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Approaches to adopt the principles of *Cosán*, the Irish national framework for teachers' professional learning, into the professional practices of primary teachers while cultivating teacher agency through the process

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A thesis submitted
in fulfilment of the requirement for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
University College Cork, National University of Ireland.

November 2024

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Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism and intellectual property.

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Date: November 2024

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Acronyms

- TPL: Teachers' Professional Learning
- OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
- LAOS: Looking at Our Schools
- SSE: School Self-Evaluation
- PD: Professional Development
- ITE: Initial Teacher Education
- CPD: Continuous Professional Development
- TPLD: Teacher Professional Learning and Development
- TLLP: The Teacher Learning and Leadership Programme
- CLPL: Career-Long Professional Learning
- GTC Scotland: General Teaching Council Scotland
- INTO: Irish National Teachers' Organisation
- EPV: Extra Personnel Vacation
- PDST: Professional Development Service for Teachers
- CoP: Communities of Practice
- RTA: Reflexive Thematic Approach
- vCoP: virtual Communities of Practice
- NLC: Networked Learning Community
- SET: Special Education Teacher
- NCSE: National Council of Special Education
- NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- PDST: Professional Development Services for Teachers
- Oide: national support service for teachers and school leaders

Abstract

This study aimed to discover what approaches would best incorporate the principles of the *Cosán* framework (the Irish national framework for teachers' professional learning [TPL], Teaching Council, 2016) into the professional practices of primary teachers in Ireland. These need to be practical for *Cosán* to be utilised by teachers when they are reflecting on and seeking to enhance their professional abilities so any TPL undertaken leads to changes to in practice or transformation of practice. Throughout the study, there was a focus on whether the development of reflective, collaborative cultures within primary schools has the potential to positively influence professional development amongst teachers, while also examining what factors may inhibit or facilitate teachers' ability to engage with impactful TPL. This study also assessed the potential of *Cosán* to cultivate teacher agency, as primary school teachers incorporate the principles of this framework into their practices, so engagement in their career and growth as professionals are enriched through critically reflective, autonomous practices.

This study addresses a gap in the research as, since its publication in 2016, there is no published literature on *Cosán's* impact on the professional practices of teachers, despite it being decisively important to the development of teachers. As a result, this research study will contribute significantly to public policy on the continuum of teacher education in Ireland as its findings will have universal implications and opportunities for teachers in how they may engage with TPL.

This research drew upon current literature on TPL and sought paradigms of best practice in TPL that may be applicable to this research. A qualitative, multiple case study, based on the experiences of fourteen primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland, was the methodology employed. The participating teachers' views were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, as they utilised *Cosán* as a lens to assess their professional practices and assist them in furthering themselves professionally. The data was thematically analysed as I identified patterns that were specific to this research and constructed themes from which the findings were generated. A tripartite theoretical framework, comprising sociocultural and constructivist perspectives on learning, along with

complexity theory, further informed this study, as I examined and constructed knowledge emanating from the dynamic, lived experiences of the participants and their engagement with professional learning.

The findings and conclusions of this research were addressed thematically according to the four main research questions. The findings recognised that school-based professional learning, whether formal or informal is a significant approach to TPL. Correspondingly, both networked learning communities and online professional learning were identified as effective approaches to TPL, external to the school, which lead to transformative practices. This study also ascertained a need for the system of TPL for individual teachers to be overhauled. Significant factors that enable professional learning for primary teachers' were identified through this research and include, leadership, school culture, collaborative practices, reflective practices, resources teacher autonomy, relevance and the multi-faceted factor of the holistic view of a teacher. This research further built on international research which recognises the importance of both collaborative practices and reflective practices in TPL, however, it indicated a need for more supports to be put in place to encourage both individual teachers and schools to utilise these approaches to benefit the most from them and ultimately promote a school culture which fosters collaborative reflection. Finally, this research established that *Cosán* has the potential to cultivate teacher agency, nevertheless, teachers need further support to become authentic reflective practitioners who are aware of their evolving professional identity. Furthermore, this study identified that many of the ecological factors necessary to engender teacher agency are also necessary to facilitate TPL.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

Teachers' professional learning (TPL) is currently a prominent area of education that is being widely examined internationally (King et al., 2023; Admiraal et al., 2021; Imants & van der Wal., 2020; OECD, 2019b; Kennedy, 2014). In many countries, it is considered essential to the development of quality education provision (Nguyen et al., 2021; OECD, 2019b; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Kennedy, 2015) yet, based on countries' policies on continuous professional development, models of TPL vary widely (Caena, 2011). Recent efforts to understand the possible impacts of teacher professional learning on improving schools, enhancing teacher quality and improving the quality of student learning have led researchers and policymakers to focus on understanding the effectiveness of these actions (OECD, 2019b). To further augment the argument for effective TPL, one TALIS study [Teaching and Learning International Survey, an international survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)] demonstrated that, in most countries, TPL is generally not meeting the needs of teachers (OECD, 2019a) and this viewpoint has also been advanced by Cooper et al. (2020), Muijs et al. (2014) and Timperley (2011).

This study aims to discover what approaches can be utilised to best incorporate the principles of the *Cosán* framework (the Irish national framework for teachers' professional learning [TPL], Teaching Council, 2016), into the professional practices of primary teachers in Ireland. This will herein be referred to as *Cosán*. These need to be practical for *Cosán* to be utilised as a scaffold by teachers when they are reflecting on and seeking to enhance their professional abilities, so any TPL undertaken leads to transformative practices. Throughout the study, there will be a focus on whether the development of reflective, collaborative cultures within primary schools possess the potential to positively influence professional development amongst teachers, while also examining what factors may inhibit or enable teachers' ability to engage with effective TPL. This study will also assess the

potential of *Cosán* to cultivate teacher agency, as primary school teachers incorporate the principles of this framework into their practices, so engagement in their career and growth as professionals are enriched through critically reflective, autonomous practices. This research will draw upon current national and international literature on TPL and seek paradigms of best practice in TPL that may be applicable to this research. A qualitative, multiple case study, based on the experiences of fourteen primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland, is the methodology being employed. Recruitment of participants was via a national online survey and purposeful sampling was used to select fourteen primary teachers from a variety of backgrounds. The data collection instruments of semi-structured interviews and focus groups were utilised to gather the participating teachers' views as they utilised *Cosán* as a lens to assist in furthering themselves professionally. The data was thematically analysed as I identified, evaluated and noted patterns, specific to this research, which led to codes that I distilled to generate themes that determined this research's findings. The complementary theoretical frameworks of sociocultural and constructivist perspectives on learning further informed this study and these perspectives were also intertwined with complexity theory as the contexts of this research project were dynamic and complex, leading to varying levels of transformative professional learning. I used these theories to construct knowledge emanating from the lived experiences of the participants and their engagement with professional learning.

The key elements of this research study presented in this introductory chapter include:

- an overview of the terms teachers' professional learning and transformative professional practices
- the national and international policy contexts encompassing this research
- my motivation for engaging in this research project
- the research objectives and questions;
- a synopsis of the research methodology and design.

1.2 Terms and Definitions

1.2.1 Defining TPL

TPL has been defined in a myriad of ways. According to the OECD [the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], professional development can be succinctly defined as "activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher" (2009, p. 49). On the other hand, Day's (1999a) definition can be deemed as all-encompassing as he includes a wide variety of intentional, considered learning experiences, whether carried out on an individual basis or with others, which spans the professional life of a teacher; these experiences benefit the teacher and improves their quality of teaching as they commit, renew and develop the skills necessary to develop as a good educator. A constructivist perspective is taken by both Postholm (2012) and Winkler (2001) as they term it as a course of action as teachers apply new knowledge and expertise to lead to transformative practices that impact students' learning. Guskey (2000) purports that TPL can not only improve teachers' knowledge and skills but also enhance the attitudes of teachers while positively impacting student learning.

National policies have variances in the above definitions. For instance, in England, it is viewed as continuing professional development (CPD), which covers a wide range of staff development activities, both formal and informal, designed to address individual teachers' development needs and improve their professional practice (Eurydice, 2021). In the Nordic countries, where the education systems are often lauded for consistently placing highly in the PISA rankings, professional development is seen as "a wide spectrum of activities aimed at developing teachers' skills, knowledge, working methods and competencies" (Taajamo, 2016, p. 101). [PISA is the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment and, every three years, measures the ability of 15-year-olds in 77 regions in the areas of reading, mathematics and science (OECD, 2022a; Government of Ireland, 2019).] Similarly, in Ireland, the Teaching Council defines professional development as "lifelong teacher learning and comprises the full range of educational experiences designed to enrich teachers' professional knowledge, understanding and capabilities throughout their careers" (2011a, p. 19).

The above definitions concur that TPL can take place in a variety of settings, through a variety of approaches and reflects the acknowledged complexity of teaching as a profession (Phantharakphong & Liyanage, 2021; Teaching Council, 2010; Fraser et al., 2007). All of the definitions allude to teachers as individuals, but Day's (1999a) and Guskey's (2000) definitions augment this and specifically recognises TPL on a macro-level perspective to include TPL to benefit not just individuals but schools too, a viewpoint which Caena (2011) shares and this interpretation of TPL is what I based this research study on.

1.2.2 Use of Term 'TPL'

There are a myriad of ways in which teachers' professional learning (TPL) is referred to in the literature and policy, and different terms have nuanced connotations. Initially, in-service 'training' was often short courses or one-off workshops with a weak relationship to classroom practice (Opfer & Pedder, 2011b; Timperley et al., 2007), mainly related to school or policy reforms (Bolam & McMahon, 2004) and alluded to a deficit approach, when teachers are deemed to need to be upskilled by experts, (Bergmark, 2020; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Today, with school systems obliged to address rapidly changing environments and emerging issues (Chu et al., 2016; Pont et al., 2008), this view appears limited, and the term 'training' is perceived as insufficient to encompass all approaches to teacher learning (Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2021). Professional development is a term commonly used by pre-eminent researchers in this area such as Guskey (1991, 2002), Darling-Hammond (2005) and King (2016), and used in some jurisdictions, for example, England, and it may be conceived that this term may be more associated with career progression (O'Brien & Jones, 2014). Ongoing or continuous professional development (CPD) is a slightly distinct term as it alludes to TPL which is continually progressing a teacher to update skills and knowledge and, as such, is used by King et al. (2022), Kennedy (2014) and de Vries et al. (2013). The term professional learning implies an approach that is more critically reflective, flexible and less performance-related (O'Brien & Jones, 2014), is ongoing, systematic, dynamic and embedded in the school context (Caena, 2011). Furner & McCulla (2019) deem professional learning to be the subsequent change in teachers' practices occurring

as a result of professional development and this view is supported by King et al. (2022). It can also be argued that this term embodies the key characteristics needed for effective career-long teacher learning (O'Brien & Jones, 2014) and takes into account the complexity of teacher learning (King et al., 2023). Furthermore, the term professional learning acknowledges that through actively using their agency, professional learning is what can potentially result when a teacher engages in professional development (King et al., 2023).

In Ireland, TPL was historically referred to as in-service education (Coolahan, 2007) but the Teaching Council (2011a) currently uses the term teachers' professional learning (TPL), and it is widely used in the literature (Timperley , 2005a; Brodie et al., 2019;Bergmark,2020; Boeskens et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2020; Boylan et al., 2023; Salo et al., 2024). This view of professional learning encompasses a range of both formal and informal TPL approaches and reflects principles such as flexibility, autonomy, collaboration and reflection, leading to transformative practices (King et el., 2022). As I positioned my research within the Irish context, this is the term that was used throughout this research study and it encompasses the above variances.

1.2.3 Transformative TPL

The adjective "transformative" was one I deliberated on before opting to use it to describe the type of TPL I envisage teachers engaging in. I had considered other adjectives, such as practical, effective, sustainable, and impactful but none of these encompassed the meaning I was intending. The transformative TPL I refer to within this research study is based on Kennedy's (2011) description of Fraser et al.'s (2007) definition which views it as an ongoing collaborative, reflective enquiry in which teachers are allowed the space to develop their understanding their professional practices, often leading to transformational educational practice.

This definition echoes principles within the *Cosán* framework which advocate for collaboration and reflection by teachers to deliberate on professional practices and engage in TPL which results in positive changes to practice. Kennedy (2014) also asserts that a transformative category of professional learning incorporates models of collaborative inquiry that support teachers to be critically engaged and reflective,

which reflects wider literature (Boylan et al., 2023; King et al. 2023). Kennedy (2014) further posits that teacher agency is a necessary co-component for transformative learning if a positive change to professional practices is to be enacted. Fraser et al.'s (2007) explanation is also reflective of the constructivist theory of learning within which this research project is co-framed, as described in section 2 of this chapter. Mezirow (1978) deemed transformative learning to be constructivist in nature because learners continuously process and interpret learnings to make meaning of one's experience (Simesk, 2012). Furthermore, for TPL to become transformative it must resonate with a teacher's belief and value systems (Korthagen, 2017; Fraser et al., 2007). Brennan & King (2022) weave the above thoughts together when they state that for TPL to become transformative it must contest preceding assumptions, construct new meanings and enable teachers to use their agency to align this with their values for it to convert into sustainable professional practices. For the reasons rationalised in this section, I will use the term "transformative" to describe the TPL I refer to in this research project.

1.3 Contexts

This research study took place against the backdrop of national and international contexts, the local school contexts, and those of the individual teachers, and these are further expounded in section 3.5 of the Methodology Chapter. These contexts interplay and recursively influence one another, as one of the theoretical frameworks I utilise, namely complexity theory, illuminates (Davis & Sumara, 2008; Mason, 2008) and thus supports a richer interpretation of this study's findings. I will present a synopsis of these contexts here.

1.3.1 National Policy Context

The *Cosán* framework, which is the first national framework policy on teachers' professional learning in the Republic of Ireland, was published in 2016 after a comprehensive consultation process, during which teachers were approached for their input during the initial phase, to begin with the needs and opinions of the

teachers. *Cosán* means footpath in Irish and this term was chosen as teachers' professional learning is deemed to be a personal, career-long journey for each teacher and is reflective of their personal and professional contexts (Teaching Council, 2016). *Cosán* builds on from *Droichead*, the National Induction Programme for Teachers (Teaching Council, 2015). *Droichead,* meaning 'bridge' in Irish, is the only route of induction for all primary and post-primary teachers registered since 2020 and supports newly qualified teachers to be inducted into the teaching profession through a journey of professional growth within the school context they work in and with the support of their colleagues (Oide, 2024).

The *Cosán* framework took a centre-out approach in its development through consultation with stakeholders (Barron et al., 2023) and recognises TPL as having intellectual, professional and personal dimensions (Broderick, 2019). The framework states that teachers have a personal responsibility to actively engage in TPL to maintain and improve their professional knowledge throughout their career and acknowledges the diverse ways individual teachers learn which reflects the complexity of the teaching profession (Teaching Council, 2016). The framework is founded on the following principles (Teaching Council, 2016, pp. 6-10):

1. *Cosán* will recognise teachers as autonomous and responsible learning professionals.
2. *Cosán* will be a flexible framework.
3. *Cosán* will facilitate teachers in identifying and pursuing relevant learning opportunities.
4. *Cosán* will facilitate teachers in identifying opportunities for quality learning, and will allow for innovative approaches to quality assurance.
5. *Cosán* will recognise the importance of teachers having access to rich and varied learning opportunities.
6. *Cosán* will provide a long-awaited opportunity for teachers and stakeholders to formally acknowledge and recognise teachers' learning.
7. *Cosán* will facilitate teachers in valuing their learning, and in prioritising learning that benefits them and their students.

The Teaching Council, in conjunction with the Department of Education, intends for the *Cosán* Framework to be implemented system-wide by 2027 (Department of Education, 2021a). Originally, *Cosán* was supposed to have an accountability component and link TPL undertaken with maintaining teacher registration (Teaching Council, 2016) but this has not been enacted (Department of Education, 2024). The *Cosán* framework is compatible with the education policy *Looking at Our Schools* [LAOS] (Department of Education, 2022b). This is an education self-evaluation policy that interlinks both an internal and external evaluation system as teachers and schools are encouraged to view their professional practices against standards in the areas of teaching, learning, leadership and management and to evaluate whether their practices are effective or not, while inspectors also use this framework to monitor, evaluate, report on and support schools (Department of Education, 2022b). It may be regarded that this policy is not clear on whether its focus is accountability or capacity building (McNamara et al., 2022) and if it is perceived to be a "tick the box" assignment without a strong emphasis on the actionable "what next?" it will not build capacity and lead to transformative practices (McNamara et al., 2022; Hargreaves & Braun, 2013). This is where the two policies diverge, as LAOS (Department of Education, 2022b) positions teachers to be accountable with evidence-based data leading to improvement, while *Cosán* generally views teachers as autonomous professionals (Barron et al., 2023). Paradoxically, *Cosán* also asks teachers to measure and document the impact of their development, but how this is to be enacted is not currently defined (Barron et al., 2023).

1.3.2 International Policy Context

The significant global need for a quality teacher profession that is ready to meet the rapidly changing needs of today's society and to support teachers' access to continuing professional learning was recently highlighted by UN Secretary-General António Guterres (2024) and is noted across literature and policy (Cooper et al., 2020; OECD, 2019c; Stoll, 2011) Literature on education also gives prominence to TPL (King, et al., 2023; Boylan et al., 2023; Brennan & King, 2022; Admiraal et al., 2021; OECD, 2019b; Kennedy, 2014; Timperley et al. 2007; Hargreaves, 2000), yet,

the complexity and multi-faceted nature of teachers' learning results in the literature focusing on disparate aspects of TPL. There is literature on the mediating effects of culture and leadership on TPL (Bellibaş et al., 2020; Anderson, 2017; Liu et al., 2016) and on collaborative or reflective practices (Lipscombe, 2020; Kennedy, 2011). The influence of teacher agency on TPL is another area of education research that has become prominent in contemporary literature (Molla & Nolan, 2020; Brodie, 2019; Leijen et al., 2020; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Priestley et al., 2015a) as has the area of transformative professional learning (Boylan et al., 2023; King & Holland, 2022; Lin et al., 2022; Paneru et al., 2017). This study intends to delve into these areas of TPL from an Irish perspective and further build on these works.

1.3.3 Local School Contexts

The local school context is another setting that further influences this study. Primary schooling in the Republic of Ireland is for eight years and children begin school aged 4 or 5 years old (Eurydice, 2023). The majority of primary schools are denominational but also include Irish-medium schools and multi-denominational schools. In Ireland, 99% of primary schools are state-funded and the Government of Ireland pays for almost all of the building and day-to-day running costs of the schools which are managed by voluntary Boards of Managements (Eurydice, 2023), while the school's day-to-day running is undertaken by the school principal. School principals can be administrative if the school enrolment is above 173 students, otherwise, they are teaching principals (Department of Education, 2023b). Primary schools that receive state funding must adhere to the relevant legislation (Government of Ireland, 1998) and implement the Department of Education's primary school curriculum which is currently being revised (Department of Education, 2023a). Each school has the autonomy to interpret the curriculum, as appropriate, to meet the students' needs in specific contexts (Department of Education, 2021b) and, along with a school self-evaluation system (Department of Education, 2022a), the Department of Education's inspectorate visit schools to ensure quality in education and maintenance of standards (Eurydice, 2023).

1.4 My motivation

In my two decades as a primary teacher, I have been curious about how teachers vary in how they remain relevant in their practices, evolve and develop over the course of their professional lives. I often wondered why some professional learning activities motivated teachers and led to changes in professional practices, while others were deemed a waste of time. In 2016, I completed my MEd dissertation on effective models of CPD for primary school teachers which provided me with a formal opportunity to critically examine TPL. As a result of my interest in the area of TPL, I began to work with the Teaching Council as a facilitator in the development and roll-out of nationwide workshops on *Cosán*. It was through this facilitation that I noticed that primary teachers were not engaging with the *Cosán* framework to the same extent as their secondary school counterparts. I began to wonder why this was and my PhD research questions began to germinate and I thus embarked on my PhD journey.

I intend for my research to contribute to teachers' learning by encouraging primary teachers to explore the *Cosán* framework, incorporate the principles of *Cosán* into their professional lives in a practical and sustainable way and lead to transformative professional practices. Schools and teachers are beleaguered from a variety of pressures within a limited amount of time and there may be potential for *Cosán* to have the flexibility and capacity to assist schools to be more economical with time while enhancing positive participation in TPL and promoting reflective, collaborative professional practices. Similar to King et al. (2023) and Kennedy (2014), I believe teacher agency needs to be fostered if TPL is to lead to transformative professional practices, as a result, this research will also determine if *Cosán* has the capacity to foster teachers' agency by supporting teachers to engage more substantially in their profession by reflecting critically on their practices and using their autonomy to determine steps to continue to advance themselves professionally.

1.5 Significance of this Research

The purpose of this study was to examine approaches that can be used to embed the principles of the *Cosán* framework into the professional practices of primary teachers in Ireland. This was chosen as I have a keen interest in the area of TPL, as I illustrated, and because *Cosán* was, at the time of writing, a current prominent education policy in Ireland as the Teaching Council and Department of Education worked in tandem to advance the implementation of the framework nationally (Department of Education, 2021a).

From both a scholarly perspective and with regards to its relevance to the teaching profession, this research is highly significant as:

- It will address a gap in research. While research has been carried out on TPL in Ireland (Barron et al., 2023; Mooney-Simmie, 2021; Skerritt et al., 2021; McMillan et al., 2016; King, 2019 & 2014) there is currently no published research on *Cosán's* impact on the professional practices of teachers since its publication in 2016, despite it being pivotally important to the development of teachers. This is significant as TPL is considered essential for quality education (Nguyen, 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2017; OECD, 2009).
- This research project will contribute significantly to public policy on the continuum of teacher education in Ireland as its findings will have universal implications and opportunities for teachers in how they may engage with TPL.
- It will contribute to teachers' learning by encouraging primary teachers to explore the *Cosán* framework, situate their practices, and that of their school, within the framework and reflect on and plan for more impactful professional learning.
- Approaches to enhance reflective, collaborative practices will be further recognised. This is significant to TPL as the capacity of peer learning and support may be harnessed to develop teachers professionally and agentically, using a centre-out approach.
- The research will determine if *Cosán* can foster teachers' agency by supporting teachers to reflect critically on their practices and utilise their autonomy to further themselves professionally, as advocated for by Biesta & Tedder (2007) and Priestly et al. (2015b).

1.6 Research Study Overview

1.6.1 Research Objectives & Questions

This study aimed to discover what approaches could be utilised to best incorporate the principles of the *Cosán* framework into the professional practices of primary teachers in Ireland. These need to be practical and sustainable for *Cosán* to be utilised as a scaffold by teachers when they are reflecting on and seeking to enhance their professional abilities, so any TPL undertaken have a meaningful impact on their teaching practices. This project investigated, amongst others, if reflective, collaborative approaches to TPL has the potential to work best for primary teachers, to positively influence professional learning amongst teachers, as promoted by the Teaching Council (2016) to support *Cosán*. It also determined what factors may inhibit or facilitate teachers' ability to engage with TPL, as through engagement with the framework in a meaningful way, teachers' teaching practices should be positively enhanced through impactful professional learning which would lead to transformative practices. This study also assessed if and how the process of engaging with the principles of *Cosán* may cultivate teacher agency. This promotion of teacher agency through *Cosán* may be an additional benefit of the framework as it encourages teachers to be more meaningfully engaged in their profession. This study is relevant for teachers in Ireland as *Cosán*, which is a progressive national framework on TPL when compared internationally, encourages teachers to reflect on their professional practices collaboratively and to determine relevant learning opportunities to pursue to meet their professional needs in an autonomous, flexible fashion. From both a scholarly perspective and with regard to its relevance to the teaching profession, this research project was significant.

In summary, the key research questions were:

- *What approaches can be employed by teachers in primary schools to incorporate the core principles of the* Cosán *framework into their living professional practices?*
- *What factors enable or inhibit primary teachers' engagement with transformative TPL in the Republic of Ireland?*

- *Can the development of reflective, collaborative cultures in schools enhance the positive impact of TPL?*
- *Can* Cosán *be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency?*

1.6.2 Research Methodology

A qualitative, multiple case study, based on the experiences of fourteen primary school teachers in Ireland, was the methodology employed for this research project, to gain in-depth insights from the participating teachers of their engagement with *Cosán*. A national online survey was utilised initially to identify and recruit fourteen primary teachers for this study. Purposeful sampling was used to select interested primary teachers from a variety of contexts and backgrounds nationally. Over the following fourteen months, the participants' views, as they utilised this framework as a lens to examine their engagement with professional learning, were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The data gathered was thematically analysed to identify, note and evaluate patterns that were specific to this research, in keeping with the advice of Braun & Clarke (2022a).

Rigour and trust in this research project were attained through considered planning, constant diligence and adherence to appropriate and effective research methods. The methodology employed and sampling procedures implemented have been clearly defined in Chapter Three: Methodology Chapter to establish the project's validity and dependability. Through the utilisation of a variety of data collection tools, namely, surveys, interviews and focus groups, the reliability of the data was ensured by accurately collecting representations of the participants' viewpoints. This triangulation of the gathered evidence further added to this research's credibility as it truthfully portrayed what was studied and the resultant findings. A robust review of the theoretical framing underpinning investigation of the research problem through the literature review further solidified the rigour of this research. This study's validity was ensured by constantly viewing the project through the lens of the research questions.

Adherence to stringent ethical protocols throughout the research was as essential as ensuring the validity and reliability of any responsible research. The ethical considerations on my part pertaining to this research were towards the fourteen participants, informed consent and anonymising the data gathered. At all stages of the research endeavour, ethical considerations were informed by the necessity to safeguard the interests of the research participants, particularly in relation to assurances of anonymity and I needed to reflect on this throughout the project (Appendix 1).

1.7 Dissertation Overview

This research study begins with an introductory chapter to set the scene for this research study. The following literature review chapter examines factors significant to TPL, compares and contrasts TPL policies in six chosen jurisdictions and assesses key frameworks or models of TPL. The methodology chapter justifies and details the research design and theoretical framework utilised for this research, along with describing the data collection instruments, data collection and data analysis applied and finally considers the methodological rigour and ethical considerations related to this study. Chapters four to seven illustrated the findings of this research study and critically discusses these in light of the literature. Chapter eight completes this research study by providing conclusions regarding the findings, along with recommendations and limitations pertaining to this study.

1.8 Conclusion

An overview of my research project has been provided in this introductory chapter. The rationale, motivation and research aims for this research study have also been outlined. It has also summarised the context and described the research methodology employed for this project. In the next chapter, the literature review and the conceptual framework to support this project will be illustrated and national and international perspectives of TPL will be explored to further lay the foundation for this study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, teachers' professional learning is an area of research that has come to prominence in international research literature over recent decades (Mooney Simmie et al., 2023; Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2021; Cooper et al., 2020; King, 2016, 2014; Kennedy, 2015, 2014, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Timperley et al., 2007; Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2002) and the literature has also expanded and focused on various facets of TPL (Evans, 2019). This study sought to discover what approaches can be utilised to incorporate the principles of *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016) into primary teachers' professional practices in the Republic of Ireland. Teachers need to engage practically with these approaches if this is to become a path teachers follow when they are reflecting on and seeking to enhance their professional abilities so it has meaningful impact on their teaching practices and students' learning. This research project investigated what factors can inhibit or enable teachers' engagement with effective TPL and further explored if reflective, collaborative approaches to TPL have the potential to work best for primary teachers, as advocated for by the Teaching Council to support *Cosán* (2016). The extent to which agentic teachers can be fostered, through the use of the *Cosán* framework was also considered.

