was able to pinpoint exactly what we needed and I think that she really delivered that on the day as well". "The one word that comes to me is trust in capital letters. You can trust their resources, they have a knack of brilliant editing down to the bare bones". This is the APII with responsibility for leading the Primary Language Curriculum describing how they have supported him in his leadership role. "A PDST advisor came out and supported the teachers in how that was done (the digital strategy) and I think it was a great success and I think getting the, you know the Lego We Do, getting the children (pauses) the interest was phenomenal and you know again we had staff who went on and

		continued their own professional development". "I see it happening with those team leaders. I see them asking other teachers to take on roles. Will you do the Lego We do? Or will you, you know I suppose they start working with people they might be friends with, or you know you've got a (pauses) you're brilliant at IT for example." **Case C** "We got it for School Self-Evaluation for the leadership team and we started talking about Aistear and he gave us tips about how to focus on what exactly in Aistear we wanted to focus on, which was developing outdoors and really helped us. We thought that would take the year but actually it was only a session and it worked". "The conversation turned to planning and how difficult planning can be so then if was that (pauses) the new guidance for preparation on teaching and learning so that was what we actually ended up focusing on for the rest of the year". "Obviously as our staff gets bigger, I can't say 'listen can you stay behind for an hour, can we talk about this?' It will have to be more formal, it will have to be more streamlined. So that really is what the PDST helped us with making things practical for the future". "We want to be a restorative school, we all have a real interest in it, so we got PDST training last year, it was the two teachers, me and the other teacher who was here. It just wasn't good, we didn't get anything from it really". While engaging the support of PDST is a generic process across all schools it is important to report the range of experiences. This is not an issue that is related to the uniqueness of the case but rather with the provision of support for school improvement.

		Case D “Their approach is so practical. We’ve had sustained support in Gaeilge, we’re currently getting the Primary Language Curriculum sustained support but also sustained support in EAL”. “There is one thing I loved actually and while I have it in my mind is that they came in to give us support in EAL, but they didn’t give us anything. They sat and they listened, and they took down ‘what do you need from us?’ and they’re going to come back to us. “And it's the same with Irish. Actually, they listened to us.” “Whereas when they were in the school, and what we found especially from sustained support was that they were giving us practical tools for using in the classroom and then teachers were feeding back to us about what was going well and what wasn’t.” “So, when they came back for the next visit we were like right, actually this is working really well and that’s great, but we have this one issue. Sure, they knew exactly what the issue was.” “And that I think really helped in terms of practice.” “And what we have found more beneficial is looking as, as a school at what we are prioritising as school and doing things like the staff sharing or the whole staff CPD route or whole staff conversations around problems has proven much more effective than sending out emails about what the education centres are offering.” There is clearly a generic process whereby school leaders engage the services of the PDST to support them in school improvement. In general, school leaders describe how this has influenced subsequent whole-school collaboration. It is important when writing up to look

		back and check exactly which school leaders are speaking. It could be noteworthy that some schools engage with other organisations as part of the school improvement planning but I must determine if they contribute to the overall understanding of the quintain or are a feature of the uniqueness of the case. This persuasion was developed on the grounds that there is collective agreement among school leaders on the benefit of sustained school support from PDST and school leaders speak of how it influences subsequent professional collaboration at school level.
CCA 5 Schools report positive experiences of inspection and recognise the inspectorate as a support service for school improvement. However, fear of inspection among teachers is recognised by school leaders as a barrier to engagement with inspectors.	Theme 2	**Case A** “He also went through School Self-Evaluation for us, and the focus was PE at that time. He offered it to us, so he came in.” In the case of this school, the inspector had conducted some incidental visits and was visiting the school to inspect a newly qualified teacher when he offered the support in SSE. **Case B** “She mentioned that if you want the inspectors to come out and advise you on your planning.” “I remember writing it down in my little book and saying I’m definitely going to ring, and I did.” “I still remember that meeting, there was about five (pauses) all the In-School Management team were at it (names previous API) was taking notes and the inspectors just started talking and we just started listening and writing and going, I wanted to be clear what she was talking about with the targets.” **Case C** “I think the mandatory policies, because like everyone, and as principal you live in fear of inspection and inspectors reports and I know we have had two inspections in the two years that we’ve opened but you still, and I really want to try to change that, I