This chapter presents an overview of relevant literature on the subject of TPL and examines the hypotheses informing transformative TPL, in order to lay a solid foundation for this research project. There is extensive literature on the topic of TPL and, of necessity, because of limits to time and resources, this was a review of a representative sample of available literature pertinent to this research. The parameters of the literature were informed by the major themes inherent to the four research questions this study investigated and keywords such as teachers' professional learning, teachers' professional development, factors enabling teachers' professional learning, collaborative practices and teachers' professional learning, reflective practices and teacher professional learning, and teacher agency

and teachers' professional learning. Databases such as Google Scholar and UCC's online library were used. The theoretical frameworks that framed this research were analysed and these were the lenses through which this research was viewed. Various factors which may influence the effectiveness of TPL were synthesised in this review. This chapter also examined the systems and provisions for TPL in six jurisdictions, namely, England, Finland, New Zealand, Ontario, Canada, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, to situate current TPL policies. These jurisdictions were chosen as they are mainly Anglophone, there is a wide amount of published research on TPL practices in each of these jurisdictions and they represent examples of particular and distinctive approaches to TPL, some of which have been influential to policies on TPL in Ireland. Significant frameworks and models of TPL were examined in this chapter. Finally, these factors, along with the various national policies and approaches to TPL, were then compared to lauded paradigms of TPL such as Guskey's (1991) seminal viewpoint on effective professional learning, Timperley et al.'s (2007) formative synthesis on TPL and Korthagen's distinctive view on TPL (2017).

2.2 Importance of TPL

There is broad agreement that there is a significant need for effective TPL to enhance teaching and learning (Department for Education, 2016b; Chu et al., 2016; Banks & Smyth, 2011; Timperley et al., 2007; Goodall et al., 2005). TPL is also deemed necessary because of the fast-paced, evolving changes in society which directly impact the provision of learning in schools and the students' needs (OECD, 2020a). This wide range of necessary skills, knowledge and experience cannot be sufficiently taught in initial teacher education [ITE], as this is only phase one of the continuum of learning for teachers (Government of Ireland, 2023b), hence, the need for TPL throughout the career of the teacher is self-evident (Teaching Council, 2016; de Vries et al., 2013; Caena, 2011; Coolahan, 2002). However, there is some disparity about what is effective TPL and this is dependent on the perspective of who is examining it (Opfer et al., 2010; Kennedy, 2015). This research study will aim

to identify if the *Cosán* framework can augment transformative TPL for primary teachers, while also enhancing teacher agency.

The topic of TPL is complex and multi-dimensional (King et al., 2023; Boylan et al., 2023; Boeskens et al., 2020; Korthagen, 2017; Timperley et al., 2007). For example, there is the influence of different agendas which can be motivated by politics, policy, the academic world or industry/ markets (Kennedy, 2015). Furthermore, the effects of the nuances of the individual teachers' contexts on TPL, whether personal, professional or emotional, also need to be fully appreciated (Caena, 2011; Korthagen, 2017). This study will also examine the various competing factors that can promote or inhibit TPL and how these concepts can confluence and result in effective, impactful TPL for teachers.

As TPL is such a multi-factorial and complex subject, this research needs a strong theoretical framework to build it on. This is explored in the following section.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The theories of sociocultural and constructivist perspectives on learning, along with complexity theory, are the theories that inform this study as I built knowledge based on the complex, lived experiences of the participants. The sociocultural and constructivist theories of learning differ in that a sociocultural perspective views learning as a "two-way relationship between individual learning and culture" (van der Zwet et al., 2011, p.361) while the constructivist theory of learning perceives it as an individual cognitive activity whereby the participant acquires then forms their knowledge based on their temporal-spatial experiences (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Nonetheless, I chose to utilise these theoretical frameworks as they can be complementary (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000) and provide a richer interpretation of how teachers learn. Further to these theoretical frameworks, I am also using complexity theory to further enrich this research project with insights of how teachers learn within a dynamic system (Rapos et al., 2025). These concepts, taken together, also functioned as enquiring instruments to assist in answering the challenging research questions of this project (Elkjaer, 2009).

The following sub-sections provide an overview of these theories and how they augmented and guided this research project.

2.3.1 Socio-Cultural Theory of Learning

The socio-cultural theory of learning can be defined as examining the interrelationships of social and individual practices in the construction of knowledge and the myriad of ways in which culture shapes the development and construction of individual knowledge (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012) or as succinctly stated, socio-culturalism locates learning in the processes of co-participation and not in the minds of individuals (Hanks in Lave & Wenger, 1991). The perspective that learning is a social process embedded in real-world contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991) would support this study as it investigated how primary teachers' experiences with TPL in Ireland. A socio-cultural perspective affords an alternative view of TPL, from that which was transmissive, to one which supports a more transformative model that espouses the individual teacher's autonomy within a democratic, collaborative culture (Fraser et al., 2007; Kennedy, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991). A socio-cultural learning framework can assist in elucidating and envisaging how adults learn as it can integrate the complexity of various learning contexts and their impact on the individual's learning (van der Zwet et al., 2011). This is also supported by Lave & Wenger's (1991) view of socio-culturalism as they deem learning to be an inherently social process, rooted not only in individual cognition but also in the complex, contextual environments in which it takes place. As a result, this approach to learning highlights the importance of both interpersonal relations and a culture of learning within a school and these cannot be underestimated in supporting TPL (McMillan et al., 2016). This is further supported by Lave and Wenger (1991) who emphasise the influencing role of school cultures on the formation of the identities of individual professional teachers as they integrate into professional learning communities. Also, as a socio-cultural perspective draws a connection between thinking and doing (Strom & Viesca, 2021), it is befitting to use when enquiring how TPL can lead to transformative practices.

By adopting a socio-cultural perspective for this research project, I attempted to allow for the multi-factorial influences on TPL, such as leadership, school culture,

teacher agency and the extent to which collaborative practices and/ or reflection is used, which affect the capacity of a teacher to engage with TPL effectively, as this research aims to discover.

2.3.2 Constructivist Theory of Learning

The constructivist theory of learning purports that knowledge cannot be passed on between individuals as each person actively constructs new knowledge on their prior knowledge, perceptions, values and experiences (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Illeris, 2009). In its most simple terms, constructivism can be evident when a teacher adapts a curriculum to suit the students in their class (King, 2016). The use of a constructivist perspective can support a transformative model of TPL as teachers are encouraged to build on the knowledge they attained and develop practices which suit their contexts and student's needs (Lambirth et al., 2021; Kennedy, 2007).

I decided to engage in a constructivist analysis of TPL for this research project as the methodology would involve iterative processes as the primary teachers actively participated in cycles of inquiry into how they engaged with the principles of *Cosán* and they constructed and reconstructed knowledge using new emerging perspectives, a view affirmed by Kelly (2006). The constructivist perspective on learning also encouraged learners to reflect to actively engage in constructing their own knowledge (Sercu et al., 2005) and reflection is an encompassing principle of *Cosán*. Reflection and building one's own knowledge can be made more powerful and effective if teachers work collaboratively using a constructivist approach to change their practices and make them more impactful (King, 2016; Kennedy 2005, 2014) and collaboration is another dimension of learning advocated strongly for in *Cosán*.

2.3.3 Complexity Theory

Complexity theory considers how systems change, adapt and evolve and new behaviours and knowledge emerge (Cochran Smith, et al., 2014; Mason, 2008). Complexity theory has key features such as its viewpoint of 'the edge of chaos'

which is where it believes new knowledge and phenomena emerge in a volatile but structured space, as through reflections, teachers' thought processes and practices are challenged, agitated and ultimately change occurs (Strom & Viesca, 2021; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a; Mason, 2008). Complexity theory also views systems as 'nested', i.e. smaller systems are situated within larger systems and the boundaries between these are fluid and they reciprocally influence each other (Rapos et al., 2025; Strom & Viesca, 2021; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a; Mason, 2008). This can be illustrated in education by viewing a teacher working within a classroom, which is within a school and within a national school system which is further influenced by international factors. Furthermore, these systems self-organise as no one dominant entity controls the systems but the various smaller components interact and through this reciprocal interaction, new phenomena may emerge (Strom & Viesca, 2021; Davis & Sumara, 2014; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a). Complexity theory provides a holistic view of the various systems that interplay to move teacher learning to transformative practices (Rapos et al., 20205; Strom & Viesca, 2021; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a).

Compexity theory is suited to interpretivist research (Mason, 2008), with multiple views of reality (Cohen et al., 2011) and suggests the use of qualitative, case study methodology (Cohen et al., 2011), as proposed for this research study. For the reasons illustrated within this section, I decided to further adopt complexity theory within this project's theoretical framework.

2.3.4 The intersection of these theories

The theoretical framework I set my project against drew on a range of theoretical perspectives, namely, constructivism, socio-cultural theory of learning and complexity theory, as Figure 2.1 illustrates. Constructivism is portrayed in this figure through the images of the teachers building their own knowledge as they engage in TPL. Socio-culturalism is illustrated by the teachers engaged in TPL and influenced by their colleagues and factors such as those depicted on the noticeboard, including considerations such as curriculum, context, reflection, pedagogy, leadership and resources. Complexity Theory is represented by the metaphor of a gyroscope. I used this image as I believe it encapsulates some of the characteristics of complexity theory, such as the edge of chaos concept, the nested systems, the dynamic

contexts interacting and influencing each other and the importance of momentum to bring about change.

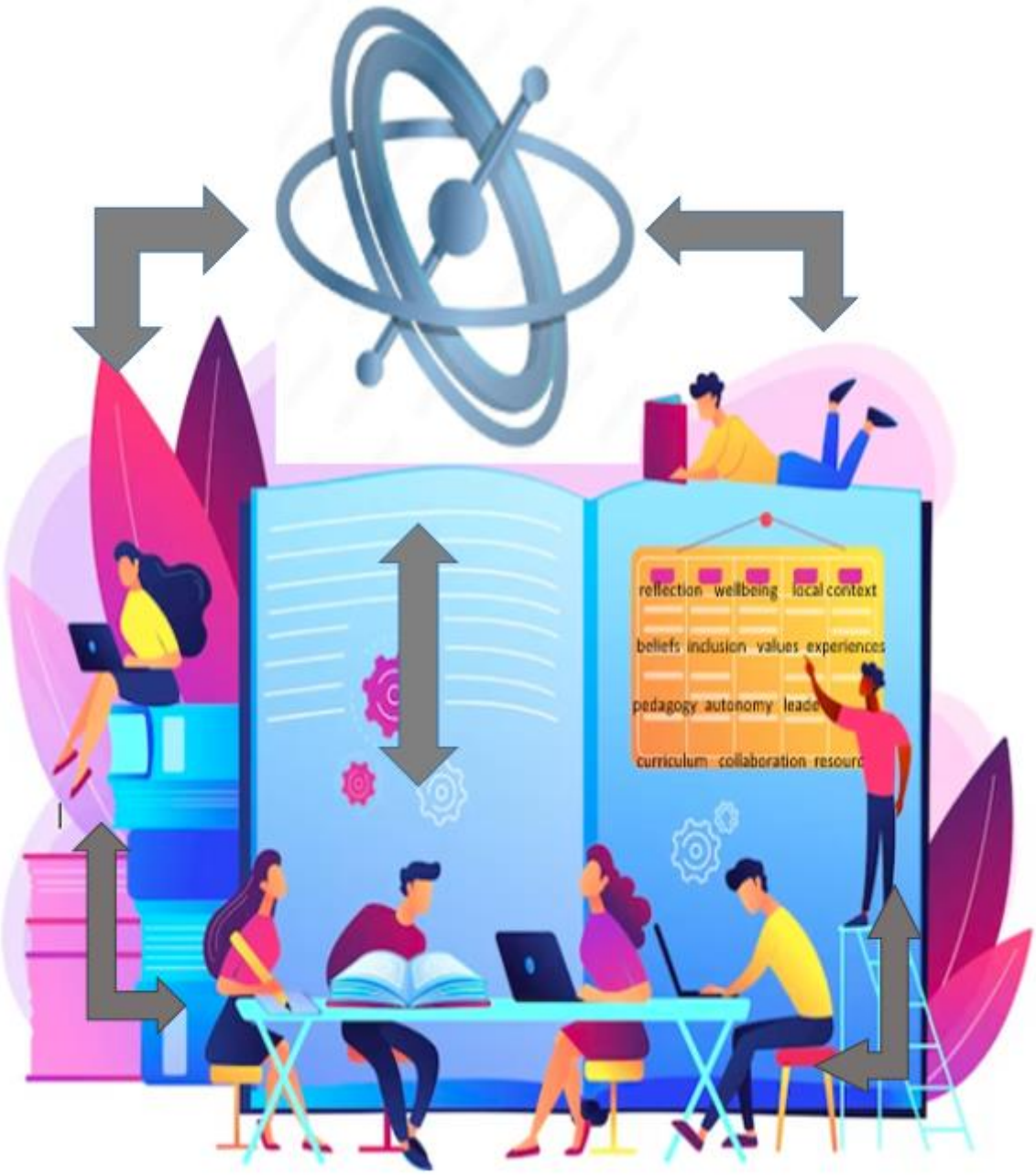


Figure 2.1. Intersection of the three theories

The use of three theories was not to overcomplicate this research project but to answer the research questions as comprehensively as possible. The Teaching Council noted within *Cosán* (2016) that teachers' learning should be socially

constructed and this was reflected by Caena who reiterated that teachers' learning can be conceptualised as "a process of active individual construction and enculturation into social practices" (2011, p.9). As explored and established in this section, both the constructivist and socio-cultural views on adult learning can complement each other as transformative learning necessitates the consideration of both personal and social aspects (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). While socio-culturalism and the constructivist theory of education can be analytically separate, these perspectives can also be regarded as jointly constitutive and in intricate ways symbiotic (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). On the other hand, complexity theory offers a more multidimensional, synergetic perspective of learning within a more iterative system (Sutherland et al., 2023). Teachers take new knowledge and merge it with their values, beliefs and experiences to construct new learning and this does not occur in isolation but within a community set against specific contexts (Hager & Beckett, 2024). Encompassing these learning experiences for teachers are the various dynamic contexts that interplay and influence it all. Consequently, I believe these frameworks can intersect to enquire and serve the purpose of this study which is to answer this project's research questions.

1. *What approaches can be employed by teachers in primary schools to incorporate the core principles of the* Cosán *framework into their living professional practices?*
2. *What factors enable or inhibit primary teachers' engagement with transformative TPL in the Republic of Ireland?*
3. *Can the development of reflective, collaborative cultures in schools enhance the positive impact of TPL?*
4. *Can* Cosán *be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency?*

The next section will establish how various factors of TPL can mediate its effectiveness thus determining the extent to which transformative change occurs in teachers' professional practices.

2.4 Factors deemed relevant for effective TPL

There are a myriad of factors which can facilitate or inhibit TPL. This section, examines those that are extensively referred to in the literature and within the TPL policies of the various jurisdictions outlined above. They are namely, reflective practices, collaborative practices, school culture, school leadership, teacher agency, motivation and teacher identity.

2.4.1 TPL and Reflective Practices

Teachers reflecting on teaching practices have been promoted as a powerful tool for more effective teaching (Harris, 1998; Day, 1999b; Shandomo, 2010; OECD, 2012a; Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013; Çimer et al., 2013, King et al., 2023). An early exponent of reflective thinking, Dewey, defined it as an active and deliberate process that enabled us to learn directly from our experiences (1933). Schön further built on this theory and linked reflection to professional development (1983, 1987). He also distinguished between two different types of reflection: reflection on action, which is retrospective, and reflection in action, where one reacts in the moment to the situation unfolding (Schön, 1983). Many researchers concur with Schön (1987) and opine that for professional learning development to really have an impact, teachers need to fully engage in reflective practices (Imel, 1992; Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006; Liu, 2015; Šarić & Šteh, 2017, King et al., 2023). The OECD (2012a) concurs with this and aspires to the expectation that by reflecting on their practices, teachers would challenge their teaching conventions and beliefs to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of their teaching practices. Reflective practice is deemed significant to education professionals as it is crucial in ensuring professional learning becomes transformative (King et al., 2023; Keay et al., 2019; Šarić & Šteh, 2017). It is also expected that teachers will reflect on their teaching practices and the impact it has on their students' learning (Teaching Council, 2016; Timperley et al., 2009; Meiers & Ingvarsen, 2005). Reflection also supports teachers in ensuring they do not become complacent in their practices by encouraging inquiry into their professional practices and how these may advance, while concurrently, there is also a self-organising process to reflection which supports teachers in engaging with their career coherently (Keay et al., 2019). Teachers who engage in critical reflection may benefit

from it as they could gain an insight into why they teach as they do, learn to reframe situations through challenging assumptions, evaluate how their practices can become more effective, note areas to improve on and discover how to engage their students further so their teaching is impacting positively on their learning (Leijen et al., 2020; Liu, 2015; Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2006). This assessment of the importance of reflection lends itself to the constructionist view of learning, one of the theories of learning this project is scaffolded on, as through reflection, a teacher develops the capacity to engage in transformative learning (Illeris, 2009).

"The reflective teacher model has been influential" (Menter, et al., 2010, p. 2) and while there are many benefits to engaging in reflective practices as a teacher, as attested above, there are also challenges. These include the reality that reflection can be time-consuming (Imel, 1992) and given the ever-expanding workload of teachers (Hunter et al., 2022; Maas et al., 2021) reflection may not take priority. Critically reflecting on teaching practices also requires teachers to honestly evaluate their teaching that may be personally sensitive and challenging for some to do (King et al., 2023; Šarić & Šteh, 2017; Menter et al., 2010; Imel, 1992). While there may be difficulties with developing reflective practices to enhance professional learning, it is widely held that reflective practices lead to improved professional practices which impact positively on students' learning (Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013; Çimer et al., 2013; OECD, 2012a; Shandomo, 2010; Day, 1999b) and it holds a prominent place in national policies on teacher education and learning, as outlined below.

National policies for the development of initial teacher education or newly qualified teachers include various models of reflection on professional learning for teachers in the jurisdictions of Finland, New Zealand, Ontario, Republic of Ireland and Scotland. In Finland, during initial teacher education [ITE], there is a strong emphasis on teachers as researchers and this skill is transferred to the classrooms where teachers enquire, reflect, evaluate and carry out continual cycles of action research to improve teaching practices, support teacher development and improve student learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; OECD, 2010). This skills-based approach to ITE cultivates a reflective, inquiry-oriented approach to teaching which develops high-quality teachers (Darling Hammond, 2006). In New Zealand, through

the two-year mentored induction programme (Teaching Council of Aotearoa NZ, 2021), reflective practices are encouraged in newly qualified teachers and the development of professional thinking and knowledge is supported (Haigh & Trevethan, 2017; Ell, 2011). This teacher induction programme is similar to Ireland's induction programme which requires newly qualified teachers to reflect regularly on professional experience and learning (Smyth et al., 2016). Parallel to this, both Ontario's (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021) and Scotland's induction programmes (EIS, 2020) place more emphasis on reflective dialogue between the new teacher and their mentor to evaluate practice to develop efficacy. These regions' induction programmes view one of the aims of mentoring to be a catalyst for reflection through collaborative dialogue, as advocated for by Tonna et al. (2017). These countries' ITE policies also support Liu's (2015) view that teachers need to be supported when the capacity to develop critical reflective skills is being cultivated, as this can lead to effective teaching and learning.

Reflective practices feature in the policies on professional learning for teachers in the jurisdictions of England, Finland, New Zealand, Ontario, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. Finland, Ontario and Scotland share similarities when their systems of professional development for teachers are compared and the standing of reflective practices is evaluated. Each policy requires teachers to undertake a personal review of their professional development and, with the assistance of encouraging yet challenging discussions with their school leaders, to self-evaluate reflectively on their practices (ETFO, 2024; GTC Scotland, 2021a; Paronen & Lappi, 2018). These cycles of professional development are in place to empower teachers to critically reflect on their teaching and needs, to then identify what will be the focus of their ongoing professional growth (Tarhan et al., 2019; GTC Scotland, 2019; Ontario College of Teachers, 2016). These approaches are in line with Antoniu and Kyrikides's (2013) belief that reflection is more effective when teachers are given the autonomy to identify areas of teaching for improvement themselves and the agency to develop a plan to address these needs. In England, the Standard for Teachers' Professional Development maintains that teachers should reflect regularly and systematically on their teaching approaches and the effectiveness of their lessons (Department for Education, 2016a). In Ireland, *Cosán* promotes the role of

reflection in teacher learning, whether collaborative or individual and further states that ongoing cycles of reflection are career-long processes (Teaching Council, 2016).

Reflective dialogue can be a very powerful tool as it can encourage teachers to view different perspectives of their practices by deconstructing and constructing them with another participant, whether a school leader, mentor or colleague (Tonna et al., 2017). This view is also espoused by the OECD (2012a) when they asserted that teacher collaboration is key to supporting reflection by teachers. Dogan et al. (2019) reflects this belief and further asserts that reflective dialogue is a critical component in professional learning communities. The following section will delve into how collaborative practices can support teachers' professional learning.

2.4.2 TPL and Collaborative Practices

Collaborative practices are deemed to benefit teachers' learning throughout their careers as it can lead to transformative teaching and learning (Opfer & Pedder, 2011a; Harris & Jones, 2010) and more sustainable, relevant and impactful teachers' professional learning (de Jong et al., 2021; OECD, 2014b; Cordingly et al., 2005). Collaborative practices can be defined as a continuum of interactions between two or more teaching colleagues working together towards a shared goal (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Collaborative activities are recognised as being an important model of successful TPL as it is relevant to teachers' practices and contexts as they are embedded within the workplace (Abbaspour et al., 2024; Lipscombe et al., 2020; Durksen et al., 2017). It also has the power to make teachers feel more agentic and supported and thus more engaged and satisfied with the profession of teaching (Boylan et al., 2023; Reeves et al., 2017). Education Scotland (2015) and Ireland's Teaching Council (2016) advocate for collaborative activities amongst teachers in their policies on TPL. Meanwhile, New Zealand (Teaching Council of Aotearoa NZ, 2021) and England (Department for Education, 2019) have similar systems of appraisal of teachers which inform professional development and collaborative practices while also interlinking with school improvement priorities (Department for Education, 2019); however, according to Visone et al. (2021) and Vangrieken et al. (2015), a system of teacher evaluation can lead to a sense of competitiveness and individualism that is not conducive to collaborative practices. Another potential

difficulty in developing sustainable, collaborative, reflective models of professional development in Ireland would be the reality that 44% of primary schools in Ireland have four teachers or less (Department of Education and Skills, 2020); thus, the small size of these collegial communities may be a challenge.

2.4.2.1 *Communities of Practice*

Collaboration in schools often begets communities of practice. It can be defined as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). This learning community emerges when a group of teachers are focused on improving teacher learning and, thus, student achievement and a culture arises where it becomes the norm to collaborate to continually improve (Opfer & Pedder, 2011a; du Four 2004). Communities of practice can also be defined as a group of socially interdependent teachers mutually engaged in a shared vision over a sustained period of time (Vangrieken et al., 2015). The socio-cultural theory of learning can clarify how communities of practice can enhance TPL as skills and knowledge are acquired within a particular context, identities are shaped and the TPL engaged with is influenced by the school's culture (Eshchar-Netz, et al., 2022; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Communities of practice have the potential to enhance the capability of all teachers within a school (Hord & Sommers, 2008), and, as a result, are increasingly being used in many countries, such as Australia, Germany, the Netherlands and the U.S., as a means for school-based professional development to improve teacher quality (Schaap et al., 2019). Communities of practice need to be cultivated for a school to become a place of transformative teaching and learning (King et al., 2023; Kennedy, 2014; Harris & Jones, 2010) and qualities of successful communities of practice include: cooperation, shared vision, a focus on learning, reflective inquiry and de-privatisation of practice (OECD, 2012a; Caena, 2011). The development of communities of practice is a centres-out approach, as recommended by many (OECD, 2012a; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a), and allows for professional autonomy while also being relevant, accessible and impactful and these are all values underpinning teachers' professional learning in *Cosán*.

Developing communities of practice is not a simple process and it needs to become part of the ethos of the school (Hargreaves, 2007) and a school culture of responsibility, honesty and respect, along with solid leadership needs to be cultivated for collaborative practices to flourish (Lipscombe et al., 2020; Kennedy, 2011; Caena, 2011). The mindset of teachers must change from the individual to working collaboratively with their colleagues for the common shared purpose of improving students' learning if it is to be successful (Fullan, 2011; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a; Harris & Jones, 2010). Time is also needed for colleagues to genuinely collaborate with each other (Bergmark, 2020; King, 2019). Communities of practice should also be attentive to not becoming complacent –the *status quo* should not be reinforced but colleagues need to gather to deliberate, critically reflect and challenge practices to lead to transformative learning (de Jong, 2021; Timperley et al., 2007; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). This view is also attested to by the Teaching Council who state that teachers' thinking and realities sometimes needs to be challenged (2016) if new practices are to be transformative and this is mirrored in England's TPL policy that encourages the use of external facilitators to challenge orthodox thinking and practices (Department for Education, 2016a). These external facilitators can also provide support to facilitate the development of collaborative practices within schools (Brennan & Gorman, 2024; de Jong, 2021; Lambirth et al., 2021). This facilitation role should be eased off over time as a culture conducive to collaboration develops and teachers develop the skillset to sustain it (Bergmark, 2020). There is a resonance within these views of challenging the *status quo* and agitating the system to lead to transformative practices and complexity theory's "edge of chaos", a condition that can be a catalyst for new ideas (Strom & Viesca, 2021).

2.4.2.2 *Professional Learning Communities*

On the other hand, professional learning communities (PLCs) can be understood as groups of teachers who meet regularly to engage in collaborative problem-solving around specific teaching and learning issues, with the aim of improving student outcomes (Wenger et al., 2002). Qualities of successful PLCs include: collaboration, shared vision, a focus on learning, reflective inquiry and de-privatisation of practice

(Brennan & Gorman, 2023; OECD, 2012a; Caena, 2011; Stoll et al., 2006). When these elements are present, and supported by favourable contextual factors such as strong leadership and organisational structures, PLCs can serve as powerful forms of professional learning (Christensen, 2025; Brennan & King, 2022; Stoll et al., 2006) and lead to the fostering of agentic professional practices (King, 2014, Brennan & Gorman, 2023). Conversely, the absence of such support, along with external pressures like policy reforms and accountability demands, can hinder the development of PLCs (Dogan et al., 2016).

One persistent barrier to PLC development is the lack of time, a long-standing challenge to professional learning in schools that remains largely unaddressed in policy (Parker et al., 2016). However, when teachers are empowered to exercise agency, they are more likely to engage in shared decision-making and collective learning, which can lead to innovative and collaborative solutions (Harris & Muijs, 2010). Much of the existing research on PLCs highlights their strength in being context-specific and school-based, reinforcing the value of situated professional learning.

2.4.2.3 *Network Learning Communities and Online Communities of Practice*

Communities of practice (CoP) do not just occur within schools but also across schools (Lipscombe, 2020). This is specifically observed in Finland (Lavonen, 2020; Brandisauskiene et al., 2021), Ontario (Darling-Hammond, 2017) and New Zealand (Ministry of Education NZ, 2022b), where lateral collaboration is encouraged and schools disseminate examined best practices. A networked learning community (NLC) is when a group of schools collaborate to share knowledge typically around a specific educational area (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Katz & Earl, 2010) and is a recognised form of professional development which has the potential to lead to effective practices (Coppe, 2024; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Barrera-Pedemonte, 2016; Desimone, 2009). Networks of professional learning communities are recognised as a beneficial support for TPL as teachers communicate and exchange ideas and the larger network draws on more diverse knowledge and expertise (Evert & Stein, 2022; Katz & Earl, 2010). Similar to NLCs, virtual communities of practice (vCoP) have emerged online over the last twenty

years, which was accelerated by the Covid pandemic (McInerney, 2022; Brennan & Gorman, 2023) and are deemed to be a potentially powerful tool for TPL (Ghamrawi, 2022; Brennan & Gorman, 2023). The isolating nature of teaching can be mitigated with vCoPs as teachers collaborate, support and encourage each other (Yang et al., 2020; Kenney et al., 2013). A further identified benefit of vCoPs is its ability to allow resources to be uploaded and shared (Ghamrawi, 2022).

While there can be difficulties when developing collaborative practices and CoP, as outlined above, empirical research has demonstrated the impact of CoP to be progressive on teachers' learning (Vangrieken, 2015; Caena, 2011) and this impetus can incentivise schools and national policies to promote the development of collaboration amongst staffs and schools. This progress can be seen in the national policy for TPL in Scotland which encourages collaborative, dialogic practices and guidelines are in place which are designed to support the development of cultures that foster sustainability, trust and teacher agency while also promoting teacher-led professional learning and enabling collaborative professionalism (GTC Scotland, 2019). This is reflective of the national TPL policy in New Zealand where school leaders develop, in collaboration with their teaching staff, a Professional Growth Cycle which aims to promote the professional development of the individual teacher through authentic learning collaborations while targeting the school community's needs (Teaching Council Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021).

Effective communities of practice are not only dependent on the school's culture but also synergetic with it (Eschar-Netz et al., 2022; Visone et al., 2021). The following section will outline how school culture impacts on teachers' TPL.

2.4.3 TPL and School Culture

School culture is perhaps an elusive quality but, it may be viewed as the beliefs, values and norms that guide how a school operates (Muijs et al., 2014; Kennedy, 2011; Fullan, 2007). The prioritising of a school culture conducive to learning is an essential element to support TPL (Abbaspour et al., 2024; Kennedy, 2011) as teacher quality is deemed to be dependent on the school culture (Lavonen et al., 2020). Culture is created by the school community over time (Furner & McCulla, 2019;

Goodall et al., 2005) and in some instances, given its importance, it may be crucial to initially address a change of culture within the school to allow for sustainable, collaborative learning communities to develop (King, 2014).

For TPL to be successful and impactful across a school, there needs to be a supportive school culture that enables continuous TPL (Christensen, 2025; King et al., 2023; Kennedy, 2011; Guskey, 2000), as TPL is a process, not an event (Guskey, 2002), and a shared professional culture becomes more effective when collaboration is nurtured with a collective responsibility towards inquiry (Visone et al., 2021). Some factors which enable the development of a school culture and leads to capacity for teacher development and learning include collective responsibility, a shared purpose, supportive leadership, collaboration and the development of trusting, respectful relationships (Visone et al., 2021). Coherence is also needed as teachers need to share a common goal or vision and when sustained, cultural change can be initiated with teachers' learning at the heart (Labone & Long, 2016). The use of external facilitators to support and challenge teachers in their learning is also more likely to lead to transformative change towards a school culture that values teacher learning, especially when the content is linked meaningfully to their context and values (Labone & Long, 2016; Timperley et al., 2007). One of the above factors conducive to a progressive learning culture amongst the teaching staff is for trusting, honest relationships to be fostered (Vangrieken et al., 2015) but, this may be challenging as teaching has tended to be a culturally isolating profession with individual teacher autonomy to the forefront so a change in teachers' mindset is needed (Vangrieken et al., 2015; Caena, 2011). Supportive leadership is another named factor which enables a culture of learning in schools (Reinius et al., 2024; Furner & McCulla, 2019; Vangrieken et al., 2015; Kennedy et al., 2008) however if the school leadership does not prioritise the development of collaborative cultures through effective scheduling and structures, while also nurturing teacher autonomy and agency, then opportunities for successful, impactful TPL fades (Reinius et al., 2024; Visone et al., 2021; Bellibas et al., 2020).

A culture of trust and learning together, not only within schools collaboratively but across schools in networks of practice, is central to Finland's TPL policy (Ministry for Education and Culture, 2016) as, similar to Kennedy's view (2011), it is seen as

conducive to impactful TPL. This type of culture can also be seen in Scotland's policy on TPL that advances the development of cultures that foster sustainability, trust and teacher agency while also promoting teacher-led professional learning and enabling collaborative professionalism (GTC Scotland, 2019). This is reflective of Lieberman's (1995) research that when professional learning is expected a culture of inquiry becomes an integral part of the school. England's standards for TPL attends explicitly to the development of a supportive culture of trust and professional engagement, as effective professional development cannot occur in isolation (Department for Education, 2016a) but, as alluded to in an earlier section, this can be difficult to promote while, simultaneously, teachers' individual practices are being evaluated (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Meanwhile, in the Republic of Ireland, their TPL framework aims to promote a culture of powerful professional learning that engages teachers in their own learning for the benefit of themselves and their students (Teaching Council, 2016).

As outlined here, school culture can enable or inhibit TPL and is particularly shaped by the school leadership (Visone et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2008) as their influence can lead to the promotion of teacher capacity, trust and a culture of learning (Bellibas, 2020) and how this is effectual will be described in the next section.

2.4.4 TPL and School Leadership

School leadership is noted to be of importance in the literature on TPL as it plays a critical role in fostering and supporting positive relationships in schools that benefits collaborative practices and is conducive to a learning environment (Abbaspour et al., 2024; Christensen, 2025; Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2021; Chu et al., 2016; King, 2014, 2011; Kennedy, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2008). The transformational style of leadership is exemplified by a school leader who models desired behaviours, fosters trust and capacity, articulates a clear vision, and motivates others to collaborate and drive change toward that shared goal (Anderson, 2017). School leaders who engage in this style of leadership are much more likely to motivate teachers to cultivate a culture where changes in attitudes and practices occur and when collaborative practices are encouraged, sustainable, impactful TPL is more likely to ensue (King, 2011). School leaders have a particular role to play in creating an

environment where relationships of trust are forged and this is specifically outlined in the policies for TPL of England (Department for Education, 2016a). Of note, this leadership role is not just for principals but also for teacher leaders who, working beside other teachers, as change agents, can promote and be a key support for TPL within schools. (King et al., 2023). This can not only enhance situated professional growth (Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2021; Schaap et al., 2019), but also augment the school's social and cultural capacity (Mooney Simmie, 2021). This can be seen in Finland (Niemi, 2015) and in Ireland and Scotland, where all teachers are determined to have a leadership role (Teaching Council, 2016; GTC Scotland, 2021a). Effective school leaders interlink the three areas of relationships, purpose and common goals (Donaldson, 2006) and this is reflective of the belief that flexible, shared visions for the learning priorities of schools and, thus, the purpose of professional development for teachers needs to be communicated in a clear and affirmative way by the school leadership for TPL to be successful (Christensen, 2025; Schaap et al., 2019) and this is reiterated in England's Standards for Professional Development (Department for Education, 2016a) and identified as a characteristic of effective TPL in Ontario (Working Table on Teacher Development, 2007). It is also necessary for school leaders to put systems in place such as the provision of time and structures to enable teachers to participate in collaborative practices so professional learning is facilitated (Visone et al., 2021; Brodie, 2019) and the need for this can be seen in the policy for England (Department for Education, 2016a), while in Finland and Ontario their TPL programmes specify for leaders to develop skills to manage structures to enable the development of teachers (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016; Ontario Ministry of Education & OTF, 2007). Schools should have autonomy over their professional development as research points to TPL being more powerful when it is situated within the context of the schools' needs (Lipscombe et al., 2020; Caena, 2011; King, 2011) but effective school leadership is needed to enable this (Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2021). This can also be taken a step further when school leaders enable teacher leaders to become autonomous professionals (Lavonen et al., 2020), who further augment a professional culture of learning in schools where both formal and informal learning takes place (Reinius et al., 2024; King, 2011; Kennedy, 2011). This can be seen in Ontario where experienced teachers are encouraged to become autonomous leaders of learning

through the Teacher Learning and Leadership Programme (Ontario Ministry of Education & OTF, 2007).

As discussed in this section, supportive and enabling school leadership can play a key role in developing a culture of learning that leads to effective teachers who become autonomous professionally (King, 2011). This, in turn, may lead to teacher agency, which is explored in the next section.

2.4.5 TPL and Teacher Agency

Teacher agency can be defined simply as teachers being active agents determining their professional evolution through reflection on their practice (Pyhältö et al., 2015; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002) or as teachers acting intentionally to form their response to challenging situations (King, 2014). At the same time, teacher agency can also be determined as a more complex, multi-factorial phenomenon that may be shaped by context, pedagogical knowledge, policy, culture, capacity, past experiences and future aspirations (Priestley et al., 2015a; Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) and this ecological view of agency will be adopted within this research.). This perspective of agency perceives agency as emerging from "the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137) and can be comprehended as encompassing three dimensions, namely contextual, relational and temporal (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The temporal dimension to teachers' agentic practices, within this dynamic, complex interaction between these various conditions, is influenced by the past, future-orientated and situated in the present (Priestley et al., 2015a; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Boylan et al. (2023) posit that the achievement of agency and transformative learning are mutually beneficial as the emergence of each fosters the other, which is supportive of Vähäsantanen's (2015) viewpoint. Teachers as active agents is significant for TPL to lead to transformative practices and crucial for effective school development (Reinius et al., 2024; King et al., 2023; Kauppinen et al., 2020; Imants & van der Wal, 2020; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Bellibas et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2016; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Pyhältö et al., 2015; King, 2014). This is because when teachers are agentic, they are more likely to enable

change in their own practices, so it benefits their students' learning (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; Bellibas, 2020; King, 2014; Timperley et al., 2007; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). By casting a socio-cultural perspective on agency a deeper understanding can develop on the interdependency between teacher agency and TPL within the individual social contexts of the schools, which can include school leadership, school culture and collegial relationships and the broader social contexts of national policies and curriculums (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020).

Traditionally, teachers had an independent, even isolated, professional role (Vangrieken et al., 2017) and school systems tended to be very hierarchical and principal-led (Moynihan & O'Donovan, 2021) and this context did not contribute to the development of teacher agency (Brodie, 2019). Similarly, teacher agency can also be discouraged when teachers have little autonomy over prescribed curricula (Leijen et al., 2020; Priestley et al., 2015a) or when a stringent system of teacher evaluation is in place (Mooney Simmie, 2021; Priestley et al., 2015a). This top-down system, which impedes teacher agency, can also be mirrored in teachers' professional learning, where one-off workshops inform teachers in a transmissive way with little relevance to their own contexts or needs (Bergmark, 2020; Timperley et al., 2007). To be agentic teachers, teachers also need to have a deep understanding of pedagogical theories and to link them with learners' needs; this informs teachers about where their practices are situated, what gaps are there to address their students' needs and decisions can be made about TPL (Ó Breacháin, 2023; Brodie, 2019; Timperley et al., 2007).

An agentic teacher is more than a teacher with autonomy, as the manifestation of agency allows for autonomy to develop (Huang & Benson, 2013). When teachers achieve agency, they have the knowledge, experience, skills and motivation to solve professional problems they encounter to enable student learning (Brodie, 2019; Timperley et al., 2007). The development of learning communities can foster agentic capacity within teachers and leads to more engagement with TPL and thus, improved teacher quality (Brodie, 2019; Schaap et al., 2019) and this is advocated for in Scotland's guidelines for professional development (GTC Scotland, 2019). The advancement of teacher agency and autonomy while at the same time promoting collaboration may seem like a paradox but this contradiction can be resolved

through the lens of teacher agency as a flexible, reflective attitude providing the capacity for collective improvement as socio-culturalism supports (Vangrieken et al., 2017). This perspective of teacher development can be seen in Finland's policy on TPL (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016) which is autonomous and allows teachers to be agentic in developing their own TPL plans (Tarhan et al., 2019; Paronen & Lappi, 2018). Of note, *Cosán* does not mention teacher agency within the framework.

As established in this section, teachers being agentic actors within their professional practices is imperative if meaningful, transformative TPL is to occur. Teacher agency is also seen as a crucial factor in teacher motivation (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; da Silva & Mølstad, 2020; Vangrieken et al., 2017**)** and the follwing section will explore this further.

2.4.6 Motivation for TPL

As previously noted, an influential factor in TPL is teacher motivation (Calleja, 2018; Pyhältö et al, 2015). Teacher motivation to engage in TPL can be viewed at three levels: personal, school-related and system-wide (McMillan et al., 2016). The school-related and system-wide levels may be viewed as extrinsic motivators and include incentives such as certification or remuneration, or follow policy, whether at the school or national level (Boeskens et al., 2020). Intrinsic motivators are at the level of the person and are dependent on the professionalism of the teacher (Boeskens et al., 2020) and can include promotion, professional development and achievement (McMillan et al., 2016). In reality, though, practices driven by motivation are not a simple binary relationship of extrinsic and intrinsic factors but a combination of the two (Boeskens et al., 2020). Furthermore, schools and school leaders should support TPL through harnessing the inherent, vocational desire of many teachers to progress as teachers (Proudfoot & Boyd, 2025).

When teachers have autonomy over their TPL, they are more likely to be motivated as the TPL they undertake will align with their values and beliefs and thus, they are more likely to gain from it (Boeskens et al., 2020; Korthagen, 2017). On the other hand, mandated TPL can be perceived as constraining (Calleja, 2018; McMillan et al,

2016) and formal, rigorous systems of TPL, while being a strong extrinsic motivator, can also inhibit effective TPL as it may impede teachers' intrinsic motivation (Boeskens et al., 2020). However, this is at odds with research that makes evident the need for an external motivator, such as mandatory TPL or professional standards to meet and be held accountable for, can be beneficial as a system-wide motivator (Visone et al., 2021; Lavonan et al., 2020; McMillan et al., 2016; Timperley et al., 2007). Guskey (2002), on the other hand, purports that a balance between support and pressure to keep teachers motivated is necessary so changes in their practice become sustainable and effectual. This view is echoed by Boeskens et al. (2020) who deem TPL systems which are successful consider a balance between external motivators with intrinsic elements so teacher autonomy and agency emerge inherently. Thus, while not without its challenges, a holistic approach to TPL should be taken and the personal and professional needs of the teacher should be balanced with the contextual needs of the school (King, 2016). This approach is in line with the recommendation in the Republic of Ireland that teachers should retain personal and professional autonomy while the school's needs are met in the context of a national system (McMillan et al., 2016). This approach may be easier to implement if the school leader clearly outlines the school's goals and vision and encourages teachers to align their practices with the school's vision as the teachers' motivational forces move from being extrinsic to intrinsic (Visone et al., 2021).

Timperley et al. (2007) are of the view that a teachers' motivation to undertake TPL is not as important as their willingness to engage with TPL and seeing, over a sustained period, that their learning, which results in changes to their practices, is impacting positively on their students' learning. This view of teachers being motivated by seeing positive results in their teaching practices and, thus, their students' learning is also reflected by King (2016). For a teacher to be able to assess whether their new learning or practices have had an impact on their students' learning, they need to be an agentic teacher who can reflect meaningfully on their actions (Pyhältö et al., 2015) and this is supportive of Priestley et al.'s (2015a) and Emirbayer & Mische's (1998) views of teacher agency being concerned with taking action in the present to have different results in the future which their agency further motivates them to shape the future.

The above synopsis of what best motivates teachers is reflected in *Cosán* where a vision is outlined of intrinsically motivated professional teachers who will have autonomy and agency over their TPL as they are in the best position to identify what are their learning needs and their students, while having due regard for their school context.

2.4.7 Teacher Identity

Teacher identity can be described "as an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences" (Flores & Day, 2006). Teacher identity is fluid, constantly evolving and shaped by the individual teachers' various contexts and unique experiences (Suarez et al., 2022; Korthagen, 2017; Day et al., 2006). The formation of identity is deemed to be a complex and dynamic system (Rushton et al., 2022) and is socially mediated (Reeves, 2018). Furthermore, the positioning of teachers' fluctuating identity within their unique personal and professional histories and contexts, as depicted by Buchanan (2015), is congruent with the portrayal of agency as being temporally embedded within varying social contexts (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The Teaching Council (2020, p.4) concur that teacher identity is constantly in flux and perceive identity as "both a concept and a process" and the necessity to engage in reflective practices is significant to develop this sense. Surprisingly, similar to agency, *Cosán* does not mention the awareness of evolving teacher identity and its relationship with TPL. Reflective actions enrich teachers' perspectives and understandings as they actively construct their own knowledge of the world (Heikkinen et al., 2012), while concurrently, the social contexts, interactions and histories inherent within various contexts further shape what is learned (Rogoff & Lave, 1984) and these ensuing experiences mould a teachers' identity (Hökkä et al., 2017a), as constructivism and socio-culturalism elucidates. Teachers' identities are closely connected with their values, beliefs, aspirations and perception of emotions (Andrews & Munro, 2018; Korthagen, 2017; Hökkä, 2017a; Postholm, 2012; Day et al., 2006). Mockler (2011) contends that a more nuanced understanding of teacher professional identity and how this identity is shaped is essential for addressing TPL

as it is a valuable lens for supporting educators and fostering a more transformative and meaningful educational agenda.

2.4.8 Conclusion

This section of the literature review has dealt with various factors that can enhance or inhibit TPL. Teachers engaging in TPL does not automatically give rise to transformative practices or school development as many elements need to converge to allow the teachers' professional learning to have an impact (King, 2014), as this synthesis has demonstrated. These factors are interconnected in various ways and together may create conditions conducive to non-linear TPL approaches and foster transformative professional practices (Raduan & Na, 2020).

The next section will explore international paradigms of TPL. The jurisdictions of England, Finland, New Zealand, Ontario, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland have been chosen as there is a wide amount of published research, in English, on teachers' professional learning practices for each of these places and they represent examples of particular and distinctive approaches to TPL, some of which have been influential to policies on TPL in Ireland.

2.5. Overview of International Perspectives and Policies on TPL

2.5.1 England

In England, there is a standards-based approach to TPL and TPL is commonly referred to as Professional Development [PD]. The Department for Education defines PD broadly as any activity that develops teachers' knowledge, understanding or effectiveness and can enhance children's learning (Department for Education & Skills, 2006). They further state that by engaging in PD teachers' job satisfaction can be improved, at whatever stage of their career they are at (Department for Education & Skills, 2006). It is of note, that while the standards for PD have been reviewed in the intervening years, there has been no update to the definition (Department for Education, 2019). While PD is not mandatory for

teachers to remain registered it is seen as a duty they should undertake (Department for Education, 2011) and while nearly 100% of teachers partake in professional development activities annually, only 26% report participating in collaborative professional learning activities regularly (OECD, 2022b). Schools are inspected every three years while teachers' performance is consistently assessed annually by school management (Eurydice, 2021). This in-school review of teachers' competence by management often involves classroom observation and annual specific, measurable targets are set out for each teacher after each year's appraisal and this performance management is linked to pay progression (Department for Education, 2019). This system of appraisal is not intended to add to the workload of teachers and is meant to be a supportive practice which should inform collaborative practices and professional development while linking to school improvement priorities (Department for Education, 2019). This hierarchal, standards-based approach with a focus on school performance determines objectives for school improvement that further influences targets for teachers' professional development and can be viewed as a narrow vision of teacher professional development (Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2021; Czerniawski, 2013; Opfer & Pedder, 2011b). It is deemed that the needs of individual teachers may not fit in with the determined needs of the school and this conflict means that the PD teachers undertake may not lead to sustainable or impactful practices (Opfer & Pedder, 2011b; ATL, 2009). Furthermore, many teachers feel they have little autonomy over their professional development goals (Worth & van den Brande, 2020). Another unintended consequence of a system of teacher evaluation is that teachers may feel they are in competition with their colleagues and, as a result, work more independently which is not conducive to a collaborative school culture (Visone et al., 2021).

There are practices in professional development in England that are deemed good by international standards (OECD, 2018a). For example, the induction programme for novice teachers is very supportive of their development into the profession (Eurydice, 2021; Department for Education, 2021). In another initiative, teachers can also become chartered teachers, who are teachers recognised for their high level of expertise and skill in education, by completing a 14-month certification programme and this system recognises teachers who have an expertise in teaching,

rather than leadership, and they are also remunerated for this (Eurydice, 2021). Educational policy is now placing more importance on collaboration between schools through teaching schools where evidence-based good practices are shared between schools (Armstrong, 2015) which is congruent with research on the NLCs (Coppe, 2024; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Barrera-Pedemonte, 2016; Desimone, 2009).

2.5.2 Finland

The system of education in Finland has often been lauded as a paradigm of excellence in education (Frederick, 2020; OECD, 2012b). The teachers there are highly respected and qualified with at least a master's degree (OECD, 2013b). Teaching is a prestigious career in Finland and there is a lot of competition for places in initial teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2017), hence only those with the best suitability and aptitude are accepted (Paronen & Lappi, 2018). During initial teacher education, there is a strong emphasis on teachers as researchers and this skill is transferred to the schools and classrooms where teachers enquire, reflect, evaluate and carry out continual cycles of action research to improve teaching practices, support teacher development and improve student learning (OECD, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). To further build on this effective initial teacher education (ITE), beginning teachers are then given the time and support to work collaboratively with colleagues (Darling-Hammond, 2017) to meet their students' needs (Paronen & Lappi, 2018). Similar to England, the Finnish education system is decentralised and in municipal areas, schools and teachers have the freedom to interpret core curriculum guidelines (Paronen & Lappi, 2018; OECD, 2012b). The education system is also not inspected externally nor is it guided by external examinations as it is only at the end of secondary school that there is an external matriculation exam (Tarhan et al., 2019; Paronen & Lappi, 2018). Teachers are accountable to themselves and their students and not to outside agencies, yet, teachers generally undergo an appraisal annually with their principal (Paronen & Lappi, 2018). This tends to be a reflective, strengths-based and empowering evaluation which is often used as a basis for professional learning as communities of practice develop within schools around noted areas for development (Tarhan, et

al., 2019; Paronen & Lappi, 2018). This model of teacher evaluation is autonomous, which is in line with the overall decentralisation of education in Finland, as outlined above, and gives teachers the agency to develop their own plan for professional development (Tarhan, et al., 2019; Paronen & Lappi, 2018), hence TPL in Finland tends to be based on teachers' and school's needs (Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2021).

Finnish education policy also supports cooperation, networking and collaboration between schools in developing and disseminating best effective practice (OECD, 2012b). The endorsement of professionalism amongst teachers; a culture of trust between schools, teachers and their communities, the importance of individualised teaching and learning programmes and a balance between creativity and experimentation with academic achievement is what has become known as the much-lauded "Finnish Way" of education policies (OECD, 2012b).

This agentic approach to TPL is commonly referred to as Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in Finland (Paronen & Lappi, 2018). While CPD here is obligatory, it is the responsibility of each teacher and their employer (Paronen & Lappi, 2018). Each municipal authority funds a maximum of three days of mandatory CPD annually for each teacher (Paronen & Lappi, 2018), nevertheless, Finnish teachers often partake in more than is formally required (Eurydice, 2022). There was quite a variance between municipalities for the provided CPD and this was seen as a weakness in the Finnish education system (OECD, 2010). As a result, a national programme was collaboratively developed to provide more equitable access to professional development across Finland, "Teacher Education Development Programme" (Ministry for Education & Culture, Finland, 2016). This development program sets out objectives and guidelines to determine the direction for initial teachers' education and continuous life-long professional development and applies to all teachers from early childhood education through primary and secondary education up to tertiary and adult education (Ministry for Education and Culture, Finland, 2016; Lavonen, 2020). In summary, the guidelines promote collaboration, networking, research-based teaching, learner and goal-oriented approaches while developing pedagogical competencies and strengthening educational leadership and management (Ministry for Education and Culture, Finland, 2016). Pilot projects to support implementing this development

programme were selected, trialled and later evaluated and those that were deemed to have the most potential were further supported and their learnings shared (Lavonen, 2020). These pilot programmes demonstrated strengths in supporting networking, community building and collaboration that the "Teacher Education Development Programme" (Ministry for Education and Culture, Finland, 2016) advocates for to benefit teachers' professional learning in a sustainable fashion (Lavonen, 2020; Brandisauskiene, 2021) and this is similar to a programme in place in New Zealand and described in the following section.

2.5.3 New Zealand

In New Zealand, the system of education is deemed strong with students consistently performing above the OECD average in reading, science and mathematics since 2000 (OECD, 2022c). Teaching as a profession has always been highly regarded in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2021) and, similar to Finland, is seen as having high public trust and integrity (Education Council New Zealand, 2017). Another similarity with Finland is that schools in New Zealand have very high levels of autonomy as the school system is devolved to local school boards who, through the principal and teachers, implement national education policies in a flexible way to meet local needs (OECD, 2013a; Ell, 2011). The National Curriculum (Ministry of Education NZ, 2007) is flexible enough for schools to use their autonomy and professionalism to respond to learners and their needs and evidence-based practices are widely promoted (OECD, 2013a; Ell, 2011). Another parallel with the Finnish education system is the establishment of the Teacher Led Innovation Fund which allocates funding to research projects in schools that have the potential to improve teaching practices and be shared across school networks (Ministry of Education NZ, 2022b). A further demonstration of this system of evidence-based learning is the conducting and publishing of research by the Ministry of Education to form a basis for their policies (Ministry of Education NZ, 2022a). An influential example of this is Timperley et al.'s (2007) seminal piece of research synthesis on best evidence for TPL.

There is a devolved autonomous approach to TPL in New Zealand and it is generally known as teacher professional learning and development (TPLD) (Timperley, et al., 2007) and although it is not mandatory (Ell, 2011) it is expected (Teaching Council of Aotearoa NZ, 2021). As previously mentioned above, the devolved and autonomous nature of the education system in New Zealand entrusts schools, school leaders and teachers to develop capacity and undertake professional development to meet the needs of the schools (OECD, 2013a). However, TPLD varies from school to school, depending on the aptitude of the school board and school leaders and this can be seen as a limitation of the education system (OECD, 2013a). Nevertheless, 98% of teachers partake in some form of TPLD annually (OECD, 2018b). While a commonplace form of TPLD is attending a course outside the school setting, collaborative, peer learning experiences are deemed to be the most impactful in New Zealand (OECD, 2018b). Many primary teachers also undertake further qualifications to merit a pay increase (Ell, 2011).

The promotion of reflective practices is instigated in the graduate teachers' induction period through a mentoring programme (Teaching Council of Aotearoa NZ, 2021) which is often under the supervision of an expert teacher who supports the development of professional thinking and knowledge and is critical friend before the new teacher can be fully registered (Haigh & Trevethan, 2017; Ell, 2011). Once registered, teachers must have their practising certificate renewed every three years by meeting the Practising Teacher Criteria and Standards which includes partaking in some form of documented professional growth, which is linked to school improvement (Teaching Council of Aotearoa NZ, 2021). As part of this process, teachers must demonstrate that they have shown progress in their professional growth by using evidence of their teaching, learning, and reflection, (Teaching Council of Aotearoa NZ, 2021). Consequently, the majority of principals observe lessons within classes (OECD, 2013a), as they have the responsibility of appraising teachers and determining whether the teacher meets the standards (Teaching Council of Aotearoa NZ, 2021) which has similarities to the system of appraisal in place in England (Eurydice, 2021; Department for Education, 2019), as described here previously and Ontario, as will be described in the next section. School leaders develop, in collaboration with their teaching staff, a Professional Growth Cycle which aims to promote the professional development of the

individual teacher through authentic learning collaborations while targeting school community's needs (Teaching Council of Aotearoa NZ, 2021).

2.5.4 Ontario, Canada

Educational reform, including the debate about high quality, ongoing professional learning has been to the forefront of policy development in Ontario, Canada over the last two decades (Hardy, 2009; Broad & Evans, 2006). Governments worked towards reforming a mandated, top-down deficit approach to TPL and restoring commitment to and respect for the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2017; OECD, 2012b; Working Table on Teacher Development, 2007). Students' outcomes quickly improved by using evidence-based best practices within schools and capacity building across the education system (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Additionally, during this period, and similar to what occurred in Finland, teaching as a profession became more sought after and there is now a strong demand for places in teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2017). This improvement in teaching and learning is further demonstrated in the OECD's report in which Ontario's education system's indicators for more innovative practices improved from 2001-2011 (OECD, 2014a).