		really want to have a more open conversation with the inspector." **Case D** "We haven't asked for support because you can request that. I haven't requested for them to come. We had a WSE pre-covid and I suppose over Covid it was slightly different." "We did have a visit, that visit was an extremely positive one, a really lovely inspector." "I am very proactive with the staff in trying to dispel any fear of the inspector's car outside the gates." "I don't think you're supposed to fear the inspector. I think you're supposed to view the inspectorate as an assistance and a consultancy, and I think if we're happy that the essential boxes are ticked then we want to hear what they have to say." While school leaders recognise the benefits of the inspectorate as a support service there are some challenges at local level, particularly around fear of inspection. These are not tied to the uniqueness of the case and can contribute to understanding of the quintain. This persuasion occurs on the grounds that the inspectorate are influencing the practice of school leadership for school improvement.
CCA 6 Opportunities for formal professional collaboration are in place to support the focus of school improvement. School leaders recognise the importance of creating a collaborative culture within and between schools.	Theme 3	**Case A** "Our special education teacher would deal with, because I'm teaching all day, during Croke Park hours she meets with the SNAs". "She'd also be listening to them to ask them, how are they getting on with the children? Should we, you know, should we change timetables? Is everything working out, and with the teacher as well". "Yes, she does because she comes into Croke Park then as well". "We'd designate time for SEN, I might do a general meeting, a general update for everybody including the SNAs and she'd

		always be meeting with the SNAs and one particular class teacher because all the children with needs, it just happens that they are all in one class, so they sit together and we'd all kind of split up". "I'd kind of work with the teacher upstairs and our SET teacher and our SET postholder would pop into the Junior and Senior Infants teacher and pop upstairs to us as well during Croke Park just to see how are things getting on". "And we'd also look at…bits and pieces that we have in place. Are they working out? Is front of house okay in the morning, opening and closing gates?" "We're definitely not dossing during the webinars, and I've spoken to other principals about this and you do feel like are we doing the right thing? What's the school up the road doing? Have they other ideas? Could we share?" The challenge in dealing with a high enrolment of children with special educational needs is a unique feature of this school. However, it is a focus of school improvement activity and engagement with external support agencies. The findings about collaboration about special education in this school provide a suitable lens to understand the culture of collaboration in this school and can contribute to the understanding of the quintain. What is noticeable is that teachers collaborate formally as a whole staff at staff meetings, and this is followed by subsequent collaboration in smaller groups. The school leader and teacher with responsibility for special educational needs collaborate with the staff and external support agencies on a regular basis. **Case B** "We have staff meetings, and they obviously are a great vehicle to trial these things and then pass out the information to all staff".

		“Then we’ve had our monthly planning meetings as well, so you know that if there is an initiative coming up the teachers get a chance there to you know get the ideas from the leader and to learn about and bring them back to their own class”. “Communication and collaboration is the bedrock and collegiality. I would say those three Cs to me are the most important now you know”. “It’s our own little triangle you know, we communicate, we collaborate, and we’re collegial with one another, you know, and great things can happen”. “I would be in a network with local principals and I’m a member of the Irish Primary Principals Network and you know I think it’s good to have those opportunities to talk to other principals”. The findings at this site contribute insight to generic processes in schools for the development of a collaborative culture through staff meetings, staff collaboration in small groups and school leaders' vision for professional collaboration. **Case C** “I think they’d have to be a lot more formal, a lot more planned, like I mean it’s very Lucy Goosey at the moment”. “We do have monthly staff meetings and we you know we have, we have things that we want to focus on which are on the agenda of every meetings we chat about, try something, we could try like say for example restorative practice” “Every day is nearly a Croke Park hour except once a month we type up what we are saying and that’s the reason it will have to be a lot more formal than that. Like I will do out a yearly plan or a year plan of this is when they will be because obviously, we will have thirteen or fourteen people so we will have to coordinate so they will have to know

		exactly when they're staying behind". "I think it was the respect for each other like you know of everyone's opinions and listening to everyone's opinions and giving everyone a chance." "What I've started to do is just to have formal enough professional conversations with staff individually. So I've just asked them, 'How do you think things are going? What would you change? And what would you like to do to change?' "Being able to meet the staff both formally and informally every day. Like not formally everyday but just through staff meetings but also individual meetings to see how things are going" "Your job satisfaction would come from the parts of your job that you love doing and for 99% of teachers that is standing in front of a class and teaching them and engaging and building relationships and building, making connections with everyone in the school". This school is unique because it is in the early stages of development; however, the principal has a clear vision of the development of a collaborative culture and is already laying the foundations for professional collaboration amongst staff. There is further evidence elsewhere where he mentioned the importance of challenging each other as a feature of working in the school and I need to review this during the write-up. The findings in this school provide sufficient evidence to contribute to understanding of the quintain. **Case D** "I would think collaboration is a huge part of working in our school". "We have had people who have joined the school and really have not settled with the collaborative way of doing things". (Unique feature or contribution to understanding?)