Since then, these characteristics have continued to inform a variety of teacher development policies in Ontario, including the New Teacher Induction Program, Annual Learning Plan, Teacher Performance Appraisal and Teacher Learning & Leadership Program for more experienced teachers (Campbell et al., 2012). The New Teacher Induction Programme has expanded its supports within the province and is now a four-year supported programme with mentoring (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Every five years, teachers are appraised by their principal through a variety of elements that include collaborative, professional dialogues and a strong role for learning communities to support continuous growth and development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The Annual Learning Plan calls on teachers to draw up a teacher's professional plan, in collaboration with their principal, that includes growth objectives, a proposed action plan to attain these, along with a timeline, and to review and amend it annually (ETFO, 2024). Parallel to these programmes being

developed and enacted upon, a programme to support experienced teachers in their ongoing professional learning was launched, “The Teacher Learning and Leadership Programme” (TLLP) (Ontario Ministry of Education & OTF, 2007). This framework supported experienced teachers to embark autonomously on their professional development while also developing the skills required to share their professional learning and examples of innovative, best practice in a sustainable way (Ontario Ministry of Education & OTF, 2007), which had similarities with New Zealand’s Teacher Led Innovation Fund (Ministry of Education NZ, 2022b). There is a very strong emphasis on networking within the school system in Ontario, even more so than in Finland, as there is a belief that, amongst their schools, exemplars of pedagogical practices can be revealed and shared through these collaborative learning networks sustainably (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Complementing these initiatives, there is also a strong emphasis on research-based activities in schools so practices are evidence-based and partnerships between schools and colleges are furthered (Darling-Hammond, 2017) which has strong parallels to the system of TPL in Scotland, as outlined below. Ontario’s TLLP Programme was lauded as an example of a programme balancing the teacher voice and its obligation to system policies (Lieberman et al., 2016). This was believed to have occurred as teachers were given the autonomy to improve their practices while supporting their colleagues' development in a meaningful, positive way because of the collaboration between the Ontario Ministry of Education and the various teacher unions in the programme’s development (Lieberman et al., 2016) and while the government is currently not funding this, the learnings from this successful programme continue (Ontario Teacher Federation, 2025).

2.5.5Scotland

Similar to Ontario, the last two decades have seen significant changes to education (OECD, 2021) and the teaching profession in Scotland (Watson & Michael, 2016). It began with an ambitious overhaul of the Scottish curriculum (Scottish Government, 2008) which is non-prescriptive and relies on the professional capacity of schools and teachers to adapt the curriculum to meet local needs (Priestley & Humes, 2010). As a result of this new curriculum, teachers began to be viewed as professionals with their own insight, aptitude, capacity and autonomy to interpret a curriculum

rather than implement one in a directed fashion (McDonald-Grieve & McGinley, 2010). Similar to Finland and Ontario, teachers in Scotland are currently well regarded and held in high regard (OECD, 2021). This changing educational landscape resulted in unprecedented review and investment in teachers' professional development in Scotland (Fraser et al., 2007).

TPL is now referred to as career-long professional learning [CLPL] (Education Scotland, 2014; O'Brien & Jones, 2014). CLPL highlights the continuous growth and enhancement of teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and practice across their careers (General Teaching Council [GTC] Scotland, 2021a). It extends beyond traditional training or one-off professional development, positioning teacher learning as an ongoing, reflective process shaped by the evolving needs of the profession and the learners they support(General Teaching Council [GTC] Scotland, 2021a). While CLPL is viewed as an entitlement and a responsibility for each teacher, engagement in CLPL is also necessary to remain registered as a teacher (Education Scotland, 2014). This must be engaged with every five years, as per the "Professional Update" process (GTC Scotland, 2019). Similar to systems in place in Finland and Ontario, this involves teachers undertaking an autonomous annual review of their professional development and a discussion with their school leader who, through a coaching approach, challenges and supports the teacher to self-evaluate reflectively on their practices (GTC Scotland, 2021a). These cycles of professional development are in place to empower teachers to critically reflect on their teaching and needs, to then identify what will be the focus of their professional learning and to later evaluate and gather evidence as to the impact of the professional learning (GTC Scotland, 2019). Collaborative, dialogic practices that focus on the impact teaching practices have on students' learning and sharing experiences are central to CLPL practices in Scotland (GTC Scotland, 2019). There are guidelines in place that are designed to support the development of cultures that foster sustainability, trust and teacher agency while also promoting teacher-led professional learning and enabling collaborative professionalism (GTC Scotland, 2019). There is also the expectation that, through an ongoing cyclical approach, teachers' professional review and development process links in with the professional standards of teachers and the school improvement planning cycle (GTC Scotland, 2019).

In 2003, a new scheme, the Chartered Teacher, was put in place in Scotland to recognise teachers who engaged in intensive professional development programmes and met certain competencies (McDonald Grieve & McGinley, 2010). This provided expert teachers with another, non-management, route for advancement in their careers with the added benefit of keeping their expertise within the classroom (McDonald Grieve & McGinley, 2010) and had parallels to Ontario's "The Teacher Learning and Leadership Programme" (Ontario Ministry of Education & OTF, 2007). In what was seen as a short-sighted, cost-cutting decision, this system came to an end in 2012 and was replaced with a new masters qualification (Marshall, 2012). There is a continuing problem with the retention of teachers in Scotland and the resultant reduced career opportunities (Scottish Government, 2019) and, thus, a recent report has recommended the establishment of a new role, that of "Lead Teacher", for teachers who specialise in pedagogy, curriculum or policy delivery (Scottish Government, 2019) and this was established in August 2021.

2.5.6 Republic of Ireland

TPL amongst primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) has been in place since the foundation of the state in 1922 when many teachers undertook summer in-service courses, as TPL was commonly known then (Coolahan, 2004). Under rule 58 of the Rules for National Schools (Government of Ireland, 1965), extra personal vacation (EPV) days were earned by primary teachers who engaged in Department of Education approved summer courses, an incentive still in place today.

In 1971 a new curriculum (Department of Education) was introduced and in-service courses over a three-year period were provided to primary teachers to support its implementation (INTO, 1999). In 1980, a government paper on education emphasised the continued need for in-service courses for teachers and, in 1984, a government committee on in-service education recommended the establishment of a national council to oversee in-service education for teachers and, of note, the report also emphasised the concept of teachers as lifelong learners with professional and personal needs (Hyland & Milne, 1992). However, according to

Coolahan (2004), momentum in teacher education was lost during the 1980s. In 1991, the OECD published a review of education in Ireland which was complimentary of the quality of teachers in Ireland but recommended an overhaul of in-service provision to address the changing needs of the teaching profession and the evolving curriculum (OECD, 1991). As a result, TPL for teachers was transformed and a multitude of opportunities for it developed across Ireland (Coolahan, 2004). Further expansions occurred in the RoI in the area of TPL to assist in the implementation of a new primary curriculum (Department of Education and Science, 1999). These services amalgamated in 2010 to form the Professional Development Service for Teachers [PDST]. In 2023, the PDST further amalgamated with other teacher professional provisions, such as the National Induction Programme for Teachers, the Centre for School Leadership and Junior Cycle for Teachers to become Oide (oide meaning teacher or instructor in Irish).

Further developments led to the establishment of the Teaching Council of Ireland was established on a statutory basis in March 2006, and serves as the regulatory body for the teaching profession. Its core responsibilities include upholding high professional standards, safeguarding the public interest, and ensuring a well-qualified teaching workforce (Teaching Council, 2024).

As outlined here, Ireland's system of TPL has been fragmented as teachers undertake various summer courses to earn EPV and inclined towards system-based reform (mainly the implementation of new curricula) with focus on the improvement of skills rather than capacity (McMillan, et al., 2016). The need for a national policy for TPL was evident (Coolahan, 2002) and in 2011, The Teaching Council commenced a public consultation process on TPL and subsequently published "*Cosán*, the Framework for Teachers' Learning" (Teaching Council, 2016).

2.5.6.1 The Cosán Framework

The *Cosán* framework is the national framework for professional learning for all teachers in the Republic of Ireland. It is regarded as being based on transformative models of TPL (Rawdon et al., 2020) and TPL is not currently mandatory to remain registered as a teacher (Department of Education, 2024). The standards to which teachers in Ireland should commit when guiding learning are presented in the policy

and unlike many other national or international regulatory bodies, there are only two standards, which reflect the flexibility and accessibility upholding the framework (Teaching Council, 2016). These are that teachers "demonstrate a commitment to quality teaching and learning for their students and themselves, and continued professional growth for enhanced professional practice, to support that quality teaching and learning in a sustainable way" (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 22). Caena (2014) opines that there are two approaches to the implementation of professional standards in various jurisdictions; one focuses on regulated accountability, such as in England, and the other concentrates on developing processes based on principles to guide teachers, such as in Scotland, and I would include the Republic of Ireland. This is reflective of Day & Sachs' (2005) views which determine two discourses of teacher professionalism, managerial professionalism which is predominately standards based with high levels of accountability and democratic professionalism which is aligned with collaboration, teacher agency and autonomy. It is evident the *Cosán* framework interprets teacher professionalism as democratic with its centre-out, collaborative approach to its development and instigation.

The principles which underpin the framework include autonomy, responsibility, flexibility, accessibility, relevance, acknowledgement and impact (Teaching Council, 2016) and remarkably, teacher agency is not mentioned within the framework. The Teaching Council (2016) is also of the view that teachers, as adult learners, learn in a variety of ways and should have autonomy over their learning as they are best placed to establish what is needed to improve their practices and then evaluate its impact. Thus, *Cosán* provides the latitude to embrace the various contexts and career-long professional needs of teachers and has the potential to support all teachers. The multitude of processes through which teachers, as adult learners, learn are also acknowledged in Furthermore, the dimensions of teachers' learning *Cosán* promotes (Teaching Council, 2016) reflect de Jong et al.'s (2021) viewpoint that TPL takes place in all kinds of situations which are not mutually exclusiveReflection is a key concept of the framework, whether individual or collaborative, and at the core of this is the impact TPL will have on teachers' practices and students' learning (Teaching Council, 2016). *Cosán* aims for teachers' professional learning to be a cyclical process where, through reflection, teachers

identify opportunities for development, engage in professional learning, and explore the impact this learning has on their practices and/ or students' learning, before beginning another cycle (Teaching Council, 2016). This framework also advocates for teaching colleagues to work collaboratively to identify areas to support knowledge and skill acquisition, as well as the development of teachers' practices (Teaching Council, 2016). However, this approach to TPL may be difficult in the Irish context, as in 2019, 44% of primary schools in Ireland could be defined as small, i.e., having four teachers or less (Department of Education and Skills, 2020) resulting in possible challenges when developing sustainable, collaborative TPL. Nevertheless, this model of TPL encompasses teacher autonomy, takes into account teachers' professional needs and bases it within their various school contexts, while incorporating reflective, collaborative practices, and this model is affirmed by the OECD (2014) when they note the need to adapt TPL policies to respond to the needs of teachers while balancing the needs of schools. *Cosán* also reflects Lavonen et al.'s (2020) stance of engaging all stakeholders in the development of the national framework and furthering this ownership of the framework in its implementation through a centre-out approach. As a result, *Cosán* can be deemed to be a progressive framework for TPL, when compared internationally.

2.5.6.2 Looking at Our Schools Framework

Arising from developments in how schools were inspected and valuated in Ireland, primary and post-primary schools were encouraged to engage in a whole school self-evaluation (SSE) process (Skerritt et al., 2021). The first cycle of SSE was introduced in 2012 (Department of Education & Skills, 2012a) and the Looking at Our Schools Policy (LAOS) was last updated in 2022 (Department of Education, 2022b). This framework illustrates what effective learning, teaching, leadership and management practices are to look like in the Irish school system and outlines a set of standards for these (Department of Education, 2022a, 2022b). It is to be utilised by teachers and school leaders to enhance their professional practices in these four areas and is envisioned to be used by schools to support their school self-evaluation process. This framework is to be utilised by the inspectorate when they monitor, evaluate and support schools (Department of Education, 2022a, 2022b).

Importantly, it also supports reflective, collaborative practices (Department of Education, 2022a, 2022b) which mirrors approaches advocated for by *Cosán*. Furthermore, it intends to support and inform TPL for teachers and school leaders while recognising teachers and school leaders should have agency and autonomy over their professional practices (Department of Education, 2022b). LAOS is deemed to be a complementary framework to *Cosán* as it creates an opportunity and provides a scaffold by which teachers and/ or schools can reflect on their professional practices and work towards enhancing these to lead to transformative practices (Barron et al., 2023; Department of Education, 2022b). On the other hand, as noted in Chapter 1, these two significant education policies are at variance in how they view teachers as professionals.

2.5.6.3 Summary

The education system in the Republic of Ireland has been through a complex evolution over the last four decades with significant changes in education policy which reflected the rapid changes in society (Coolahan, 2017). A manifestation of this was the establishment of the Teaching Council in 2006 and one of its statutory functions is responsibility for the promotion of teachers' ongoing learning (Teaching Council, 2022). One of the ways the Teaching Council has been working to promote and support high standards across the teaching profession in Ireland is by collaborating with the Department of Education on key policies (Teaching Council, 2022), such as *Cosán*. Nevertheless, tension is apparent between these two bodies as, in some ways, they contradict each other in how teacher professionalism is viewed which can be difficult for teachers and schools to negotiate and operate within (Barron et al., 2023). However, primary teachers in Ireland are afforded agency which teachers should practice as they critically evaluate policies and apply them to their contexts (Barron et al., 2023)

2.5.7 Conclusion

Table 2.1 depicts a comparison of key TPL themes across the six jurisdictions. As ascertained in this examination and summary of TPL policies in six jurisdictions,

developments in TPL have generally reformed from a policy-based, top-down approach towards a more centre-out, cooperative approach to TPL (Caena, 2014). The following section will look at how these factors interplay with exemplar paradigms of TPL.

	TPL Name	Performance Appraisal	Mandatory PL	Autonomy	Reflective Practices	Collaboration Focus	Innovation / Expertise Recognition
England	Professional Development (PD)	Annual, appraisal framework, linked to pay	Not mandated, yet must engage in PD as part of appraisal	Low	Tends to be performance driven	Limited- often linked with accountability.	Chartered Teacher
Finland	Continuous Professional Development (CPD)	Not formal, reflective, supportive	Not mandated, culturally embedded	High	Embedded, continuous	Embedded, peer-driven	National programme pilots
New Zealand	Teacher Professional Learning & Development (TPLD)	Annual Professional Growth Cycles	Mandatory- linked to registration every 3 years	High	For growth and registration	Strong	Teacher-Led Innovation Fund
Ontario	Professional Learning (PL)	Teacher Performance Appraisal every 5 years	Not mandated- expected	Moderate to high	Structured, cyclical, dialogic	System-wide networking	(former) Teacher Learning and Leadership Program
Scotland	Career-Long Professional Learning (CLPL)	Professional Update process every 5 years	Mandatory engagement with CPLP for registration.	High	Cyclical, dialogic & empowering	Embedded and system-wide	(Former) Chartered Teacher
Republic of Ireland	Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL)	Indirect via school inspections	Not mandatory nor linked to registration.	High	Emerging, cyclical	Emerging	None

Table 2.1 Comparison of TPL across six jurisdictions

2.6 Analysis of Various Teachers' Professional Learning Policies

2.6.1 Influential paradigms of TPL

Kennedy's (2005) seminal article on models of continuing professional development was one of the first pieces of literature to compare and analyse different models. Nine predominant models of TPL were organised into three categories, based on their purpose and capacity for teacher agency and autonomy (Kennedy, 2005). These models were further reviewed and amended to the following three overarching models: transmissive, malleable and transformative (Kennedy, 2014). Table 2.2 portrays common TPL activities and places them under the model Kennedy perceives them to be.

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

Increasing capacity for professional autonomy and teacher agency

Table 2.2 Kennedy's (2014, p. 693) CPD models.

According to Kennedy (2014), standards-based models and one-off external workshops or courses provided by outside experts fall under the umbrella category of transmissive TPL. These models align with the deficit approach and imply that teachers have a gap in their knowledge and/ or skills that needs external expertise to resolve (Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002). While these transmissive models have a place, this top-down approach to TPL tends to have very little impact on the professional development of teachers, as there is limited scope for critical reflection (Timperley, 2011). Malleable models of TPL are perceived to shape teachers' behaviours or attitudes to align with specific goals or policies (Kennedy, 2014). This TPL category has the potential for teachers to be more engaged and empowered (Kennedy, 2014). According to Kennedy (2014), the transformative category

comprises examples of TPL that involve collaborative professional inquiry; these hold the greatest potential for meaningful, sustained improvement in TPL. This includes collaborative, critically reflective models that lead to agency, which are promoted as effective modes of TPL (King et al., 2023; Boylan et al., 2023; OECD, 2019a; Korthagen, 2017; Wenger, 2010; Timperley et al., 2007; Stoll et al., 2006; Guskey, 1991). These social learning systems are believed to support engagement in professional development and have the capacity to sustainably impact teachers' and students' learning (Stoll et al., 2006). However, this definition of transformative models of TPL may be problematic in the Irish context, as a significant proportion of primary schools have four teachers or fewer (Department of Education and Skills, 2020); thus, developing sustainable, collaborative, reflective models of professional development would be challenging given the reality of the collegial community being undersized.

Desimone (2009) offers a model of TPL that serves as a foundational framework for identifying key elements of effective professional development. These include content focus- knowledge, skills and attitudes to improve pedagogy; active learning such as observing teachers or being observed, engaging in collaborative critical reflection or analysing student work related to a subject; coherence- in other words, TPL should align with teacher knowledge, school vision and policy; duration- TPL should be sustained in both depth and duration; and collective participation- teachers within the same school working together as a learning community to develop professional capacity (Desimone, 2009). Desimone argues that many studies lack a consistent conceptual framework, leading to fragmented and inconclusive findings (2009). The research emphasises the importance of aligning TPL activities with these features to enhance their impact on professional practices and ultimately, support student achievement (Desimone, 2009). Desimone (2009) also proposes a comprehensive research framework that explores the links between TPL experiences, resulting changes in teacher practice, leading to improved student outcomes. Desimone (2009) recommends utilising existing research more effectively to enhance the quality of studies on TPL, ultimately improving the ability to design and implement TPL that most benefits both teachers and their students.

In another framework, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) synthesised findings from thirty-five studies to identify key features of effective TPL. The report outlines seven core components that contribute to impactful TPL, many of which correlate with Desimone's (2009) key elements. These include a focus on curriculum content; active learning; collaboration; use of models and examples of effective teacher practice; outside expertise; constructive feedback and critical reflection; and sustained support. Furthermore, this study also highlights the need to align TPL with local school goals which is facilitated by school leadership, the need for adequate time, resources and structures to enable TPL and the potential PLCs have to enhance TPL.

King et al. (2023) introduced a conceptual framework designed to address the multifaceted nature of TPL. This meta-model synthesizes existing literature and models, proposing a structure that encompasses three key constructs. These include context on the macro, meso and micro levels to encompass their various dynamics; experience which refers to the design and implementation of TPL activities which are active, collaborative and in line with school goals; and outcomes which include both the short and long-term impact of TPL on both professional practices and student learning (king et al., 2023). This framework allows for a more nuanced understanding of TPL, encompassing its dynamic contexts and contributes to the ongoing discourse on enhancing the impact of professional learning by offering a comprehensive model that acknowledges and navigates its inherent complexities (King et al., 2023).

de Vries et al. (2013) in their research simplifies models of TPL into three groups: "updating knowledge and skills, reflection on experiences, and collaboration with colleagues" (p.80) and concurs with Kennedy's view (2014) that all three approaches can be effective and participation in a diverse range of TPL activities is necessary for meaningful development as a teacher. Interestingly, Lieberman (1995) also classified CPD into three types: direct teaching, which includes courses and workshops and may be viewed as transmissive; learning in school, which would include coaching, mentoring, PLCs, critical friends and collaborative practices; and out of school learning that would include professional networks, visits to other

schools, school-university partnerships which is a system of TPL widely promoted in Finland (Ministry for Education & Culture, Finland, 2016).

2.6.2 Comparative Analysis of TPL Frameworks

In the following section, the TPL policies of the regions of England, Finland, New Zealand, Ontario, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland will be examined using the comparative tripod perspectives on TPL of Guskey (1991), Timperley et al. (2007) and Korthagen (2017). I chose these frameworks as they were the most influential on me when I first began to curiously consider TPL and its impact on professional practices. The triple-lens framework is a useful tool for considering the factors which might contribute to a teacher's effective engagement in collaborative learning, as well as consideration of the balance of collaborative learning compared to other forms of professional learning (Fraser et al., 2007).

2.6.2.1 *Guskey (1991): Enhancing the Effectiveness of Professional Development Programmes*



Figure 2.2 Guskey's (1991) Factors to Enhance Effective TPL

Guskey, in his guidelines for effective professional development (1991), is of the opinion that although change through TPL can be complex there is great potential in its impact. He proposes that TPL should begin with the individual teacher and develop a culture of trust so teachers feel they can discuss their misgivings about new programmes and/ or policies and their implementation. Interestingly, of the policies examined, the only professional development policy that specifically promotes the development of a culture of trust in schools is England's "Standards for Teachers' Professional Development" (Department for Education, 2016a), although Ontario's report into the Teacher Learning and Leadership programme (Campbell et al., 2018) does support it and, in Scotland, trust is seen as the foundation to the annual professional review and development process (GTC Scotland, 2019) and trust is mentioned as a professional value in Scotland's TPL policy (GTC Scotland, 2021b). This is despite a culture of trust noted in research to be an intrinsic part of developing effective TPL across schools (Bellibaş, et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Day et al., 2009a).

Guskey (1991) also advises implementing change gradually so the change is sustainable, yet to keep in mind the long-term wider vision so the incremental plan has a focus to keep everyone engaged and working towards the same goal, a view supported by Carlyon (2015). While not one of the six policies this writer examined advised implementation of changes in a slow, methodical approach, England's policy advises for approaches that will sustain TPL (Department for Education, 2016a). Meanwhile, Campbell et al.'s (2018) report also promotes cognisance of sustainable approaches, while *Cosán* encourages the development of a growth mindset which focuses on the cyclical processes, but does not specifically refer to TPL being an incremental or methodical process.

Guskey (1991) believes that TPL is most effective when developed in a collaborative fashion as this interlinks the personal nature of the teaching profession with the professional and provides an opportunity for teachers to share problems and solutions when working together with a shared purpose. Kennedy (2011) proposes that the standard based model of TPL, as adopted by England and Scotland, focuses on the individual and is not conducive to collaborative endeavours. However, in

both Scotland's (GTC Scotland, 2021a), and England's (Department for Education, 2016b) most recent TPL policies collaborative practices are a key approach to effective TPL for teachers. This viewpoint is also reflected in Finland's TPL policy (Ministry for Education and Culture, 2016) as there is a strong emphasis on collaboration in their policy document. New Zealand's TPL policy asserts the need for school leadership to develop an environment that fosters collaboration (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021). In the Republic of Ireland, as in Ontario, collaboration is a foundational concept to their TPL policies (Teaching Council, 2016; Ontario College of Teachers, 2016). The utilisation of collaborative practices to enhance TPL is widely advocated in literature (Cordingly et al., 2005; Kennedy, 2011; Trust et al., 2016; Bergmark, 2020)

The need for purposeful, specific, reflective feedback to encourage the further development of good practices is another component of effective TPL, according to Guskey (1991) and this coaching or mentoring approach is also promoted by Kennedy (2005) and Andrews & Munroe (2018). This approach is reflected in Scotland's Professional Review and Development process when teachers are to critically reflect on their teaching practices with their school leader who will challenge and support the process (GTC Scotland, 2019). A similar practice is employed in Ontario where teachers must complete an annual Learning Plan to support and focus their professional learning and growth (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2022). This process is autonomous and teacher driven, although the school leader is to discuss and sign off on it (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2022). In New Zealand, one of the standards requires teachers to seek feedback and problem solve collaboratively to improve their professional practices and its impact on their learners (Education Council New Zealand, 2017). Finland's TPL policy supports self-evaluation of teachers with ongoing dialogue between the teacher and school leaders to identify areas for further TPL (OECD, 2103b), while in England the teachers' standards expects teachers to seek constructive feedback on their practices (Department for Education, 2016a). Meanwhile, while *Cosán* notes coaching and mentoring to be a learning process through which TPL may take place, specific, reflective feedback is not highlighted as a key factor within it.

Finally, Guskey (1991) furthermore recommends that after TPL, teachers need to be supported and encouraged to implement their new learnings to sustain their efforts towards positive change as this can be a slow, laborious process, hence the concept of ongoing change needs to be part of the routine practices of teachers. England's standards for professional development mirrors this as it explicitly states that professional learning should be sustained over time with ongoing support for iterative cycles of TPL (Department for Education, 2016a). Reflective of Guskey's (1991) guidance is New Zealand's policy on TPL which has ongoing change embedded within its Professional Growth Cycle and standards (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021) and similarly, in the Republic of Ireland and in Ontario, TPL is viewed as a journey with ongoing growth and development (Teaching Council, 2016; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2022). On the other hand, Finland's national policy on TPL places importance on research based teacher education (Ministry for Education and Culture, 2016) which would indicate of ongoing cycles of evaluation and change, it is not clearly specified; whereas Scotland's standards support career-long professional learning (GTC Scotland, 2021a) and promotes life-long learning (GTC Scotland, 2019), there is no detail on how this can or should be achieved.

2.6.2.2 *Timperley et al. (2007): Teacher Professional Learning and Development*

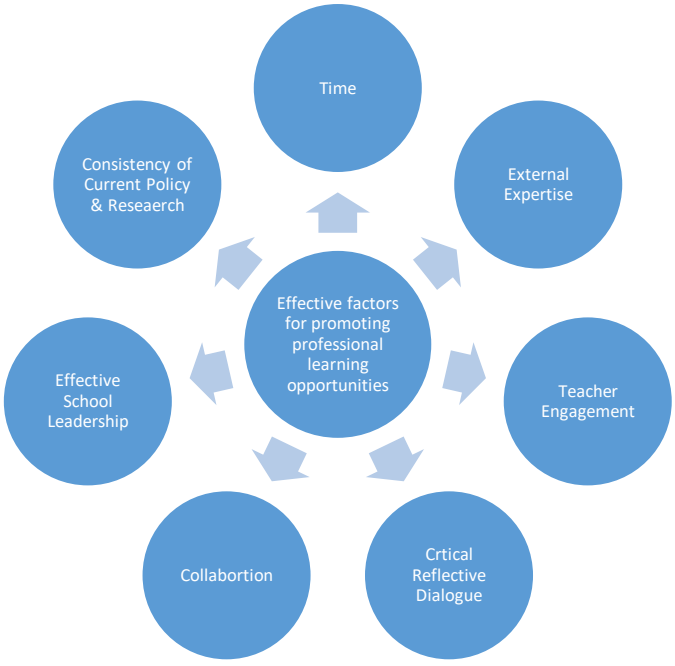


Figure 2.3 Timperley's 2007 Factors to Promote TPL

Timperley et al. (2007) believe extended time periods with frequent meetings are an essential element for impactful TPL, as perceptions about established practices need to be challenged and transformed in an iterative process and this echoes de Jong et al.'s research (2021). This viewpoint is supported by England's standards' for professional learning (Minister for Education, 2016a) as they advocate for TPL programmes with at least a focus of two terms in length to embed new practices after challenging teachers' existing beliefs and encouraging new perspectives through peer support and coaching. In New Zealand, their TPL standards do request of teachers to challenge their beliefs and assumptions but they do not specifically link this to any timeframe (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021) and this is similar to Scotland's approach who view teachers as potential agents of change (GTC Scotland, 2019).

Timperley et al. (2007) also advise the use of external experts to ensure more systematic change occurs whilst engaging in TPL, as teachers need to fully understand the new pedagogical content while interweaving it with their previously held beliefs and values and the outside expert can assist in facilitating this. It is of interest here that Timperley et al. (2007) are not necessarily referring to workshops outside of the school settings for professional learning activities but are instead endorsing the use of experts to help teachers make meaning in their school contexts. This is also advocated for by ní Bhroin & King (2020) and Brennan & Gorman (2023) who recognise that drawing on the knowledge of an expert in a particular area to support teachers to build their own deeper understanding, related to their context, can be viewed a social constructivist concept of scaffolding. The TPL policies of the above six jurisdictions all recognise the vast potential for professional learning activities to enrich teachers' professional development and growth within the setting of the school in a collaborative fashion (GTC Scotland, 2019; Department for Education, 2016a; Ministry for Education and Culture, 2016; Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021; Ontario College of Teachers, 2016; Teaching Council, 2016). England's standards explicitly state the need for external experts to challenge teachers' thought processes and practices, share and develop new knowledge and goals and sustain change so new practices embed into the repertoire of teachers' methodologies (Department for Education, 2016a). Finland's guidelines for TPL recognise all teachers as experts but encourages the use

of networking across schools to share and disseminate best practice and knowledge (Ministry for Education and Culture, 2016) which is also advocated for by (Trust, et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this use of outside expertise needs to be managed in a measured way as it may lead to dependence and inhibit the development of an agentic teacher (Stoll et al., 2006).

Another element Timperley at al. (2007) advocate for is teachers having a clear rationale for undertaking TPL and if they have a clear objective they are more likely to engage with it and thus, it is more likely to have a positive impact on students' learning. Both Scotland's process of Professional Review and Development process (Education Scotland, 2014) and Ontario's Annual Learning Plan (ETFO, 2024) mirror this as they require teachers to clearly define their professional learning needs and how they plan to meet these.

Timperley et al. (2007) further support the need to challenge the commonly held views, expectations and practices of teachers if real change is to occur from TPL and students' learning enhanced and this view is supported by the OECD (2012a). The need to challenge presumptions, expectations and long-held beliefs can be seen in the TPL policies of five jurisdictions (GTC Scotland, 2019; Department for Education, 2016a; Ministry for Education and Culture, 2016; Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021; Ontario College of Teachers, 2016). While in Ireland, *Cosán* only mentions that school-based TPL has the potential to challenge teachers' current beliefs and practices but does not explicitly advocate for it. The TPL policies of both England (Department for Education, 2016a) and Scotland (Education Scotland, 2014) both further endorse this approach through employing coaching as a method to be used in professional dialogues. Finland's national education policies also require of teachers to challenge their expectations of certain student cohorts (OECD, 2013b).

Timperley et al. (2007) promote the need for collaborative communities of practice but for these to be effective they further purport that these communities of practice should provide teachers with opportunities to critically reflect on current practices, in the light of new learnings, and to analyse the impact new methods or programmes have on students. This is similar to the belief of Šaric & Šteh (2017) and a view held by Kennedy (2005) who, while extoling the benefits of communities of

practice, urges caution as they can be echo chambers that reiterate long held, established views and practices. As previously mentioned, CoPs or PLCs that encourage teachers to critically reflect and challenge current practices, in light of new learnings, is advocated in five jurisdictions policies (GTC Scotland, 2019; Department for Education, 2016a; Ministry for Education and Culture, 2016; Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021; Ontario College of Teachers, 2016), while the Republic of Ireland's framework advocates strongly for collaborative reflection within dynamic CoP or PLCs (Teaching Council, 2016). England's professional development standards state the need to continuously evaluate the impact of new practices on student outcomes through critical reflection and dialogues (Department for Education, 2016a) and New Zealand's standards ask teachers to work collaboratively to improve practices which will have an impact on students' learning (Education Council NZ, 2017) while Scotland's guidelines also invite teachers to evaluate the impact of changing practices iteratively (GTC Scotland, 2021a).

Opportunities to collaborate and learn within CoPs or PLCs are also counselled by Timperley et al. (2007) as being important for effective TPL. The importance of collaboration in developing quality teachers is also supported by de Jong et al. (2021), Lipscombe et al. (2020) and OECD (2014b). As mentioned earlier in this review, all six jurisdictions examined here concur with this view and advocate for collaborative practices in their national TPL policies (GTC Scotland, 2019; Teaching Council, 2016; Department for Education, 2016a; Ministry for Education and Culture, 2016; Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021; Ontario College of Teachers, 2016).

Timperley et al. (2007) further recommend that the TPL undertaken should align with wider trends in current policy and research. This element can be reflected in the TPL policies of Scotland (Education Scotland, 2014) which recommends teachers to align their Professional Review and Development with school and national policies. This is similarly seen in Ontario's policies which also encourage teachers to link their professional learning with school improvement plans and Ministry Initiatives (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016). While the Republic of Ireland's framework takes a similar approach and advocates for purposeful collaboration

which supports school needs as a part of teachers' TPL, it does not go so far as to interlink it with national policy or international trends (Teaching Council, 2016). Finland's policy in TPL is a strong proponent of anchoring TPL in current research as research-based teaching is a central tenet of its framework (Ministry for Education and Culture, 2016).

Finally, Timperley et al. (2007) propose that effective leadership is at the core of effective TPL, a view reflected by Carlyon (2015) and Day et al. (2009a). In all five jurisdictions analysed here, they acknowledge how important this element is to promote effective TPL and this leadership does not just rest with school principals but all teachers can develop their capacity as leaders, as advocated by the OECD (2019a), having undergone TPL, and share their new knowledge and practices with their schools (GTC Scotland, 2019; Department for Education, 2016a; Ministry for Education and Culture, 2016; Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021; Ontario College of Teachers, 2016).

2.6.2.3 *Korthagen (2017): Inconvenient Truths about Teacher Learning: Towards Professional Development 3.0*

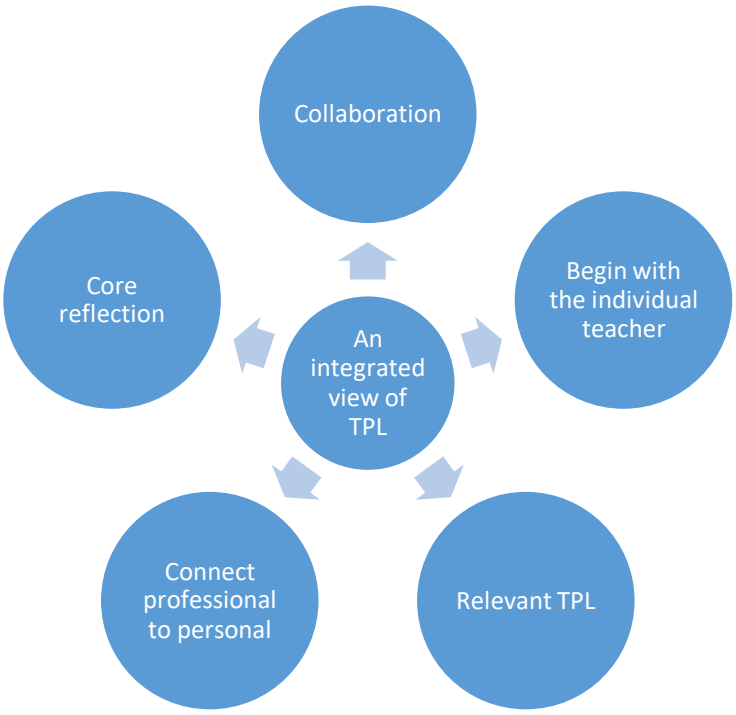


Figure 2.4 Korthagen's (2017) Factors to Support Transformational TPL

On the other hand, Korthagen (2017), has constructed a theory about TPL that he purported overturns conventional understanding about how teachers develop and learn professionally. His work challenges teachers to aim to reach their full potential as teachers and to do this they must link "the personal strengths of the people in schools with academic knowledge" Korthagen, 2017, (p. 399). At the core of this framework, he asserts that for TPL to be transformative it needs to connect with the person of the teacher (Korthagen, 2017). He views professional development as being much more complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional, which resonates with complexity theory, which this project is using as one of the theoretical frameworks to scaffold against. He, like the proponents above, advocates for reflection and is a proponent of communities of practice to support TPL (Korthagen, 2017).

Korthagen's research (2017) into teacher learning suggests that TPL is most effective when there is a connection with the person of the teacher, in other words their core, intrinsic qualities and this view is reiterated by Cooper et al. (2020) and Robinson (2014) who believes professional development for teachers should connect the personal to the professional. This may be alluded to in both the Republic of Ireland's (2016) and Ontario's (2016) TPL frameworks when they encourage teachers to undertake TPL that is a priority to them personally and Scotland's Professional Review and Development process is of a similar guidance (Education Scotland, 2014). Correspondingly, Scotland's standards for professional learning list professional values by which they expect teachers to mould their teaching practices by and acknowledges that teaching is shaped and influenced by teachers' beliefs and values and they aspire for teachers to examine and critically reflect on these (GTC Scotland, 2021a). Interestingly, in New Zealand, their standards ask teachers to manage their beliefs and assumptions for the sake of their learners (Education Council New Zealand, 2017), which is at odds with Korthagen's (2017) viewpoint that to have impactful TPL you must engage teachers personally by linking their needs to their core values and beliefs.

Korthagen (2017) also proposes that TPL should begin with teachers' actual needs and to base approaches to address these in the contexts of their classrooms and settings, what he deems the "realistic approach" (p.393) and this view is further

supported by Cooper et al. (2020) who asserts that unless their TPL is informed by their own beliefs about teaching and learning then the TPL they undertake may not meet their needs or be valued. This approach would lead to a teacher being intrinsically motivated as it is at the level of the person (Boeskens et al., 2020) and also has the potential to promote agency in teachers as they are cognisant about where their practices are situated what they need to further progress professionally (Brodie, 2019; Timperley et al., 2007). England's standards for professional learning is at variance with this as they seek to begin with the needs of the learners and not of the teachers (Department for Education, 2016a). Finland's teachers have a lot more autonomy over their professional learning and have the agency to develop a personal plan for professional development (Tarhan, et al., 2019) which is based on the needs of the individual teacher and their school context (Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2021). This can also be demonstrated with the Republic of Ireland's TPL framework (Teaching Council, 2016) which encourages teachers to determine their own personal TPL path to develop professionally and both Finland's and the RoI's perspectives are consistent with Korthagen's "realistic approach" (2017, p.393). On the other hand, New Zealand's requirement to remain registered through the Practising Certificate process emphasises the needs of the school and for teaching staffs to employ authentic collaborative approaches to meet these (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021) meets Korthagen's proposal (2017) halfway as it is situated within the school setting but meets the needs of the school primarily.

Korthagen (2017), similar to Timperley et al. (2007) above, further purports that guided reflection which takes into account the emotions and expectations of the participants involved and is not just an intellectual exercise, needs to be promoted in TPL and this reflects King's (2014) viewpoint that TPL may be enhanced by understanding the subjective world of human experience. Unlike, the standards-based perspective of TPL in England (Department for Education, 2016a), Korthagen (2017) is of the view that it is impossible to quantify the complex, qualitative, personal nature of the profession of teaching and hence, he fundamentally disagrees with a competency-based approach but prefers to promote the view of positive psychology that builds on people's strengths, rather than targeting weaknesses. Furthermore, Kennedy (2005) believes this "deficit model can affect

teachers' confidence and suppress the development of shared best practices in schools. Interestingly, Swennen (2013) considers that the centralised system of government approach to TPL can support teacher agency if they instigate initiatives to support teachers and their learning and Caena (2014) further proposes that there can be varying approaches to the implementation of national professional standards policies, and illustrates this with the examples of England's policy (Department for Education, 2016a) which focuses on accountability, while Scotland's policy focuses on the standards to be used as a guide to promote professional development (GTC Scotland, 2021). Nevertheless, the even less centralised and more positive approach in focusing on the strengths of teachers can be observed in Finland's management of the way they instigate and hold professional conversations about teachers' professional growth which is autonomous and teacher-led (Tarhan, et al., 2019; Paronen & Lappi, 2018).

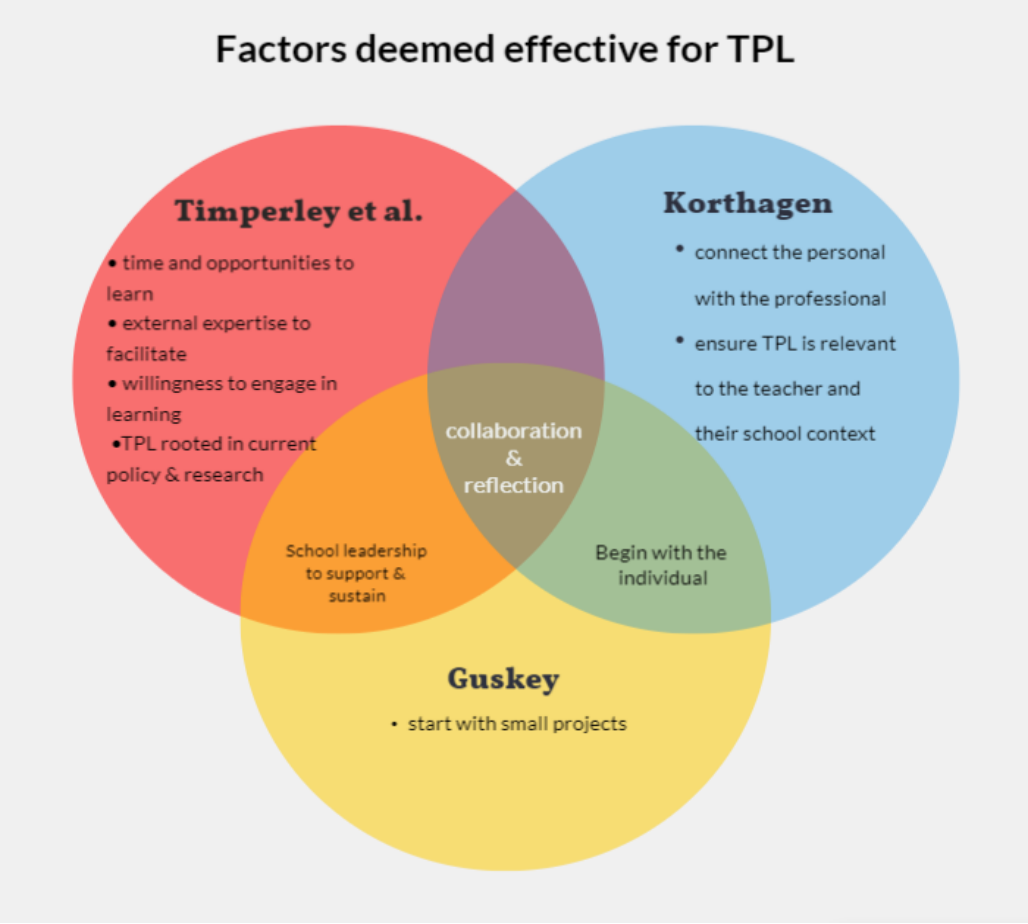


Figure 2.5 Intersection of seminal TPL frameworks

2.6.5 In Summary

The three paradigms of TPL focused upon here are distinctive in their beliefs of what factors determine effective TPL, nevertheless, many factors are in common and, as Figure 2.5 unambiguously illustrates below, the influences of collaboration and reflection are at the core of these paradigms. These elements of reflection and collaboration were also demonstrated to be influential in the TPL policies of the six jurisdictions examined in this chapter. Collaborative reflection also echoes the principles of shared professional responsibility and collective professional confidence which is at the heart of *Cosán*.

2.7 Conclusion

This literature review has presented a critical review of national and international literature related to Teachers' Professional Learning. As demonstrated, meaningful and sustainable TPL is crucial to the development of quality teachers. This chapter also highlighted that through engagement with effective TPL, teacher agency can be promoted as teachers become more aware of what makes them professionals and are empowered to make informed, reflective decisions about their teaching and their students' learning. The extent to which TPL is effective and transformative is determined by many factors, as established in this review. Furthermore, as seen in the review of TPL policies of the six jurisdictions, there are many variances between the models of TPL employed by them, however, as ascertained, developments in TPL have largely modified from a policy-based, top-down approach towards a more centre-out, co-operative approach to TPL. In the Republic of Ireland specifically, the national framework for TPL, *Cosán,* which is the central focus of this study, is proceeding towards adopting a model that respects and recognises the autonomy and professionalism of teachers, pays heed to the needs of individual teachers, while being cognisant of the contexts of schools, and incorporates collaborative, reflective practices. A synopsis of the theoretical framework underpinning this research study has also been provided here. This specifically relates to how, by taking a socio-cultural and constructivist view on how adults learn and situating this within the

framework of complexity theory, which views the varying, dynamic contexts within the 'whole' system, this research project can deepen its understanding of how the primary teacher participants of this study can engage in transformative TPL. This research study will be significant as it will determine how the above mentioned approaches, factors and paradigms can confluence to promote transformative TPL for primary school teachers in Ireland while being supported by the principles of the framework of *Cosán* and nurturing the development of agentic teachers. This can be seen in the research questions as follows:

1. *What practical and sustainable approaches to TPL can be employed by teachers in primary schools to incorporate the core principles of the* Cosán *framework into their living professional practices?*
2. *What factors enable or inhibit primary teachers' engagement with transformative TPL in the Republic of Ireland?*
3. *Can the development of reflective, collaborative cultures in schools enhance the positive impact of TPL?*
4. *Can* Cosán *be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and, thus, promote teacher agency?*

Chapter Three will now specify the relevant aspects of the methodological elements of this research study.

Chapter Three

Methodology Chapter

3.1 Introduction

This research study employed a qualitative, multiple case study approach, in which various methods of data collection were utilised to explore the central research question: What approaches can be employed by teachers in primary schools to incorporate the core principles of *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016) into their living professional practices? Questions emanating from the central research question include:

- *What factors enable or inhibit primary teachers' engagement with transformative TPL in the Republic of Ireland?*
- *Can the development of reflective, collaborative cultures in schools enhance the positive impact of TPL?*
- *Can* Cosán *be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency?*

Research projects need a framework to follow, otherwise, endeavours to understand the intricacies of the world become haphazard (Cohen et al., 2011). Accordingly, this chapter elucidates the project's research design. The research paradigm which provided the backdrop to this research is described. An overview of the research questions, research setting and sampling procedures is presented. The various research instruments and the reasoning behind those chosen to fulfil the purpose of this research are examined. The rationale for the methods employed for data analysis is summarised and analysis procedures are described comprehensively. The concepts of validity, triangulation, generalisability and transferability are addressed. Ethical considerations and protocols followed in this research are also outlined. The limitations of this study and the role of the researcher are also considered in this chapter.

3.2 The Research Paradigm

A paradigm can be defined as a basic set of philosophies that lead to actions (Opie, 2007) or simply a conceptual framework that underpins the ontological and epistemological theories chosen to frame a research project (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Researchers elect a paradigm to reflect their philosophical position and against which they can frame their research (Opie, 2007). I chose an interpretivist perspective to guide my research as it adopts the principles that multiple realities and meanings exist which depend on and are co-created by the researcher along with the participants, as considered by Yin (2014). 2013)., I gathered data, through the utilisation of focus groups and individual interviews, as data collection instruments that, through thematic analysis, I was able to negotiate constantly and (re)interpret to discover underlying patterns and meaning and make sense of their experiences within the rigorous parameters of this study, which is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm (Levers, 2013).

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Cohen et al., 2011) and with the relationship between the world and our human practices (Braun & Clarke, 2013), or simply, social reality (Opie, 2007). Ontologically, I believe there are multiple views of reality. For this study, I employed a qualitative, multiple case study to examine the fourteen participants' experiences of engaging with the *Cosán* framework in their contexts through individual interviews and focus groups. I utilised this approach as it aligns with the understanding that teachers' experiences and interpretations of TPL and transformational professional learning are inherently subjective, shaped by their unique contexts, histories, and social interactions. Rather than seeking a single, objective truth, the study embraces the notion that reality is experienced differently by each individual, and therefore, a multiplicity of valid perspectives exists.

Epistemology is the theory behind knowledge (Opie, 2007) and deals with how it is acquired (Cohen et al., 2011). Epistemologically, my assumptions of how knowledge is acquired correlate with constructivism. Constructivism contends that knowledge cannot be passed on between individuals as each person actively constructs new knowledge on their prior knowledge, perceptions, values and experiences (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Illeris, 2009). Individual interviews and focus groups are

compatible with constructivism as they provide a rich understanding of the participants' experiences (Robson, 2011; Freeman, 2006).

Another perspective I adopted for this research project is a socio-cultural theory of learning. The socio-cultural theory of learning can be defined as examining the interrelationships of social and individual practices in the construction of knowledge and the myriad of ways in which culture moulds the development and construction of individual knowledge (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012). I utilised this theory as it had the potential to illuminate how adults learn as it can integrate the influence and complexity of various learning contexts and their impact on the individual's learning and identity (van der Zwet et al., 2011; Lave & Wenger, 1991). As a result, I chose to further adopt this approach to learning as this study was ascertaining how the sample participants engaged with *Cosán* as they negotiated and navigated their professional development in their contexts. This perspective complements the constructivist view on adult learning as they are both concerned with learning that leads to transformation, which necessitates personal and social aspects (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Consequently, I utilised both theories to build an understanding of how teachers learn to augment my attempts to answer this project's research questions.

As illustrated, socio-culturalism and constructivism are theories that correlate with how people learn. These theories were necessary for my research as I looked at the lived experiences of the fourteen participants and their engagement with professional learning. On the other hand, this research project was nestled within complex ecological settings (see Section 3.5 below) and the dynamic interplay of various factors within these settings resulted in varying levels of effective professional learning. The phenomenon of how TPL can become transformative, at whatever level- whether this is across a professional learning community, a school or at a more national level, required another perspective that constructivism and the socio-cultural theory of learning cannot explain alone. As a result, I decided to utilise complexity theory when expanding my viewpoint from the individual teachers' engagement with transformative TPL to the whole ecological system (Strom & Viesca, 2021; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a). This theory's inherent inter-relational, situational, adaptive position provides a potent, compelling viewpoint to

further illustrate and illuminate aspects of TPL, especially when used to guide the interpretation and analysis of the data (Cochran Smith et al., 2014; Mason, 2008). Furthermore, a qualitative, multiple case study with an interpretivist paradigm is suitable as a theoretical framework incorporating complexity theory (Mason, 2008) and, thus, enhanced this research project.

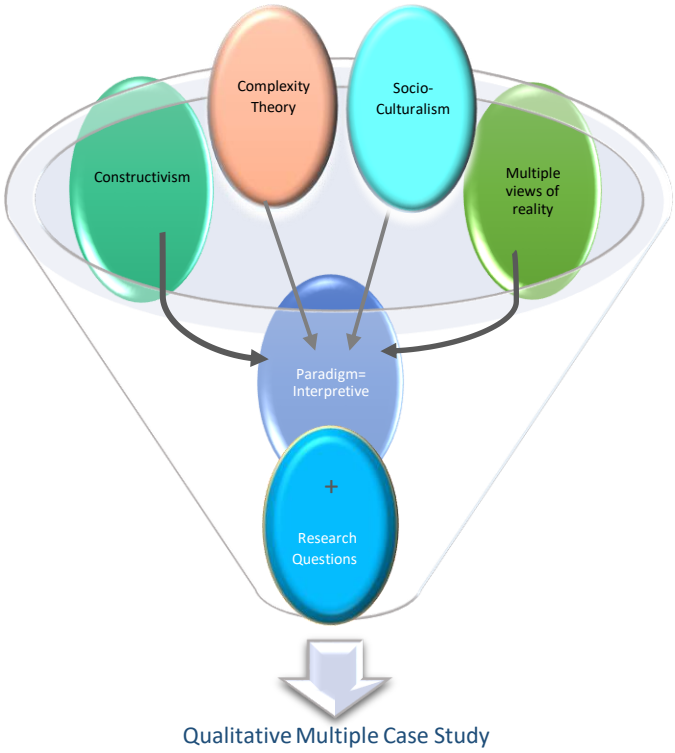


Figure 3.1 Development of Research Methodology

Figure 3.1 illustrates this study's positioning within the ontological belief of multiple views of reality, alongside the epistemological stance of constructivism, informed by the socio-cultural theory of learning and enhanced by complexity theory, which gave fruition to an interpretivist paradigm. In summary, this study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, underpinned by an ontological belief in the existence of multiple, socially constructed realities. From an epistemological standpoint, the study adopts a constructivist lens, influenced by the socio-cultural learning theory and enriched by complexity theory. To explore these complex and contextualised understandings, a qualitative multiple case study methodology was chosen. This approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm and the adopted epistemology, allowing for an in-depth, nuanced exploration of teachers' lived experiences across

varied school settings. By focusing on multiple cases, the study captures the diversity of perspectives and the contextual factors that shape how transformational professional learning is understood and enacted. The methodology supports the exploration and answering of this study's research questions. The following section will delve into the development of the research questions.

3.3 The Research Questions

I have had an abiding interest in the area of TPL as I believe quality TPL, linked to an area of need or interest, has the potential to develop a teacher and keep one invigorated in their profession. Once I identified the area, a thematic literature review was carried out to identify a gap in the research area so the project planned would have originality (Cohen et al., 2011; Bell, 2010) and the potential to be impactful and beneficial to its field (Braun & Clarke, 2013). From here, I developed and defined the main research question and considered research sub-questions to frame and guide the research project (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cohen et al., 2011). The original research questions were:

1. What approaches can be employed by teachers in primary schools to make the core principle of the *Cosán* framework a practical and sustainable reality in their professional practices?
2. What factors make it easier for *Cosán* to be embedded in the professional practices of primary teachers?
3. Has *Cosán* the potential to keep teachers more engaged with their chosen profession throughout their careers, as it allows for teachers to continue to have autonomy over their professional learning?
4. How can *Cosán* be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency?

Research questions are likely to evolve as projects progress (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and this held true in this research. I decided question 3 would make the project's scope unwieldly as it would not be practical to assess, amongst the other questions, in the timeframe of this research, so, I discarded it. As the project continued to develop, the topic of collaboration and its potential importance to impactful TPL became more prominent so a question was devised for its inclusion. The final research questions for this project became:

1. *What approaches can be employed by teachers in primary schools to incorporate the core principles of the* Cosán *framework into their living professional practices?*
2. *What factors enable or inhibit primary teachers' engagement with transformative TPL in the Republic of Ireland?*
3. *Can the development of reflective, collaborative cultures in schools enhance the positive impact of TPL?*
4. *Can* Cosán *be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency?*

Once the research questions began to form, I could assess what methodology and data collection instruments could best answer them when considering my underlying paradigmatic beliefs, as advised by Cohen et al. (2011), Opie (2007) and Patton (1999). I also followed the advice of Silverman (2013) when evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of different research methodologies in discerning which would be most suitable for meeting the requirements of my research project and which methodology would assist me most in answering my research questions. As I wanted to understand in detail the experiences of primary teachers engaging in the *Cosán* framework and how various factors could lead to facilitating or inhibiting their engagement, a qualitative, multiple case study using multiple data collection instruments was deemed to be the most suitable approach. This methodology can capture examples of the lived experiences of real people in intricate, real situations while illustrating a rich, descriptive analysis of events (Cohen et al., 2011). This will be further addressed in the following section which reviews this study's research design.

3.4 Research Design

This research project aimed to identify practical and sustainable approaches that can be employed by teachers in primary schools to incorporate the core principles of the *Cosán* framework into their professional practices. This study is grounded in an ontological belief in multiple realities and an epistemological stance of constructivism, shaped by socio-cultural learning theory and enriched by complexity theory, leading to the adoption of an interpretivist paradigm. This philosophical foundation guided the research design, with a qualitative multiple case study identified as the most appropriate methodology as it best aligned with my philosophical assumptions, as outlined above, and was most suited to answering the research questions this study posed. Qualitative approaches use words rather than numbers and are employed to understand a given situation within its context in detail and generate rich data from a small sample of data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Qualitative research also involves an interpretivist approach to the world, with the researcher taking an active role in making sense of the illustrated, lived experiences of the participants, which aligns with my research paradigm, as I outlined above (Snape & Spencer, 2003). This approach was appropriate for my project as findings were contingent on the detailed, revealed experiences of the participating teachers to determine the best approaches to incorporate the principles of *Cosán* into their professional practices.

To further answer the research question, I determined to utilise a multiple case study design to conduct an in-depth study of a complex issue, as Flyvbjerg (2006) advocated for. This decision was further consolidated by the assessment that multiple case studies can be employed for iterative, comparative and heuristic research projects (Eckstein, 2000). Furthermore, case studies are suited to consider the context of the study (Yin, 2009) and because the study can be constructed based on the data gathered from the social situations investigated (Hammersly & Gomm, 2000). This view related well to my research project as through engagement in successive interviews and focus groups, the unfolding, lived experiences of the various participants in engaging with the *Cosán* framework were interpreted and findings were constructed and refined. The following strengths, which Cohen et al.

(2011) identified, further informed my decision to use multiple case study as a research approach:

- Case studies can portray how ideas and abstract theories can dovetail.
- Case studies can be carried out by one researcher.
- Case studies illustrate in detail a complex situation in its setting which can be generalised if the reader recognises themselves or their setting in the nuanced instance.
- Case studies can recognise conflict or inconsistencies within them and be able to provide insights into different interpretations.
- Case study findings can be actionable and used in staff development, school evaluation and/ or educational policy making.
- Case studies can document the real experiences of participants in their voice (interviews).
- Case studies can be accessible to many audiences.