		“So, allowing a voice for everybody definitely helps and that again, being admin you have time for like newsletters and the google forms and analysing answers that come up in the staff feedback forms.” “It’s just the expectation to collaborate, and to discuss and I think part of it also is about a vulnerability from leadership down. That’s really important if you want to target professional development in professional conversations. It has to start with something I didn’t have, which is me being open and saying, ‘I don't know what I’m doing here so let’s try and figure it out’.” “I think the fact that everyone knows the why makes it easier for them not to question it but to get more involved and be like ‘oh we all have the same goal here, what can I do to help’? Or I can do this, or I learned this. What do you think about that? I think that makes it work.” “I think the freedom to disagree and to debate and to argue points and making sure that that discussion is very separate to your personal life as people in the staff room.” “They come and talk, we have some targeted questions sort of like coaching questions really, usually about what they would like to change, and you know what is going well and that has been really, really valuable.” “I think unless you’re being very intentional about being reflective in your practice and talking to other principals and finding out what’s happening it’s easy to live in a little insular, you know, environment where you don’t hear about other things.” This case makes a significant contribution to understanding about the quintain and there is evidence of generic processes and understandings about the development of a collaborative culture through discussion of

		structures in place to promote professional collaboration. Each of these cases contributes to understanding of the quintain and there are processes in place at each site to support the development of a collaborative culture, but which also reflect the situationality of each case. This persuasion occurred on the grounds that school leaders described similar structures for professional collaboration and articulated the value of professional collaboration amongst staff.
CCA 8 School leaders plan and lead professional collaborative activities of varying levels of engagement to influence teacher professional learning development for school improvement.	Theme 3	**Case A** “We are all working on the primary language curriculum together as well, the webinars and that too. We have one webinar left to do and that’s whole staff as well.” “So, Science Blast is a thing that we always do and I’m very involved with that and it would have been (pauses) I know what I’m doing with it and I can share with the teachers and I’ve another teacher kind of trained up on it and she’s taking over it.” ESB Science Blast is a free, non-competitive educational programme for primary schools involving the whole class investigating the science behind a simple question. They provide an investigation framework for teachers to use with their class. “I had a copy of the booklet so I made copies, and I showed them you know how you would plan, you know how we would put a whole school plan in place using the First Steps.” “The last module on assessment I found very beneficial. Ah, because of Covid restrictions we were staying in our classrooms and meeting over Zoom and that was the first time we sat altogether but with Covid protocol and we got to share ideas.” This is a discussion about the primary language curriculum webinars.

		"She'd be updating like anything new on those and myself and the other teacher have the older versions and we've updated those as well, so looking, because the iPads only came in two years ago, asking us what we are, kind of giving us continuing professional development, giving us ideas, what we can do with the class." "Also, I suppose what's happening is somebody gives the continuing professional development and the teacher brings it back to the staff as well." This case contributes to understanding of what professional collaboration to foster PLD in this school looks like. **Case B** "One of the advantages is that there is greater collaboration on a smaller scale and more people perhaps have a voice in their smaller groups so there's greater coordination between say the 6th class teachers because they are sitting beside each other…so they can get into detail on how they would do things." "Well Principal B has kindly agreed to the teachers, class teachers request that the meet on average once every month or five weeks or so to coordinate for forty minutes as a group. And so, they do that, they collaborate together and they plan together, they discuss what works, what doesn't work and what ideas they, what new to bring in to meet various learning objectives." "The school had a session where the teacher shared with everybody their websites, resources, ideas etc. to do with language so it was good." "I think you know every class teacher should take a look, get the opportunity to you know have a look at their scores, where the needs are, like we do use them, you know hugely to decide where we are going you know." (Using standardised test assessments for