Cohen et al. (2011, p. 292-293) also elucidates weaknesses of the case study paradigm and suggests how these can be overcome, as illustrated in Table 3.1 below. While these limitations could detract from the rigour of the study, I undertook the following recommended advice throughout the research project to ensure its validity and credibility.

Weaknesses of Case Study	Proposals to counteract these weaknesses
• Process of selection of research sample may not be evident. • Case studies may become unwieldly if not controlled. • Researcher bias could present a problem. • It can be difficult to make generalisations.	• I will illustrate clearly the criteria applied to identify research sample. • Ensure specific, concrete research questions are developed and design a robust methodology to answer these. • I will keep a journal of my fieldwork to be aware of my reflexivity and any impartiality. • Generalisation can occur if the experiences of the participants chosen for the project are illustrated in detail and resonate with the wider primary teacher population.

Table 3.1 Case study weaknesses and proposals for counteractions

The use of case studies is widespread in social research, nevertheless, there are many variables in how it is utilised, and this lack of standardisation can cause confusion (Harrison et al., 2017; Hammersley & Gomm, 2000). The rationale for using multiple case study in this research project was further strengthened by ensuring credibility through:

- the researcher rigorously collecting qualitative data and analysing it in an in-depth way
- the researcher being trustworthy and recognising the significance and consequence of their role in quality research
- framing the project against a chosen paradigm and not making assumptions based on this but interrogating the data gathered against the philosophical beliefs (Patton, 1999).

The analysis in this section has demonstrated the rationale for employing a qualitative, multiple case study which Figure 3.2 summarises. This chapter illustrates the data collection instruments employed in this research project after the following two sections describe the research context and research participants.

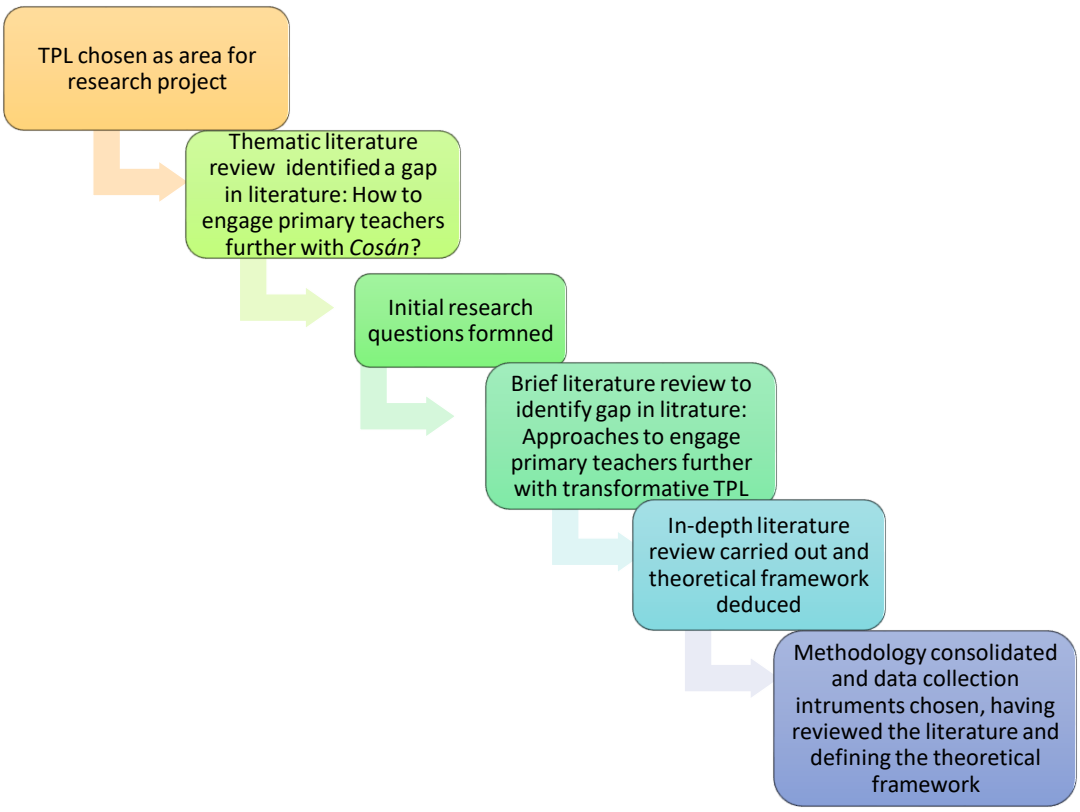


Figure 3.2 Research Design Development

3.5 The Research Context

The context of any study is important as it can provide an interpretation of why people react in a certain way to a particular situation (Mitchell, 2000). In case studies, it can be argued that the line between the phenomenon being researched and its context is indistinct which explains why it is important to situate the case studies within their respective contexts (Cohen et al., 2011). Furthermore, as complexity theory is a perspective adopted for this research study's theoretical framework, viewing the links between the various contexts as dynamic and recursive provided a richer interpretation of this project (Davis & Sumara, 2008; Mason, 2008). The following section outlines the various contexts this research project took place against and their influencing relationships. These are multi-layered and impacted and shaped each other in varying ways, as this section will elucidate, and Figure 3.3 illustrates below.

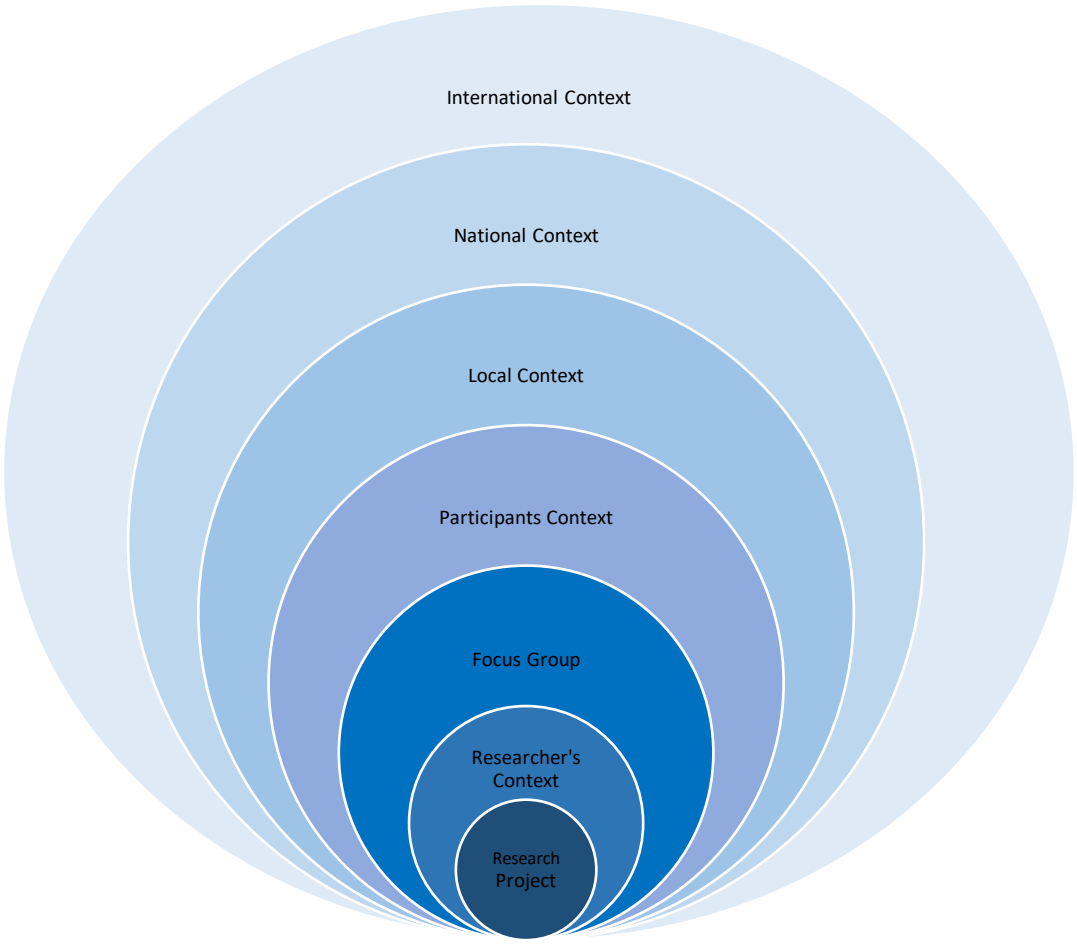


Figure 3.3: Contexts Influencing this Research Project

3.5.1 The Macro-Level Setting

The macro-setting for this project was the international background against which it was set. TPL is considered to be essential for quality education in many countries (OECD, 2020a; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Kennedy, 2014; Guskey, 2002) yet, models of TPL, based on countries' policies on continuous professional development, vary widely (Caena, 2011). The need for effective TPL is further outlined by Guskey (2002) and Timperley (2011) who both advocate for systems to be in place to facilitate and support teachers in moving to implement new knowledge into new practices. Recent efforts to understand the possible impacts of teacher professional development on improving schools, enhancing teacher quality and improving the quality of student learning have led researchers and policymakers to focus on understanding the effectiveness of these actions (OECD, 2019b). Practices that are seen to be instrumental to impactful TPL internationally and deemed to lead to more effective teaching include reflecting on teaching practices (Leijen et al., 2020; Liu, 2015; Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013; OECD, 2012a; Darling-Hammond, 2006) and collaborative practices (Lipscombe et al., 2020; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a; Harris & Jones, 2010), while the link between teacher agency and the autonomy a teacher has over their TPL has also been established (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020).

A further context which I included as part of the macro-setting was the national one. In 2016, The Teaching Council in Ireland published *Cosán*, the national framework for teachers' professional learning, after undertaking a national stakeholder consultation process. Since then, the Teaching Council developed workshops to engage teachers in the framework and encourage them to use its principles to improve their professional practices and to collaboratively progress teaching and learning within their schools (Teaching Council, 2022). The Department of Education has also been supporting the Teaching Council in advancing *Cosán* in its growth phase so all stakeholders (inspectors, education support centres etc.) enable its future development and link it to the continuum of teacher development (Department of Education, 2021a).

The Department of Education implemented school self-evaluation (SSE) into the Irish school system in 2012 to develop school improvement through a collaborative, reflective process (Department of Education and Skills, 2012a). This was most

recently updated in 2022 and is supported by a quality framework, "Looking at Our School" (LAOS) which refers to *Cosán* being the means by which teachers can reflect on their practices and learning to plan for professional growth (Department of Education, 2022b). School inspectors evaluate and assist the SSE process in schools and schools across Ireland have generally engaged well with it (Department of Education, 2022a). In the above mentioned *Cosán* workshops for teachers, teachers were encouraged to utilise *Cosán* to achieve their school's SSE goals, thus, a link between impactful school improvement and the benefit of *Cosán* has been established in a national context.

3.5.2 The Meso-Level Setting

The context of the local school shaped the meso-level setting of this study. The context of the school can be influenced by factors such as national policy, culture, leadership, resources and resourcing, collaboration and social-professional relationships (Gemmink et al., 2021). The workplace culture of each school is characterised by sets of beliefs, values and norms which guide how a school operates (Muijs et al., 2014; Kennedy, 2011; Fullan, 2007). This is strongly influenced by school leadership (Visone et al., 2021). The prioritising of a school culture conducive to learning is an essential element to support TPL (Kennedy, 2011) as, significantly, teacher quality is deemed dependent on the school culture (Lavonen, 2020). Some factors which help cultivate a facilitative school culture and lead to capacity for teacher development and learning include collective responsibility, a shared purpose, supportive leadership, collaboration and the development of trusting, respectful relationships (Visone et al., 2021). The individual interviews and focus group discussions elicited the influence of each participant's schools on their capacity to engage with the *Cosán* framework.

3.5.3 The Micro-Level Setting

The participants' personal context was a further micro-level setting which influenced this research due to reasons such as socio-cultural expectations and their willingness to engage with the research (Cohen et al., 2011; Opie, 2007), as well as

their own subjectivity which comprises of their values, perspectives, and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As these participants were unknown to me, I had to develop a relationship with them so they would feel comfortable enough to speak honestly and in-depth on their experiences with TPL so the data generated would be conducive to this project (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cohen et al., 2011; Opie, 2007). On the other hand, as purposeful sampling was utilised to recruit participants and each one came to the project voluntarily, it can be deduced that the participants had a bias towards engaging with the *Cosán* framework as they have demonstrated both an interest in TPL and a mind-set that was open to developing themselves professionally. This made gathering evidence to answer the research questions easier for the researcher (Creswell, 2012). By taking on board their expertise and experience, and intertwining these with the relevant, current literature, I attempted to address my focal research question- to identify approaches to embed the principles of *Cosán* into the professional practices of teachers, as advocated by Mogo et al. (2020). Concurrently, I needed to be cognisant of the "Hawthorne Effect" whereby participants may change their behaviour as a consequence of being involved in the research, for example, maybe trying to impress the researcher (McCambridge et al., 2014; Cohen et al., 2011). I mitigated for this by presenting an authentic version of myself as a researcher while also creating an atmosphere where their honest opinion was sought and encouraged (Cohen et al., 2011).

The focus groups were another interesting micro-level context which further shaped this study. Fourteen participants were involved in this study and to obtain a rich data set to which each participant contributes, focus groups should be small (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Consequently, I decided to split the participants into three to four focus groups. I initially anticipated that I might separate them homogenously according to the number of teaching posts in the school, as this factor may affect the capacity of a school to engage collaboratively with the *Cosán* framework, which is an area this study was attempting to assess. Furthermore, I deemed it important to divide the groups along these lines in the hope of developing a community of practice among the participants to evaluate various approaches to instigate the use of *Cosán* within their professional practices in their schools and to support each other in doing so. While this was my intention, the reality of the participants' lives

and the practicality of finding mutually convenient dates and times for the participants to meet in the focus groups meant that focus groups were determined by when three or more participants were able to meet at the same time, as section 3.8.3 elucidates. A factor within the dynamic of the focus group which I was cognisant of was that some participants might be dominant and make it challenging for others to contribute, while others may be naturally more reticent which I, in moderating as an interviewer, would have to manage in a facilitating and open fashion (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As this research was placed within the constructivist perspective, the data produced from the focus groups was dependent on the focus groups' dynamics, as they made sense and built knowledge together, and I considered this when analysing the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

As outlined so far in this section, the backdrop to this research project was unique, multi-layered and dynamic. Consequently, it was necessary to illustrate the complex, dynamic interplay of this setting as it provided the perimeter within which the study was conducted (Rapos et al., 2025; Strom & Vesca, 2021; Cohen et al., 2011) and Figure 3.4 summarises below. There was one further context which had a significant bearing on the study and that was the role of the researcher. The following section will detail my role within this research.



Figure 3.4: Contexts and their Relationships in Shaping this Project

3.6 Researcher's Role

3.6.1 Researcher Identity

As outlined previously in this chapter, my worldview reflects a socio-cultural and constructivist approach and, by holding this position, I needed to be aware of the assumptions I was making about the research before I immersed myself in the transactional phases of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, my subjectivity, which encompasses my beliefs, assumptions and experiences, could influence qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Snape & Spencer, 2003) but, according to Braun & Clarke (2013), a rigorous qualitative researcher, considers and identifies these so the research project is not automatically shaped by them. I am a practising primary teacher, so I brought to this research over twenty years' of experience in teaching. I also worked for the Teaching Council as a facilitator for the *Cosán* workshops since its inception in 2019, so I had a unique insight into *Cosán*. It was in this role that I began to wonder why primary teachers did not have the same uptake and interest in the workshops as secondary teachers, which led to the development of this study. I also undertook this study to be awarded a PhD from UCC and this has a further bearing on my stance as a researcher, which I needed to be aware of, as I aspired to achieve this award.

3.6.2 Reflexivity

In addressing this research, I was aware of my role and positioning within the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Opie, 2007). Qualitative research values subjectivity and reflexivity and has even been considered essential (Braun & Clarke, 2013), as qualitative research writing is not neutral (Opie, 2007). Reflexivity is acknowledging and recognising the role the researcher plays in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As I interacted with the participants as an interviewer and focus group facilitator, I was not an observer, however, I had a participatory role in the research as my presence within the research would influence it. I needed to be reflexive, i.e. aware of my stance, which was influenced by my identity and experiences, as illustrated above, and reflect how this may impact on the data and its analysis. I elected to do this by maintaining a researcher journal to closely monitor my

reactions towards the research to mitigate against any bearing it might have had and, consequently, enhance the validity of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022a & 2012; Cohen et al., 2011). Furthermore, as I took a qualitative, reflexive thematic approach to analysing the data, as described in detail in section 3.9, it was my subjectivity, knowledge and expertise, within the contexts peculiar to this project, which constructed a meaning from the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). As a result, reflexivity is actually to be valued and embraced (Braun & Clarke, 2022a).

The above section outlined the overlapping, intricate and multidimensional contexts against which this research took place. The following section summarises the participants chosen for this study and how this process was undertaken.

3.7 Research Participants

3.7.1 Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used to select interested primary teachers from various contexts and backgrounds, to gain in-depth insights from their experiences through their engagement with *Cosán*. Purposeful sampling can be defined as a researcher choosing subjects based on his/her estimation of their typicality (Cohen et al., 2011; Opie, 2007) and is used to illustrate important, information-rich cases (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 1999). In the case of this research, purposeful sampling was utilised to access primary teachers who have an interest in TPL so their engagement with the *Cosán* framework, and thus this project, could yield data and be evaluated, as recommended by Creswell (2012) and Cohen et al. (2011). On the other hand, if a random sampling for this project was employed, there would be no guarantee that the teachers chosen would be engaged enough in their professional development to generate enough valuable data for this research project. To ensure rigour in case selection, I clearly determined the criteria needed to be met by the participants so that the sample would be congruent with this research project, as advocated for by Patton (1999). This can involve a two-stage sampling process (Gomm et al., 2000; Patton, 1999) and was the course I followed.

3.7.2 Survey

Surveys are a useful data instrument as they can scan a wide population in an economical and efficient way (Cohen et al., 2011). For this study, a survey was primarily used as a means to identify participants at the outset, as suggested by Gomm et al. (2000). The questions for this were specifically written to identify participants for the intention of the study through purposeful sampling, as advised by Opie (2007). The survey was delivered online and participants were invited to partake through national advertisements in the Irish National Teacher Organisation's weekly e-newsletter, via NEARI (network for educational action research Ireland) and on professional group fora on Facebook (Teacher CPD Ireland; Primary Teachers Ireland) where the link to the survey was made available (Appendix 5). This approach targeted the sample population of primary teachers nationally. Online surveys have advantages over paper questionnaires as they are more economical with time, they enable access to a wider targeted population and potential respondents may be more likely to complete it, as it can be completed at their convenience (Cohen et al., 2011).

The survey needed to be considered and planned in order to achieve its objective (Cohen et al., 2011; Opie, 2007). I designed the questions for this survey to determine the background characteristics of the participants and followed Cohen et al.'s (2011, p. 260) advice in planning for the various stages of developing a survey, which was as follows:

1. Define the survey's objectives
2. Decide on the information needed
3. Decide sample
4. Design the questionnaire
5. Pilot it
6. Amend questionnaire
7. Carry out survey
8. Tabulate and analyse
9. Write up the report

The questionnaire was online and self-administered. It had seven closed questions where participants had only to tick the box most appropriate to them and one open question where they were asked why they were interested in partaking in the project. I designed the survey to be targeted, simple and short to potentially get a higher response rate, which is a vagary of online surveys, as noted by Cohen et al. (2011). I piloted this study with three primary school teachers, as they are representative of the population to be studied (Opie, 2007). Piloting a survey is an important step as it can identify potential problems with the questionnaire (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cohen et al., 2011; Opie, 2007). I asked them to complete the survey and comment on it to ascertain if any aspects of the questionnaire could be clarified or improved upon, in line with the advice of Braun & Clarke (2013). One colleague commented that I should include the class level or type of class they teach, while another commented on punctuation. As a result of their comments, I corrected the survey and subsequently added a question about the class they currently teach.

The survey was advertised across the various online platforms in March and April 2023 and I received thirty-three responses in total, of which twenty-one demonstrated a willingness to engage in the research, by freely giving their email address at the end of the online survey. Follow-up emails to inform potential participants about the project and their role within brought the number of teachers interested in engaging further down to seventeen. At this stage, I analysed the survey responses in line with the criteria determined to identify the research study's participants (see section 3.7.2) and fourteen were identified and approached to further engage in the study. I emailed each of them the participant's information and consent form (Appendix 6) and asked them to read through it and contact me if they needed clarification before signing and emailing it back to me. Once I received their consent forms, the next stage of data collecting was set.

While questionnaires are useful to answer the questions of who, what and where, i.e. fact-based questions, they are not as effective to determine the why (Opie, 2007), hence, the consequential, complimentary use of interviews and focus groups as the primary research instruments for this project, as described in section 3.8.

3.7.3 The Sampling Process

The sampling process became quite an arduous task for this project. I first designed an advertising poster, which included a link to the survey (Appendix 3), to invite primary school teachers interested in TPL to be involved in this study. This poster was advertised on the Irish primary teacher union's, the INTO (Irish National Teachers' Organisation), e-newsletter, which has a potential reach of 51,000 members (INTO, 2022). I also emailed NEARI (Network for Educational Action Research in Ireland) and asked them to share it with their members. From these sources I received one initial response. I then went to the Department of Education's website and obtained the contact email addresses of the 3,239 primary schools registered in the Republic of Ireland and emailed each school with a letter of introduction, an invite to partake in the survey and potentially the project, along with the survey link (Appendix 4). Approximately 30 emails bounced back and about a dozen schools said they receive too many requests to fill out surveys so were not facilitating passing this onto their teaching staff anymore. From this phase, I received a further twenty-one responses, of which eleven indicated a willingness to participate in the research and also met the sampling criteria, as laid out in the following section. Only three responded when a follow-up email was sent to the eleven potentially interested teachers to organise the first interview. After a short period of time, I sent another follow-up email to the teachers I had not received a response from and three further teachers replied but one could not partake further due to technology difficulties. With only six confirmed primary teachers, I lacked participant numbers, so I had to pivot in my recruitment process. I sent requests to two Republic of Ireland primary teacher forums on Facebook to place a post requesting willing participants to my research project. One forum posted it, from which I received no responses, and the other Facebook forum did not initially post it. I then reached out to my own networks of primary teachers asking, if they knew of anyone who would engage with the project and to pass the survey link on to them. From this, three further primary teachers indicated an interest to partake in the project and all of them met the sampling criteria I applied. I was about to begin gathering a few more participants by utilising a snowballing sampling method, which refers to asking people who have already been interviewed to identify other people they know who fit the selection criteria (Ritchie et al., 2003), when the post

I had submitted to one of the Facebook forums three weeks previous was approved and posted. From this, I received nine more replies to my survey, of which eight indicated a willingness to partake. At this point, I also received an email from another teacher who had been late to reply to my initial email and she showed a strong interest in being involved in the research. I then applied my selection criteria to the interested participants from the Facebook forum and ranked them according to it. I emailed five of these teachers to organise an initial interview and once I had a confirmed email of acceptance from them, I emailed the other three teachers to thank them for showing an interest in my research but they were not needed at this time. Thus, after a gruelling process and with fourteen primary teachers confirmed as participants, the data collection phase began.

3.7.4 The Sampling Criteria

Once there were sufficient interested replies to the survey, I applied criteria, as described below, to identify the participants who would be suitable to this project. Along with showing a keen interest in TPL, these primary teachers were selected via a variety of other criteria to reflect a broad representation of primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland to maximise variation in the sampling, as advocated for by Creswell (2012), Cohen et al. (2011) and Flyvbjerg (2006). The use of a strategic selection of cases may also contribute to the generalisability of case studies (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Flyvbjerg, 2006) and the transferability of the findings (Mertens, 2010). On the other hand, I was mindful that this project studied a small proportion of the teaching population and the heterogeneity of the teaching population can never be completely replicated, as counselled by Gomm et al. (2000).

The following are the sampling criteria applied to this research project:

- teachers with at least three years' teaching experience who have completed their induction period
- their willingness to participate in the research over the 14 months of data collection
- their online literacy and access to reliable technology to engage in the research

- their gender
- their seniority within the primary school workplace
- the enrolment size of the primary school they work in
- the profile of the primary school they work in, e.g., rural/ urban/ disadvantaged/ patronage.

Primary teachers with at least three years' teaching experience were chosen as they have moved along the teacher education continuum from being newly qualified teachers in the teacher induction phase into the continuing development phase of their profession and begun their autonomous, professional journey. In Ireland, once a teacher has completed their initial teacher education by graduating with either a degree level Bachelor of Education or a Professional Master of Education (primary) they must complete an induction period known as *Droichead*. This induction period meets the identified needs of teachers at the start of their careers through both school-based and additional professional learning activities (Teaching Council, 2015) and begins the socialisation process into the teaching profession on which *Cosán* builds.

Another criterion I applied was the participants' access to technology and their ability to engage via this forum. The interviews and focus group discussions were held online and it was essential that the participants had access to reliable technology, so they could engage in the interviews and discussions uninterrupted and the technological literacy to engage comfortably via this forum (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). One potential participant had technology difficulties and had to withdraw from the project before the first interview.

The level of seniority of the participants within their primary schools and whether they held a management post within the school was also considered in the criteria. This was because the Teaching Council sees school leaders as crucial in developing communities of practice in schools which are believed to be conducive to the fostering of relevant, impactful TPL (Teaching Council, 2016). In Ireland, school leadership is conceptualised as constituting a continuum, with stages from teacher leadership to established senior school leadership (CSL, 2022) and in the initial literature review, I identified leadership as a factor that may impact on teachers'

engagement with *Cosán*. Therefore, I wanted to include teachers at different levels of leadership to include this variance in the sample population.

The gender of the teacher, the enrolment number of the school and background of the school were also considered when choosing participants who reflect the general teaching population. 86% of primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland were female in 2017 (CSO, 2023) and this study reflected this high percentage by having eleven females out of the fourteen teachers, giving a participatory female percentage of 79%. 44% of primary schools in Ireland could be defined as small, i.e., having four teachers or less (Department of Education and Skills, 2020) and this research sought to reflect that, but only three teachers, who worked in primary schools of this size answered the ads. All three of these teachers met the sampling criteria, so I was able to include them all, which gave this project a percentage of 21% of teachers who worked in 'small' schools. As of September 2022, 1,194 primary schools in the Republic of Ireland have DEIS status (DEIS is the Government of Ireland's main policy initiative to respond to educational disadvantage with targeted additional resources and funding) and this represents 36% of the primary schools (Government of Ireland, 2022). 43% of the participants in this survey work in primary schools with DEIS status which, though higher than the actual statistic, is similar in proportion.

The participants were initially invited to participate in the research project via the online survey. The link to this online survey was advertised nationally, through various means, as described above, to recruit participants through purposive sampling who are knowledgeable and interested in the area of TPL to gain a comprehensive insight into their experiences with engaging with the *Cosán* framework, as advised by Cohen et al. (2011). Through the advertised surveys, the sampling process identified primary teachers who showed a willingness to engage in the research, by freely giving their email address at the end of the online survey, to be part of the research project. Once the above criteria were applied, fourteen willing primary teachers were identified from the responses and contacted via their given email address and fully informed in plain English about the research project and their part within with the participants' information and consent form. Assurances were given regarding confidentiality and anonymity of their information at all stages of the research. At this point, each participant was also asked if they

would be comfortable engaging in interviews and focus group discussions online and if they had access to the technology to do so. Once each participant's informed consent was gained, data collection began with the initial individual interviews.

Table 3.2 presents pseudonyms for each primary teacher and the characteristics of each for this research project.

Teacher Pseudonym	Gender	Years' Teaching Experience	Seniority within school	Number of Teaching Staff	School Profile	Class taught
Harry	male	14-20	Principal-teaching	4-7	rural	3rd- 6th
Hannah	female	21+	Principal-teaching	1-3	rural	3rd – 6th
Carrie	female	14-20	AP post holder	20+	urban	3rd- 6th
Gabrielle	female	14-20	AP post holder	8-13	suburban	SET
Phil	male	9-13	Teacher leader	20+	Urban, DEIS	SET
Annette	female	9-13	Teacher leader	14-19	Rural, DEIS	3rd- 6th
Liam	male	9-13	Principal-admin	8-13	rural	Admin principal
Yvonne	female	4-8	Deputy Principal	1-3	rural	Infants-2nd
Nora	Female	21+	Teacher leader	20+	Urban, DEIS	SET
Elaine	female	14-20	None	20+	urban	Infants-2nd
Laura	female	14-20	None	8-13	DEIS	SET
Liz	Female	21+	Principal-teaching	4-7	rural	SET
Rachel	female	9-13	None	8-13	Suburban, DEIS	Infant – 2nd
Marian	female	9-13	Deputy Principal	1-3	Rural, DEIS	3rd- 6th

Table 3.2 Participants' Characteristics

The following section explains how the data was collected from the above participants.

3.8 Data Collection

The methodology selected to fulfil this research study's purpose was multiple case study. This methodology was chosen, as explained in section 3.4 above, as through the descriptive nature of multiple case study, I would be in a position to examine the lived experiences of the participants in their true environment while recognising the impact of the various contexts they are positioned in (Cohen et al., 2011). As a result, this multiple case study design had the potential to fulfil the intentions of this research study and identify sustainable and practical approaches to support transformative TPL in primary schools while nurturing teacher agency. The data collection instruments chosen to gather the data through this methodology were multiple as these would be more likely to capture the nuances and variations of the participants' experiences (Cohen et al., 2011). Those chosen were interviews and focus groups. The following sections explain why these data instruments were selected and how they were utilised.

3.8.1 Interview

The data collecting began with an individual semi-structured online interview with each participant to establish their initial views on TPL, collaborative, reflective practices, the *Cosán* framework and their perception of the extent of their teacher agency. This interview structure was repeated after the focus group discussions had concluded to determine if and how these views might have evolved in the interim. I chose to utilise interviews as a data collecting instrument as they are adaptable and can probe the why, which questionnaires cannot (Opie, 2007; Bell, 2010). Another advantage of the interview process is it can be structured yet, has the potential to be flexible enough to explore more in-depth, complex answers, if the interviewer is astute and responsive enough (Cohen et al., 2011). It can also provide depth and richness to the described experiences of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Opie, 2007; Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews can also lend themselves to the researcher taking an interpretivist stance (Opie, 2007; Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). On the other hand, there are also disadvantages to interviews, such as they can be time-consuming; the researcher has to be reflexive as they can be subjective; it may be inconvenient for participants; there

may be difficulties with anonymity and analysing responses can present problems (Creswell, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011; Bell, 2010). Also, as I intended to carry out the interviews online, I was aware of further problems that can occur via this platform such as connectivity difficulties, lack of eye contact, adapting to the environment the interviewee presents themselves in and pacing difficulties (Oliffe, et al., 2021). I considered these drawbacks and when reflected on overall, in conjunction with its benefits, I deliberated that the advantages outweighed its limitations and I opted to adopt online interviews for this study.

For the interviews to be successful, I had to prepare well for them and began by designing an interview guide and schedule (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cohen et al., 2011). The questions devised on the schedule were open-ended and carefully constructed to maximise the chance to attain detailed responses from the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2012). The schedule was also flexible enough to allow further questions to emerge and ask the interviewee as the dialogue naturally developed (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Once I was content with the questions on the interview schedule (Appendices 7 & 11), I piloted it with a primary school teacher to eliminate any ambiguous questions, to ascertain if the schedule questions were polished enough to generate the data needed to answer my research questions and to determine the approximate length of the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Bell, 2010). Similar to the piloting stage with the survey, this pilot process for the interview subsequently guided me to modify the language in some questions for clarity and to adjust the order of the questions so the interview would be more conversation-like (Kallio et al., 2016; Knox & Burkard, 2009).

Once I could proceed with the interviews, I contacted each participant and organised a mutually convenient date and time to conduct the interview. The interviews were online and when preparing for an online interview the researcher follows the same steps as they would when preparing for a face-to-face interview (Salmons, 2011). Online video interviews were utilised as they were most convenient to both the researcher and participants as, geographically, the participants were located in different parts of the country and an online encounter lends itself to engagement by a more geographically diverse sample of participants as travelling long distances is not a factor when volunteering to partake in research (Oliffe et al., 2021). Also, video interviews have the potential to gather as much

detail as a face-to-face interview, as most body language can be interpreted (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, many people are much more familiar and comfortable with online video conversations in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic when it became a more common form of communication (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). Online interviews can also be as rich, if not richer, than face-to-face interviews, as participants feel comfortable in their own space and are thus more likely to be open when answering questions (Oliffe et al., 2021). When I conducted each interview I was cognisant of Cohen et al.'s (2011) advice that interviews are social, interpersonal encounters and not just a means to collect data. As a result, I conducted each interview in an interested, empathetic, respectful way to build rapport with the participants, clearly asked my prepared questions, yet, was astute and flexible enough to follow their lead with their answers if it provided an interesting insight to answer one of my research questions, and I constantly encouraged the participants to be forthcoming and expand on their answers, all in keeping with the advice of Braun & Clarke (2013), Creswell (2012), Cohen et al. (2011) and Opie (2007).

The interviews were recorded on Microsoft Teams, the platform used for the online interviews as per UCC's ethical guidelines. Once completed the interviews were transcribed verbatim using a transcribing tool available on Microsoft Teams I cross-checked and further corrected them. The transcripts were then anonymised by replacing names with pseudonyms. The data set was then ready to be analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022a) thematic analysis approach described in section 3.9. The following section describes the process of devising and undertaking the focus group discussions.

3.8.2 Focus Groups

I determined that focus groups would be a useful method of data collecting for this research study as the interactions between the participants are likely to yield more viewpoints and data than an interview (Creswell, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011). Focus groups can also triangulate with the interviews and further augment the validity of this research (Barbour & Morgan, 2017; Cohen et al., 2011). Furthermore, focus groups assembled in groups of below ten, tend to generate richer data (Braun &

Clarke, 2013; Cohen et al., 2011). I was also anticipating that through the focus group dynamic the participants would create their own PLC and support each other in reflecting on and devising practical and sustainable approaches to incorporate the core principles of the *Cosán* framework into their professional practices while cultivating teacher agency. Research has shown that those who engage in reflective PLCs develop a new sense of professional identity when collaborating with each other and this can lead to more impactful teaching practices (Brodie, 2019). This premise is further supported by Sæbø and Midtsundstad (2022) who encourage using PLCs to move reflections to actions through reflective dialogue and supporting each other in these efforts. However, when it came to reality, participants were grouped according to what focus group they could attend online, as I explained in section 3.5.3. The composition of the focus groups inevitably changed for the second round of online discussions, for the same reason. This meant that my intention of creating a PLC did not transpire, nevertheless, during the second round of focus group meetings, the participants opened up more and were more forthright in sharing TPL practices which they believed led to effective, sustainable practices.

After the initial interviews with the participants, two focus group discussions were held over four months, the first in October 2023 and the final one in February. During the first round of focus group discussions, despite trying to organise various times over a period of a fortnight, only eight out of the fourteen participants could attend. Six could not due to various reasons such as personal issues, technical difficulties and inability to find a mutually convenient time. This may be a drawback with online interviews, while they were initially deemed to be a convenient way to engage with participants who are geographically spread across the country (Oliffe et al., 2021), this convenience may lead to it being too easy to also commit to a time and the lack of physical, personal interaction may further exacerbate this anomaly. As a result of the lack of engagement with all the participants and after a discussion with my supervisors, I decided to send each participant, via email, a short recording where I went through the main discussion points from the focus group, along with some handouts, (Appendix 9). I also asked each participant to view their TPL through the lens of *Cosán* and to possibly engage in collaborative reflection with their school colleagues, even on a micro-scale before the next focus group meeting.

During the second round of focus group discussions, ten out of the fourteen participants attended; two participants were not able to engage further in this research project due to personal reasons and another two participants were not able to engage in this round of focus groups due to last minute personal reasons. As noted, the participants were more open during this round of focus groups and engaged with each other further, resulting in richer data.

During the focus groups, I followed some of the principles laid out by Bohnsack (2004) when conducting focus groups, such as

- the entire group is the addressee of interventions, rather than the discussion leader, to not influence the discussion's dynamic or flow
- the discussion leader takes on the role of an observer mostly and only intervenes if a participant has not engaged in the discussion or if the discussion does not reflect the research study's topic and has gone too far 'off tangent'
- the questions and follow-up questions should be framed in such a way that they can generate detailed descriptions or narratives of experiences
- to utilise follow-up questions to elucidate more detail about a situation or experience someone is describing that is of interest to the research
- to utilise extra follow-up questions at the end of the discussion, if there is sufficient time, to cover (an) area(s) in the discussion leader's question guide that was not yet, broached.

Before the focus groups commenced, each participant was sent an email broadly outlining what was to be discussed at the focus group so there would be an aim to the groups' discussions (Cohen et al., 2011) and dates and times mutually convenient to the participants were agreed on. The focus group discussions took place online as, similar to the reasons outlined above for online interviews, they are more convenient for the researcher and participants, they allow for participants across the country to join in, body language can still be read and people are more used to this form of communication after the recent Covid-19 pandemic (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021; Oliffe et al., 2021). At the outset of each discussion, I informed them of their right to withdraw at any point and reminded and encouraged the participants to demonstrate the values of respect, honesty, integrity,

confidentiality, anonymity and trust throughout the discussions and outside the confines of the focus groups.

Each focus group discussion was recorded on Microsoft Teams. Once completed the discussions were transcribed verbatim using a transcribing tool available on Microsoft Teams and these were cross-checked and further corrected by me. The transcripts were then anonymised by replacing names with pseudonyms. The data set was then ready to be analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022a) thematic analysis approach described in section 3.9.

3.8.4 In Summary

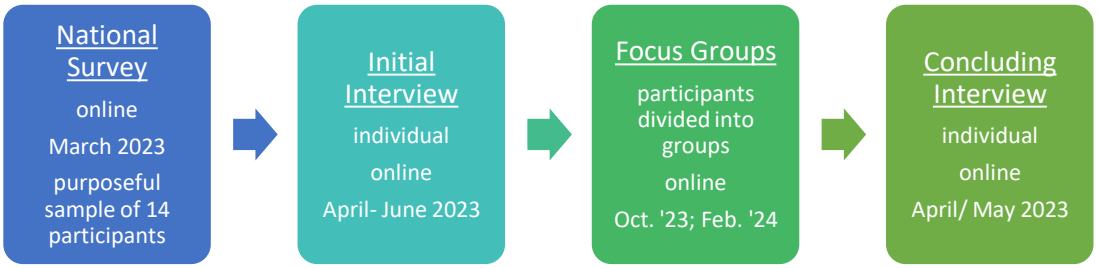


Figure 3.5 Data Collection

The above Figure 3.5 illustrates the various data collection instruments used to gather data to answer this project's research questions and the above section justifies the reasons for utilising them and describes the phases of data collection. The following section will detail how the data collected via the above outlined methods was analysed.

3.9 Data Analysis

This study generated a large amount of data including twenty-five interview transcripts and seven focus group transcripts. Creswell (2012) has outlined six steps to undertake when analysing qualitative data: collecting, transcribing, reading, coding, noting emerging themes and defining major themes. These steps are not entirely sequential but are iterative as qualitative researchers begin their analysis

as they collect the data and cyclically reading and rereading it to develop more insights into the data (Creswell, 2012). The qualitative data analysis process can also be described in five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018) which is more in accordance with the iterative nature of qualitative data. Qualitative data can be analysed in various ways such as thematic analysis, which is a method used to identify themes and patterns across a data set to answer the research questions; interpretivist phenomenological analysis, which examines how people make sense of their lived experiences; grounded theory, which focuses on building a theory from the data within the social context; and pattern based discourse analysis which identifies patterns in language and the perspective of how events are constructed (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thematic analysis can be further categorised into three principal approaches: coding reliability, codebook approaches and, the reflexive approach to TA (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). Coding reliability involves using a process to identify themes using a predetermined structured code or analytic tool which was developed from themes, either deductively or inductively (Braun & Clarke, 2022a; Byrne, 2021). The codebook approach utilises coding as a process to identify instances of a theme anchored in the research questions and tend to be created by the researcher deductively (Braun & Clarke, 2022a; Byrne, 2021). The reflexive thematic analysis [RTA] approach places the researcher's active, interpretivist analysis of the data to build knowledge to the forefront (Braun & Clarke, 2022a; Byrne, 2021). Codes develop from the researcher's deep familiarisation with the data and their evolving interpretation of patterns across the codes which develop into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022a; Byrne, 2021).

The qualitative data analysis method I utilised was RTA which Braun & Clarke simply define as "a reflexive, recursive engagement with the dataset, to produce a robust analysis" (2023). I chose this approach as it is suitable for a single researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022a) and it allowed me to analyse the data to answer my research questions about the teachers' lived experiences of TPL and their perceptions about the factors which may influence the TPL's ability to be transformative to their practices (Braun & Clarke, 2023). I also appreciated and concurred with the consideration RTA gives regarding the coherence of the different elements of the research project, such as its objectives, its philosophical, theoretical and

methodological design (Braun & Clarke, 2022b) and endeavoured to abide by this in my approach to this inquiry. Furthermore, keeping findings in context is a cardinal principle of qualitative analysis (Patton, 1999) and, while undertaking a reflexive thematic analysis approach to the data, I was cognisant of the varying, complex contexts, including my own role, that were pertinent to this study, as described in section 3.5.

3.9.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

In line with the advice of Braun & Clarke (2022a) and Creswell (2012) I took the following steps in undertaking reflexive thematic analysis. After I gathered the data, I had to familiarise myself more thoroughly with the data. This was initially done through the transcription process, during which time I arduously corrected the generated transcription by listening over and over to the transcription to ensure it was validated verbatim. I found this process acquainted me quite well with the data as I listened to the recordings repeatedly, and I noted tone and emotion within the discussions. It was at this point that I really began to earnestly reflect in and on my reflexive journal, as I considered why certain responses to questions elicited an emotional response within me. I found taking this reflexive stance to analysis to be very insightful and it provided me with a process to engage with the data at a rich level. Once the data was transcribed correctly, I then needed to read and reread the data, and I noted further impressions. This brought me to the second phase of analysis as I generated initial codes systematically across the data set before I then began to group codes according to potential themes and assembled the relevant data. This process can be seen in Appendices 12, 14, 16 and 18. I also ensured at this stage that the codes generated stayed consistent throughout the analysis process by constantly comparing them to their initial intended meaning (Creswell, 2012). I then iteratively reviewed the identified themes to ensure they linked back to the initial codes generated in the previous phase. From here, a thematic map of the analysis materialised, and these were re-analysed to clearly define them (Appendices 13, 15, 17 and 19). The final phase involved linking the final determined themes back to the data to extract clear examples to demonstrate if and how the themes link back further to the research questions and literature review and write

a report on these findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). Many of the identified themes were deductive and grounded in my literature review, however, some were inductive, such as the holistic view of the teacher and the impact of teacher identity on teacher agency. This aligns with Braun & Clarke's (2022a) opinion that RTA's analytic orientation can be both inductive and deductive. As the research project developed, I utilised the codes identified during the first in-depth analysis of data as a reference, while being vigilant to new themes which may be detected as additional data is analysed and integrated, in keeping with the advice of Yin (2009). A summary of the generated themes, in conjunction with the corresponding research questions can be seen in Table 3.3.

Research Question	**Themes Generated from Data Analysis**
What approaches can be employed by teachers in primary schools to incorporate the core principles of Cosán (Teaching Council, 2016) into their living professional practices?	• Cosán • School-based Professional Learning • Networked Learning Communities and Online Networks • Broad Experience • Quality TPL • Reform Individual Teacher TPL System
What factors enable or inhibit primary teachers' engagement with transformative TPL in the Republic of Ireland?	• Leadership • Culture • Collaborative Practices • Reflective Practices • Resources (time, structures, finance, quality of facilitators, accessibility, system supports) • Relevance • Teacher autonomy • Holistic View of Teachers
Can the development of reflective, collaborative cultures in schools enhance the positive impact of TPL?	• Identifying collaborative practices • Difficulties with Collaborative Practices • Communities of Practice • What are Reflective Practices? • Difficulties with Reflective Practices

	• Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner and its Relationship with Teacher Identity • Identifying Collaborative Reflection • What is Collaborative Reflection? • Collaborative Reflection to Support National Policy • Difficulties with Collaborative Reflection
Can Cosán be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency?	• Capacity of Individual Teacher • Collective Agency • Ecological Conditions • Teacher Identity • Cosán Framework & Teacher Identity

Table 3.3 Summary of Generated Themes

The following section outlines the steps I undertook to ensure rigour in my research and the findings reported.

3.10 Methodological Rigour

The reliability and validity of findings from qualitative data can be more questionable due to the subjective analysis of the researcher (Opie, 2007). While the 'soft' nature of words versus the hard facts of numbers may be a weakness of qualitative analysis, the benefit of using the research design employed by this project outweighs its shortcomings. Qualitative data provides insights into experiences that quantitative data cannot give (Opie, 2007). This section describes the various steps I took to ensure this research project would stand up to rigorous scrutiny.

3.10.1 Validity and Reliability

I had to ensure this study was reliable and valid for this research project to succeed. Reliability is a measure of consistency, while validity is a broader concept that interrogates whether the research design met the project's requirements and

whether the conclusions stand up to scrutiny (Creswell, 2012; Bell, 2010). Validity also encompasses the integrity, richness, depth, rigour and authenticity of good qualitative research and must be kept at the heart of all research endeavours (Cohen et al., 2011). When it comes to case studies, the validity and reliability of a project can be further enhanced by ensuring the study's process is rigorously attended to and described (Yin, 2009; Scaife, 2007). In qualitative research, the iterative approach means the researcher moves continually from the research questions to the literature, to the research design, to the data collection instruments, to the data collected and its analysis and back to the research questions to determine how they are being answered (Patton, 2002).

I employed various strategies to maintain validity and reliability in this research project and its conclusions. From the outset, I ensured that the chosen research design and data collection instruments were linked back to my research questions and fulfilled their purpose, in line with Baumfield et al.'s (2008) recommendation. Another step I took to ensure this study's validity was maximised was to pilot the survey and interview schedule, in keeping with the advice of Creswell (2012), Cohen et al. (2011) and Bell (2010). When the survey was initially piloted, I informed my three critical friends of its objective. I asked whether the designed survey would fulfil this requirement, following the advice of Bell (2010) to augment the reliability of the project. The questionnaire was also piloted to confirm that it was clear and unambiguous to the participants involved and to ensure that responses would be more reliable. Subsequently, as outlined previously, some changes were made to ensure clarity.

Throughout the phases of data collection, I was aware that the chain of evidence needed to be established and maintained (Yin, 2009) and I did so through meticulous record-keeping. Also, within the interviews and focus groups, I took a neutral stance (Creswell, 2012) to not influence any participant's input. Once the data was collected, I needed to make myself very familiar with it and hence, it was reread numerous times to initially explore it, in keeping with Creswell's advice (2012). I then analysed and re-analysed the data while connecting it back to the literature and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022a) and this process was clearly elucidated in this chapter to provide rigour to this study and validate its findings.

The validity and reliability of this project was also ensured through researcher reflexivity and reflection. Similar to the iterative processes involved in designing and carrying out the research project, I continually reflected on the research process and was particularly cognisant of biases within the data collection and analysis phase. Through my researcher's journal, I sensitively reflected on the part I was playing, as the research findings were taking shape, which further promoted this project's validity.

The validity and reliability of this research study were reinforced through triangulation as described in the next section.

3.10.2 Triangulation

Triangulation uses data from two or more sources to verify findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This project fulfilled this criterion by utilising the two data collecting instruments of interviews and focus groups through which the data were corroborated. The data were further triangulated as it was a relatively long-term study of twelve months, which added to the validity of the findings (Bell, 2010). Also, the varying perspectives of the participants added another level of triangulation as a good researcher can interpret different viewpoints and recognise the same thing and, therefore, confirm or challenge the findings (Bell, 2010; Flick, 2004) while the multiple perspectives can also provide a richer, in-depth illustration of the situation being examined, not necessarily a more certain one (Ritchie, 2003).

3.10.3 Generalisability and Transferability

Case studies, while not being able to generalise statistically as they are not quantitative by their very nature, can be generalised analytically as they can support broader theories through the evidence gathered in researching them (Cohen et al., 2011). Creswell (2012) further purports that, through multiple case studies, some of the findings, in a limited way, can be common to all cases by comparing and contrasting the cases. For this research project, I chose a sample of primary teachers who shared an interest in professional development and posed the same conundrum to them all- to identify approaches to incorporate the principles of

Cosán into their teaching practices. While they shared these similarities, the sample of chosen primary teachers was also disparate as they came from a various contexts and backgrounds, as Table 3.2 illustrates. These participants are thus representing the capricious nature of a complex issue and, as a result, the range of variability can be encompassed within this research and allow for some generalisability (Cohen et al., 2011; Flyvbjerg, 2006). This generalisability is termed naturalistic and is linked to the readers' personal, intuitive experience as they attempt to relate the research to their context, draw parallels between them and extend it to their experience (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This theory is built on by Braun & Clarke (2013), who claim that transferability can refer to qualitative research's flexible generalisability. Crucial to determining the transferability of a research project is the detailed description of the contexts of the participants, as laid out in Table 3.2, so the reader may recognise a context similar to their own and, therefore, potentially transfer the findings to their context (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Additionally, engagement with TPL is a situation all teachers are familiar with, hence, theoretically, the findings apply to many teachers (Vähähenstan, 2015).

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols are in place to maintain responsible research practices and to protect human research participants (Suter, 2006). Ethical considerations permeate all stages and phases of the research project and must be kept at the forefront of the researcher's mind at all times (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Opie, 2007). The ethical considerations pertaining to this research were principally geared towards the fourteen participants, their informed consent and anonymising the data gathered. At all stages of the research endeavour, ethical considerations were informed by the necessity to safeguard the interests of the research participants, particularly concerning assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, in line with the protocols of UCC's Social Research Ethics Committee (UCC, 2022). Ethical approval was applied for in December 2022 (see Appendix 1) and obtained (Log 2022-223) following clarification of some points (Appendix 2). The following table, 3.4, lists the

central ethical points considered in this research study and my steps to address them.

Ethical Consideration	Steps taken
Research Participants	• All participants are adults in the Republic of Ireland and in the position to give fully informed consent. • Participants of the research project had the choice to participate in the anonymous initial online survey and the teachers who wished to further engage in the project were given the opportunity to provide details by which I could contact them. • All participants were informed of the research's nature and purpose, and their part within it, in writing, in simple terms. After a consultation, their permission was sought and obtained prior to instigating any data collection. • In line with the concept of informed consent, if a participant wished to opt out of the research at any point for whatever reason, I would accept their decision. • If, during an interview or through participation in the focus group, a participant was upset or distressed by the experience, the interview was to be discontinued. I would comfort the person and direct them towards the appropriate professional and personal supports for wellbeing.
Research Data	• The respondents' survey responses were coded to retain anonymity. • The participants were given pseudo-names so their responses in the interviews and focus groups remained anonymous and confidential. • All recordings of the interviews and focus groups were destroyed once transcribed. • All data was collated, anonymised and stored securely on my UCC One Drive. • Access to the data was only had by me and my supervisors. • All results were conveyed truthfully and impartially without altering any findings to satisfy the bias of any party, including this researcher.

Researcher's Role	• My position within the research was clearly described in this project. • I often reflected on my stance within the research study and how it may impact on the study. • I maintained a reflective diary to monitor and curb any bias or subjectivity I may have developed. • I treated the participants with the utmost professional respect at all times.

Table 3.4 Ethical Considerations

All participants in this study were capable adult primary teachers who voluntarily showed an interest in partaking in the research. In keeping with the principle of informed consent, they were informed of the project and their part within it in writing (see Appendix 6) and they also were given the opportunity to ask questions to clarify any queries before any data collecting commenced, which is in line with the advice from Cohen et al. (2011) and Bell (2005). They were also made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research (see Appendix 6), which is a factor of informed consent (Creswell, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011). In keeping with ethical protocols, the respondents' surveys were coded and the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups were anonymised to protect the participants' identity and maintain confidentiality (Creswell, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011). The recordings of the interviews and focus group discussions were deleted once transcribed. All data were encrypted and stored securely on my laptop and my supervisors and I were the only people who had access to it, which is commensurate with the advice of Creswell (2012), Opie (2007) and Bell (2005). Finally, all results were conveyed impartially and honestly without any attempt to alter findings to satisfy any predictions or interests of others, in keeping with Creswell's counsel (2012).

3.12 Study Limitations

There were limitations to this study, some of which may point to areas for further research. One limitation was the study size and sample. It was a small-scale study of only fourteen participants due to the fact it was carried out by one researcher. I was aware of this from the outset and, as a result, utilised purposeful sampling to provide richer data to analyse subsequently.

Another limitation was that this study was time-bound as it was a fulfilment for a PhD. It would be interesting to continue to follow the participants' development as they further engage with the *Cosán* framework's principles to determine if their teaching practices continue to be enhanced and their teacher agency further augmented.

There were limitations due to the methodology and data collection tools employed. The use of multiple case study, as the method of research, is lauded for being a valuable methodology to explore in-depth, context-based studies (Creswell et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2011). Nevertheless, while qualitative research is best placed to gather rich data on people's lived experiences of a complex situation, it is also subjective and interpretive (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Eckstein, 2000). As noted, the data collection instruments of individual interviews and focus groups also had limitations. Furthermore, throughout this research's data collecting and analysis phases, I had to be cognisant of my subjectiveness and examine my reflexivity within the research and any inherent biases or assumptions through my reflections and research journal.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and described the methodology chosen for this research project. It examined various paradigms and the philosophical assumptions pertaining to this research study. Subsequently, a qualitative multiple case study was deemed most appropriate for this study to answer the research questions. The research design, considering the research questions and in the context of the project's paradigm, was deliberated on and its strengths and possible shortcomings

were addressed. The various contexts in which this study was set were illustrated and my role within the study was also examined. The consideration and steps taken to ensure methodological rigour and, thus, the research's validity and reliability were also illustrated. Finally, ethical considerations and the study's limitations were outlined. The following four chapters will detail this study's research findings from the analysed data and consider its implications.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion on Theme I:

Approaches to Support Engagement with the Principles of the *Cosán* Framework to Enable Transformative TPL

4.1 Introduction

Teachers' Professional Learning is widely noted in literature to be key to developing a strong teaching profession which leads to quality education (OECD, 2019b; Caspersen, 2015; Desimone, 2009). The question repeatedly posed across literature is how best can this be achieved? This chapter reviews *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016), the national framework for TPL in Ireland, and assesses its principles and potential ability to enable transformative TPL. It also examines various approaches to TPL, which the participating primary teachers engaged in, and explores the capacity of each to lead to transformative TPL against the theoretical framework conceived for this research which comprises of constructivism, socio-culturalism and complexity theory. This research study employed a qualitative, multiple case study approach, and through iterative cycles of individual interviews and focus groups, data was gathered and approaches were identified through thematic analysis. This chapter will elucidate the following central research question:

> *What approaches can be employed by teachers in primary schools to incorporate the principles of* Cosán *into their living professional practices?*

4.2 The Principles of the *Cosán* Framework

The *Cosán* framework emphasises that teachers hold a personal responsibility to actively participate in TPL to sustain and enhance their professional knowledge throughout their careers (Teaching Council, 2016). It also recognises the varied ways in which individual teachers learn, highlighting the complexity of the teaching profession. (Teaching Council, 2016). The framework is founded on the principles of

autonomy; responsibility; flexibility; support, validation & acknowledgement; relevance; and quality.

This chapter will discuss approaches, identified by the participants, which may support the embedding of these principles from *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016) into primary teachers' practices.