		professional collaboration/to identify needs). “With regard to how to improve teachers' learning and how does it happen, I suppose through team teaching in the school and through learning support teachers being in with other teachers etc. the ideas are being shared from one to the other.” This case provides some insight to what professional collaboration for PLD looks like with varying levels of collaborative engagement evident. **Case C** “Last year when there were just two of us, we made a decision to go with cursive writing from Junior Infants and I know that’s like, it’s really probably not that big a thing but we decided to go with it and neither of us knew how to teach it. So, we did a good bit of research into that, we went with the work of Brendan Culligan.” “It may sound like a small difference, but they are two absolutely different philosophies, you know it’s teacher in control versus child in control and so we came up with different opinions. So, this is when we engaged the lecturer from (names University) and lead to a really good conversation. Some of us still weren’t convinced so we decided, and we read a little bit of both and we chatted about, we had good conversations about what (pauses) what are the disadvantages of it, of this child-led and what could we do to counteract those.” (This is a long block quote, but the evidence makes a significant contribution to understanding professional collaboration for PLD. It will perhaps be broken up and integrated further into interpretive discussion.) **Case D** “We’re only starting on our proper open-door staff sharing. We’re just starting on the whole like popping

		into each other's classrooms to see good practice." "So, when there are conversations and that's, I think that feeds into what we needs to look at in terms of professional development" (linked to the first reference) "I would have thought that previously that you had to look outside your school for CPD and what we are really realising is that within the school community there are so many opportunities for professional development." "It's a conversation and it would definitely, like we would, because we do collaborative planning, we disperse a lot of information through our SET team." "We do lean heavily on SET because they would plan collaboratively with the teachers all the time, so they are, they have a strong role in terms of feeding back anything that's going not so well." "So, if you can get that conversation started then that's professional development. That's better than any education centre can provide because it is real contextual stuff that we are addressing in our own context." "I suppose willingness to open the door to each other, to ask for it and to get it. I think that's the most important and effective way of developing as teachers." "I'm blown away by just the smallest little things, so in a way that a webinar can't access I think or even a face-to-face seminar, seeing your colleagues engaging with children that you know and bringing out a side to them that you wouldn't have thought of doing yourself. I think that is most valuable." This case contributes to understanding of what professional collaboration for PLD looks like in their situation. Each of the cases provides evidence that contributes to understanding of the quintain and

		insights to school leaders understanding and practice of professional collaboration to foster teacher PLD. There are varying levels of collaborative engagement within and between sites. This persuasion occurred on the grounds that school leaders described professional collaborative activities of varying degrees of collaborative engagement for PLD at each site.

Appendix I

Identifying Factors From Each Case Report

Factors Case Report A	Factors Case Report B	Factors Case Report C	Factors Report Case D
• Contextual Demands • School Culture • Legacy of Established Structures • Hierarchical Structures • Teacher Leadership • Policy Compliance • Arranged collegiality. • Collaborative Structures • External Support Services • Transmissive & Malleable purposes • Reflective of PLO • Managerial professionalism	• Contextual Demands • School Culture • Legacy of Established Structures • Hierarchical Structures • Teacher Leadership • Policy Compliance • Arranged collegiality. • External Support Services • Transmissive & Malleable purposes • Reflective of PLO • Managerial professionalism	• Contextual Demands • Developing School Culture • No Legacy of Established Structures • Hierarchy somewhat flattened • Everyone is a leader. • Teacher Leadership • Policy enactment • External Support Services • Community of Learners • Intensive professional collaboration • Collaborative Culture • Transmissive, Malleable, and potentially transformative purposes • Potential for effective PLC • Democratic Professionalism	• Contextual Demands • Developing School Culture • No Legacy of Established Structures • Hierarchy somewhat flattened • Teacher Leadership • Policy enactment • External Support Services • Intensive informal collaboration • Collaborative Culture • Shared practice • Shared decision making for school improvement • Transmissive & Malleable purposes • Potential for effective PLC • Democratic Professionalism
Four Main Factors & Corresponding Themes			
Integrated Leadership	**CPLD for School Improvement Policy**	**Professionalisation v Professionalism**	**Forms of Professional Learning**
• Shared Leadership • School Improvement Processes	• Shared Leadership • School Improvement Processes • Professional Collaboration of CPLD	• Shared Leadership • School Improvement Processes • Professional Collaboration of CPLD	• Shared Leadership • School Improvement Processes • Professional Collaboration of CPLD