4.3 *Cosán* and the Teacher Participants' Perspectives

The *Cosán* framework's principles (Teaching Council, 2016) acknowledge teachers as having autonomy and facilitates them in identifying and pursuing relevant learning opportunities. Teachers are encouraged to utilise the *Cosán* framework in reflecting on and identifying professional strengths and weaknesses, to note patterns in professional learning undertaken and evaluate if their TPL meets a determined need (Teaching Council, 2016). It is not supposed to be another initiative teachers are obliged to engage with, as it is not mandatory, but a scaffold to support teachers in their professional evolvement throughout their careers. Throughout this research project, the teacher participants discussed their experiences TPL and using *Cosán* as a lens to support this. Many participants noted *Cosán's* potential in supporting teachers' TPL but lamented what they perceived to be poor communication and structures or support from the Teaching Council and Department of Education in making teachers aware of the framework. This view was demonstrable when Philip stated, "The way *Cosán* is going, how can we give it purpose? Is it just going to be like a lot of these things that are sent to schools and then put on the shelf in the office?" and Liz concurred with this. At the same time Elaine augmented, "[*Cosán* won't embed] Not unless it's disseminated to teachers." The participants would like to see more encouragement for teachers to engage with *Cosán* and to begin to embed its principles within their professional practices, as Nora remarked, "*Droichead, Cosán*, all these initiatives, but yet, on the coalface, there's still no difference to what the teachers are getting year on year for CPD," Annette reiterated, "this [awareness and use of *Cosán*] is where sometimes you need stuff coming in through from the top down", and Philip noted, "We've got to

get *Cosán* like that [integrated into professional practices] as well because how else can we value professional learning." As noted in the Methodology Chapter, the participants in this research study were chosen through purposeful sampling and all demonstrated an interest in professional learning, yet, of the fourteen participants, ten had little or no knowledge of *Cosán* seven years after it was published and this point was reiterated by Hannah, who is nearing retirement, "For the majority of teachers in my cohort and my age bracket very few of them will be aware of it unless they've actually gone to the trouble to go look for it". Even after engaging in this research study, a few were unsure if it would ever become integral to teachers' practices and Elaine was unconvinced about whether she would ever use it. Nevertheless, many of the participants saw the possibility of teachers engaging positively with this TPL framework, as Rachel remarked,

> *Work smarter, not harder and that's what* Cosán *is about. You work smarter but you're not working harder. You're kind of looking at the skills that you already have and trying to utilise them to the best of your ability, to, number one, I suppose develop yourself as a teacher, but when you develop yourself as a teacher, your kids are going to benefit and that's what you want! At the middle of all of this, is all these young learners, and by making ourselves better teachers, more knowledgeable teachers more confident, it's the kids that are going to benefit from it.*

Philip echoed this when he stated,

> *It [*Cosán*] is starting where the person is at as well. It is that responsibility as a teacher to be continually upskilling as well. And obviously when you get your class, you're always looking to see the needs that you have in front of you as well and where you can go from there. So I suppose it's more of a culture of professional learning as well, which is emphasised within the* Cosán *framework.*

As illustrated here, the teacher participants debated the effectiveness and practicality of *Cosán*. While the participants generally had little prior knowledge of *Cosán* before engaging in this research, they saw potential in its adeptness to inform and promote TPL. They also advanced ideas and approaches which could enable the incorporation of *Cosán* into their professional practices. The following section

outlines the participating teachers' argument for more school-based professional learning.

4.4 School-based Professional Learning

The participants in this research study spoke of not only appreciating but also wanting TPL which was school-based. This approach is advocated for by Barrera-Pedamonte (2016), Owen (2016), Bruce et al. (2010) and Desimone (2009) who affirm the effectiveness of school-based professional learning for teachers. Workplace learning can also be enhanced by informal activities such as professional conversations, teacher cooperation, listening and observing and informal mentoring (Postholm 2012; Eraut 2007, 2004). It is discernible within the principles of *Cosán* that both formal and informal school-based learning and school-based and external TPL are acknowledged as it proposes to "facilitate teachers in valuing their learning, and in prioritising learning that benefits them and their students" (p. 9), while also recognising teachers to be autonomous, responsible professionals who can "identify opportunities for quality learning, and will allow for innovative approaches to quality assurance" (p. 7).

The participants in this study gave many examples of job-embedded learning which they found to be effective. One approach participants such as Annette, Liz, Elaine and Rachel advocated for was peer observation, as Carrie supported, "They [teachers] partner up and they observe each other doing a lesson and give kind of positive feedback and stuff. Wouldn't it be an amazing way to learn and learn from each other?", which emulates a socio-cultural approach to learning and peer learning, noted by Desimone (2009) to be an effective TPL experience. This was further promoted by Liz, who discussed, on the other hand, a constructive approach to how peer observation worked in her school, "She was able to take a bit of me and a bit of her and a bit of whatever and she made it her own." It is noted that teachers are prone to being slow to change their professional practices as there is a degree of automaticity in teaching and this rigidness makes it more difficult for teachers to change practices as they have to be more considered and intentional in

making adaptations (Hobbiss et al., 2021). On the contrary, when teachers are given the opportunity to observe how beneficial a certain approach can be, they are more disposed to transforming their own practices (Coldwell et al., 2017) and this can be further consolidated through teacher observations, which is followed by coaching like discussions (Hobbiss et al., 2021). A collegial, collaborative culture where trust is high is essential for peer observations to be impactful (Coldwell et al., 2017; Owen, 2016), as Liz reiterated, "It comes back to a safe culture as well. We've a very safe culture of sharing expertise in the school". A school that nurtures a culture of trust, respect and responsibility encourages an environment where collaborative practices can flourish (Lipscombe et al., 2020; Kennedy, 2011) and approaches such as peer observation and mentoring can be fostered (Geeraerts et al., 2015). A school-based mentoring programme for newly qualified teachers is in place in Ireland, *Droichead* (Teaching Council, 2015). As part of this programme, a newly qualified teacher observes their own practices and those of their colleagues and is mentored in a coaching style throughout their induction period. Some of the participants, such as Marian, Laura and Gabrielle, expressed a desire to expand this programme and provide mentoring and/ or coaching support to mid-career teachers, as Carrie explained, "A kind of mentoring type coaching for people who are not NQTs or who are not new to the school. There is very little. There's nothing really." Teachers' professional practices can be challenged in a supportive way, through mentoring and coaching, often leading to changes in how they teach (Abakah, 2023; Geeraerts et al., 2015) and this need for support was voiced by Marian, "I didn't do anything with them [a TPL course] because this is me at exactly the same spot. So, I suppose it'd be nice if you choose an area and somebody was there to mentor."

Another work-based approach to TPL that the participants advocated for was peer learning, as Liam declared, "Learning from each other in particular…. And I suppose upskilling from each other, as well, and drawing on everyone's experiences- the staff both young and old". Nora described how a principal she worked with identified strengths within certain teachers on the staff and would put structures in place to enable them to share their best practices with colleagues and this also reflects a socio-cultural approach to learning. Many of the participants valued their colleagues' professional abilities, as reflected by Cooper et al. (2020) and this

echoes the *Cosán* principles of pursuing rich, varied, innovative and relevant TPL. Some participants identified their colleagues as resources they could utilise, as espoused by Lipscombe et al. (2020) and Kvam (2018) and illustrated by Rachel,

> *I keep going back to school is so busy that you kind of only tend to focus on your own class or what's going on in your own little world, whereas the teacher next door might be fantastic at teaching some strand or some operation and you're missing out on that because we don't know that they are so good at doing it.*

Many participants, such as Philip, Laura, Harry, Yvonne and Liam, discussed not only collaborating with colleagues in their schools, as elucidated in Chapter 6 of this research project, but also affording opportunities to exchange classes and harness their colleagues' talents and strengths for the benefit of both the teachers and students. For example, Liam might teach P.E. in a colleague's class while his colleague would teach music in his, as he explained, "there was that kind of team teaching approach taken for areas of weakness in the curriculum" and Rachel augmented, "If you have a flair for something you can come into my class and do it and I go into your class and do something that I have a flair for."

Harry noted that autonomy and professional trust need to be afforded to teachers for them to learn from each other, as advocated for by Visone et al. (2021) and Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018). Annette, along with Harry, Laura and Gabrielle, also lauded the impact informal chats can have on TPL, "I do take a lot from professional dialogues, I have to say, I think the kind of impromptu conversations are very good". Informal workplace learning can foster agency (Eraut, 2004) and augment more formal learning activities (Fraser et al., 2007). Furthermore, as knowledge acquisition and its subsequent enactment is a complex process (Eraut, 2004), informal workplace learning can also support the complexity theory of learning as this concept recognises the complexity of varied, dynamic contexts within which teachers engage with TPL (Strom & Viesca, 2021) while peer learning in groups leads to a unique learning experience that cannot be condensed to learning by individual teachers (Guile & Wilde, 2024). Philip concurs with the idea that informal workplace learning can have significant impact on colleagues' practices. He has stated a preference for informal, school-based encounters rather

than organised learning experiences, such as communities of practice. He believes modelling good practice has a positive, ripple effect, as colleagues observe good practice and are thus motivated to enquire about it and then begin to implement it themselves, as advocated by Coldwell et al. (2018). Marian also attested to the significance of informal learning when she affirmed, "I'd have to say it's the informal things that I've learned from other people are the things that have stuck with me, not the thing that I might have a qualification in […] But it's what I learned from other people along the way." On the other hand, Šaric & Šteh (2017) indicated that formal school-based learning activities were more likely to elicit better TPL outcomes than informal workplace learning. Nonetheless, as asserted here, informal workplace learning can lead to practical, sustainable and transformative professional practices, as Annette summarised, "I would certainly look at something like that, getting teachers to talk to each other, sharing plans, sharing good practice, going out, observing other teachers."

One approach for more formal school-based TPL could be integrating the school self-evaluation process [SSE] (Department of Education, 2022a) with *Cosán*, as advocated for by Nora, Liz, Gabrielle and Philip and this approach would encapsulate the principles of *Cosán* such as autonomy and relevance. Currently, through the SSE process, a school would identify areas to improve in the school and put a plan in place to meet these needs. The teacher participants further propose that school leaders should have the autonomy to identify and choose relevant and quality TPL to address their requirements, as Nora advocated, "Schools could be in control of their own CPD. [….] The principal should be allowed to find somebody herself and to bring this person to the school and do a course that's pertinent to them." *Cosán* advocates for the approach of collaborative reflection, as Chapter 6 examines in detail, and this could be promoted through interworking *Cosán* and the SSE process, as the participants elucidated. Hannah further argued for school leaders to have more autonomy and flexibility, as the *Cosán* principles advance, in determining how to meet the TPL needs of a school, "But the idea that you're only allowed to get help with maybe one thing [support from Oide] where you might need two or three things and they are all equally urgent." Schools that have this autonomy are more motivated to really engage in TPL as it is relevant and contextual (Korthagen, 2017; OECD, 2014b) and this is more likely to lead to

teachers achieving agency (Brodie, 2019; Timperley et al., 2007). The case for a school to put a structure in place, which is not onerous, to support school-based TPL was discussed by Liam,

> *I think you just need to be a bit kind of strategic in it and see what we need to develop and build on it over time and* Cosán *can definitely do that if it's harnessed correctly and it's not too cumbersome and just overloading teachers again.*

Yvonne elaborated on how not only schools could utilise *Cosán* to support a TPL plan but also individual teachers, which is reflective of Finland's TPL policy (Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2021),

> *Maybe if schools looked at a bit more focused plan, maybe developing on* Cosán *and that, you know, teachers had to give their five year plan. Where do they see themselves in five years? What do they want to achieve? And what skills do they want to develop? In that, you know, so that we're not just sauntering along and doing a course here and of course over there and, you know, as you said, ticking a box, but that there's a trajectory.*

The *Cosán* principle of supporting teachers' TPL also resonated with Gabrielle,

> *I'd love, say the part of the* Cosán *framework, like supporting teachers learning. I just think that it depends on the specific teacher and the individual teacher in question, but I feel that the schools could support teachers' learning much more than they're currently doing. I think it's very individualistic and that if a teacher wants to excel and they want to improve their own teacher professional learning, they will do so. But there's no compulsion or there's no necessity from the school or support given to actually improve that. I think it's a major stumbling block because I think if there's more support given to teachers for their own learning, I think overall, the students' learning would improve also and that would be a reflection on the school. So, it seems like we're missing a trick currently.*

However, Liam discussed how the TPL available to teachers currently is very disparate and TPL tends to be undertaken with little consideration to professional development and professional goals, whether for a school or individual teacher need. Harry also noted that, perhaps, in his role as principal he should support teachers financially when engaging with TPL if they were meeting a school need but was wary of setting precedence.

The participants' repertoire of approaches for school-based learning also included various ways to share new skills or knowledge with their colleagues. One suggested method, as promoted by Rachel, Philip, Carrie and Annette, was using an online repository to share resources, plans and lessons among staff, which has been recognised in literature as an approach to share TPL (King & Holland, 2022; Shaari et al., 2018; NSW Government, 2016). The teacher participants who spoke of this found this an effortless way to share new learnings with colleagues, yet, nevertheless determined that discussion was necessary to ensure these new learnings became impactful, as Carrie declared, "And I'd love if that sort of outlook on working together with your current colleagues. I'd love that to be a thing or that like if you did a course you'd give feedback or share and that there was a way of sharing with other people" and this is supported by Shaari et al. (2018). Another approach recommended by the teacher participants, such as Rachel, Carrie, Philip and Nora was a regular "bite size share" of best practices or undertaken TPL with their colleagues, either informally or formally at staff meetings. This was illustrated by Nora,

> *Another thing that is done in our staff meetings is the principal asks us, can you think of anything that went wonderfully well today, just to pass on to other teachers? And it's amazing. Even, like, if you have a teaching practice student in and they're only new and they come up with these things. You go- that's brilliant, I must do that!*

and further exemplified by Carrie,

> *I would literally put something down [on a staff meeting agenda] that I could show them in 2 minutes, you know, so 1: it doesn't get thrown off the agenda and 2: so people know it's only gonna be real quick and if*

> *they like it, they like it, if they don't, they don't. And in that way then it's [the TPL] shared with everybody.*

These participants believed this quick facilitation of an exchange of information, knowledge or skills supports impactful TPL as the teachers would only share TPL which was relevant and useful to their school contexts, as noted by Rachel, "you're getting to share it with other people that may actually need the information" and promoted by Lipscombe et al. (2020) and Korthagen (2017). This approach could also lead to sustainable, effective TPL as interested colleagues could assemble to further adapt and develop professional practices, if the school culture is conducive, as Harry contended and Lipscombe et al. (2020) and Opfer and Pedder (2011a) affirmed. These approaches also supports adults learning from a socio-cultural perspective as learning takes place in a collaborative culture through a process of co-participation and not in individuals' minds (Fraser et al., 2007; Hanks in Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The teacher participants spoke about needing supported and sustainable TPL if it is to lead to transformative practices, which is also advocated for by Owen (2016), Timperley (2007) and Guskey (1991). They also discussed requiring a collaborative, reflective school culture with a leadership which puts in place structures, time, funding and opportunities for accessible TPL as discussed in Chapter 5 of this study. The teacher participants, such as Marian, Yvonne, Liam discussed the significant need for TPL which is sustained over a specified period of time, as Harry advocated, "The most beneficial learning is ongoing learning." Liam also spoke of the potential benefit of more sustained TPL throughout the school year, which corresponds with the *Cosán* principles of relevance and impact, as Marian stated when referring to Oide, "Why is it only one day of, you know, sustained support [from Oide]? Why can't that be a few days a term?" and this was augmented by Annette who said,

> *If you were to have more regular CPD, like an hour every now and again, for me personally, it would be way more impactful and meaningful on my practice and I would be taking it back to school as well, those learning conversations would be quite rich with your colleagues as well, there would be more reflection, there would be talking about it. So yeah, I just don't find it very impactful at the moment.*

Gabrielle also asserted that ongoing sustained support was necessary to enable transformative TPL and she furthered this argument by declaring that sustained support also promoted teacher wellbeing. This viewpoint was affirmed by Carrie, who, in advocating for a more cohesive, collegial, collaborative TPL, stated, “so that's really a way for people to kind of ease the stress and the panic of what they're doing.” These viewpoints are reflected by Owen (2016) who recognises sustained, supportive, school-based contexts to be not only effective for TPL but also supports teacher wellbeing as the collegial environment lessens stress for teachers. Owen (2016) also values sustained, supportive TPL as it can lead to transformative practices as teachers are supported in adapting and refining their practices. This was reiterated by Liam, who asserted that TPL should take place “little and often, more so than one big one. I suppose spread it out over a couple of days and you'd do a little over an amount of time, but often, maybe every couple of weeks.” Sustained TPL would also encourage teachers to change their professional practices from those which were ingrained and automatic to more deliberate and considered effective practices (Hobbiss et al., 2021).

Some of the participants, such as Liam, Elaine and Marian, spoke about the impact external expertise had in facilitating and supporting school-based TPL, as Liz considered, “If somebody with expertise comes in, I get as many people as I can in the room or in the space to soak up their ability or their way of doing something so that we can replicate it later.” Carrie and Hannah were both assured of the need for external facilitators, as Hannah stated, “but it needed somebody coming in from outside in order to be able to do it”, and as Philip quipped, “It is hard to be a prophet in your own land.” Laura spoke about the collegiate environment an outside facilitator can instil, “It is nice to be all together as a whole school, as a group and you learning and working together” while Annette appreciated how an external viewpoint could support critical reflective engagement of professional practices as another perspective is considered. The participants’ views support those of Labone and Long (2016) and Timperley et al. (2007) who deem external facilitators as supportive in enabling transformative TPL and furthermore, the TPL policy in England advocates for the use of external facilitators to not only facilitate communities of practice but to also challenge professional practices (Department for Education, 2016a).

Finally, some participants spoke of taking time to pause and embed initiatives, acknowledging and even celebrating successes within school. This is reflected within the *Cosán* principles in which TPL is acknowledged, recognised and valued. Hannah spoke to this when she said, "sometimes you're just better off standing back and saying, look at what we've already done" and Carrie remarked further, "I think it's amazing when you do look at what goes on in schools, how much is actually done and you know, and I think we tend to sometimes undervalue the informal" and Rolfe (2014) concurs as he described this need for a period of "reflection-on-action." A moment of pause is deemed necessary as it provides an opportunity to consider and reflect how practices are developing and proceeding rather than being caught up in the routine and busyness school (Hobbiss et al., 2021; Greene, 1984) and Liz reiterated, "If you bring something new in, you have to stand back a little from something else." The need to take a moment, reflect on TPL, use it and share it with colleagues so it is further utilised and becomes impactful was recognised by Rachel, "You appreciate and utilise it [TPL], instead of just, you did that course, move on" and this was also attested to by the OECD (2019b).

As illustrated in this section, the participants in this research study advocate strongly for school-based TPL as it has the potential to be effective and lead to transformative practices. This also has the capacity to embed the principles of *Cosán* into the professional practices of teachers. The next section examines how school-based learning can reach out to other schools and teachers through networks.

4.5 Networked Learning Communities and Online Networks

NLCs could be deemed an innovative and rich approach to TPL (Coppe, 2024; Barrera-Pedemonte, 2016; Desimone, 2009) and thus, promote *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016). Most of the primary teachers who participated in this research study engaged in some mode of NLC and recognised it to be a positive, supportive form of professional learning, as Annette declared, "those kind of meetings were fantastic for professional learning because you were meeting up with teachers in different schools, you were getting to speak to them and that was fabulous."

Annette further expanded on this point and extolled how a NLC could be effective and impactful to TPL,

> *You would identify a teacher within your staff who really went to town on that [a particular subject]. So go in and cover that person's class to allow them to go out to observe good practice elsewhere because that would impact on their practice and you would hope have a good impact on all the children that they're teaching not just that year, but every year they're after.*

Participants who were principals, such as Liam, Harry, Hannah and Liz spoke of leadership networks which they found to be collegial and a source of useful, practical information or advice, as Liam described,

> *I've built up a network of other friends who are principals, some who are like-minded and not so like-minded and you pick up ideas and advice from them as needs be when you don't always have the answers. So yeah, I would have found that very good as regards CPD myself, that I would have informal chats with others on their experiences.*

Nevertheless, while Hannah acknowledged the potential benefit of these principal networks, she bemoaned that they often met during school hours, which meant she could not attend as she had no one to cover her class as a teaching principal in a two-teacher school. On the other hand, Carrie wished for teachers to have similar opportunities as principals to form networks,

> *It's interesting because that's something we don't get a chance to do very much, you know, and like, principals have the principals' network and deputy principals have the deputy principals' network. They get some chance [to network]. But the rest of us don't really get a chance. I mean, unless, you know teachers in other schools and people chat about what they do. But even that's quite difficult- to find out what's going on, what other people are doing that's working well for them.*

Some of the participants spoke about wanting to cluster with other primary schools to share knowledge and experiences and support one another and these exchanges may lead to transformative practices, as Annette asserted,

> *I think it would be very useful to have partner schools, whether they're the exact same, whether they're different, but for teachers to actually be able to talk to other teachers that are teaching the same age and stage to be able to just get together and talk and have those professional learning conversations for the better of ourselves, but also our students, mainly our students.*

Rachel furthered this perspective when she stated,

> *It's just this school is very much on its own for everything and, like a lot of schools, left to their own devices, you know? Like, I'm sure we are doing fantastic things in this school that could be shared with another school and [….] I often thought that there could be excellent things going on in the school down the road and we want to do them but we don't know how to do them. Why not once a term have a cluster?*

These views are supported by Katz and Earl (2010) who describe NLC as schools making impactful professional practices discernible and interpreting these to apply to different contexts to create new knowledge which is impactful and practical to TPL and this viewpoint is affirmed by Evert and Stein (2022) and the OECD (2019b). These NLCs also support the socio-cultural theory of learning as the teachers participate in communities of learning and consider new knowledge and skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Moreover, NLCs may potentially espouse constructivism as teachers return to their own schools and through a process of reflection, adapt the knowledge and skills they learned to fit their schema and suit their contexts (Clark, 2018; Sercu et al., 2005). Interestingly, the participants had different views on how these networks should occur with Liam deeming homogenous school groupings to be of benefit, "maybe trying to cluster schools according to context together and looking at CPD and providing CPD through that type of initiative rather than the next door neighbouring school"; Rachel preferring heterogeneous school clusters, "[meeting others] with different school backgrounds, would be very beneficial, as practical as possible, teachers want practical curriculum or professional development"; and Marian opting to meet with schools nearby, "if you could meet up with different schools, like, if I could meet up with another few teachers that are teaching 4th to 6th class in the local area." However, Philip perceives a difficulty

when networking with local schools, “the problem in Ireland is the school down the road is really your opposition”. Nevertheless, Duffy and Gallagher (2017) note the need for schools to adopt an open, cooperative and equitable mindset when engaging with each other, which should lead to a less competitive attitude and this is further asserted by Fox (2020). Annette described experiencing positive interschool encounters, when she previously taught in a different country to Ireland, as schools worked together in a “culture of collegiality” (Duffy & Gallagher, 2017, p. 113) where they not only visited other schools but also observed other teachers teaching, as she depicted, “to observe good practice elsewhere because that would impact on the teacher’s practice and you would hope have a good impact on all the children that they're teaching not just that year, but every year thereafter”. This opinion of NLCs leading to TPL which positively impacts students, echoes the principles of *Cosán*.

Many of the teacher participants discussed how they benefitted from meeting with teachers face-to-face in other schools not only in NLCs but also more informally when participating in other forms of TPL, such as workshops, as Gabrielle described,

> *I look for ones [courses] that are face-to-face because I think we just get a way more from the presenter. But you also get way more from the people that are there around you. That informal learning -you can't put a price on that because you don't get a chance to sit down with teachers and to learn from them..*

This viewpoint was also held by Annette and Hannah and reiterated by Yvonne who added, “Certainly the face-to-face is good because you end up meeting people there and you know, you kind of feel you're not alone in these situations.” Elaine spoke of learning becoming more embedded when it takes place face-to-face, “you might pick something up from reading the book or doing the course online. But then go onto something in person, you know, and hearing this in person, there’s a different aspect of it, just, like, things kind of come together, you get a deeper understanding” and this viewpoint is supported by Lave and Wenger (1991) who assert the power of co-participatory situated learning.

While some of the participants spoke of preferring face-to-face learning to online learning for the reasons explained above, many of them also appreciated the

advantages of engaging with TPL online in a variety of forms. This was reflected when Carrie stated, “I probably would prefer in person over online, but I don't mind online because then it's very handy because you can do a lot more”. Gabrielle spoke about the importance of online courses as it makes TPL accessible and convenient, which reflects the principle of *Cosán* which promotes the “access to rich and varied learning opportunities” for teachers (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 8) and this viewpoint is also reflected in the literature (Enthoven et al., 2023; Boeskens et al., 2020; Cranton, 2016). Elaine discussed in the interviews how online TPL satiated her desire for TPL in a particular subject as it enabled her to access courses, webinars, podcasts and conferences across Ireland and abroad, a viewpoint which Philip also held. This viewpoint correlates with those of Dille and Røkenes (2021) and Trust et al. (2016) that online TPL is successful if it meets the teachers’ needs and interests. On the other hand, some participants noted difficulties with online learning such as Nora’s perception that it sometimes can be “death by powerpoint” with a transmissive mode of delivery as denoted by Kennedy (2005) and this perceived lack of engagement with some online courses was also experienced by Rachel, “there’s a couple of slides online, they're trying to make this as interactive as possible. You go through the slides and it doesn't work. It doesn't. Point blank it does not work in my view because it's not practical, you're not being involved”. This lack of engagement points to not only few opportunities for teachers to actively construct their own knowledge but also a communication breakdown between the facilitator and the participant (Dille & Røkenes, 2021). Hannah also cautions about relying too extensively on online learning as

> *Depending where the digital divide is, and I'm not talking about the software and the programmes and whether they connect or not, but just the ability to get online in order to be able to access CPD. There is an assumption that yes, we can all do everything digitally.*

which is also noted as a barrier to online learning by Yeh and Tsai (2022).

An approach to TPL that many of the participants found to be impactful and practical was online networks. These are deemed to be supportive, flexible and interactive spaces where knowledge and resources can be shared and new ideas and information accessed (Macià & García, 2018; Trust et al., 2016). This is also

recognised by the participants as Gabrielle summarised, “you can impart information on social media and think about your own practice and then get ideas from other people too”. Carrie furthered this thought when she contended,

> *I find that [a social media platform] a great place for teachers. They’re very willing to share ideas and share resources even sometimes. So, it is interesting, those chats between schools, to find out things that would work. You see a thing and you immediately see that would never happen in my school.[….] It is funny how that could be different in schools even though we all do the same job. You know it can be a different experience[....] You get to hear from other people who've used it.*

These opinions demonstrate a constructivist approach to TPL being taken by these participants as they interpret the content and knowledge through reflective, authentic, self-directed explorations (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Illeris, 2009; Murphy et al., 2005). Elaine and Philip both spoke of engaging curiously and informally with both online networks and content online but this evolved into more formal engagement with TPL as their interest in a particular subject developed and this experience is recognised by the OECD (2019b). Participants such as Carrie, Marian, Elaine and Philip all spoke of having trust in particular education practitioners whose online courses they would undertake or follow online and as a result of this trust they are more likely to follow the guidance or suggestions they receive online, take a risk and change their professional practices and this approach is also recognised by Daly et al. (2010). Participants noted they enjoy the autonomy and flexibility they have over the TPL they engage with online and how far they would delve into it, as Liz stated, “There's a networking messaging service for principals. So when things pop up on that, sometimes there is something different which piques my interest and off I go then and have a look around that.” Elaine echoed this when she said,

> *If there’s something that I've been wondering about, that I know I could learn something more about…. So I might search something out. But it just might be that I see something that happens to be on that interests me or piques my interest.*

These informal, teacher-led approaches to TPL can be very effective, yet they are not often recognised as it can be difficult to evaluate their impact or standardise

them (OECD, 2019b). Nonetheless, the principles of accessibility, flexibility and autonomy within the *Cosán* framework provide a prospect to encompass and recognise online networks as a transformative approach to TPL.

4.6 Broad Experience

Some of the primary teacher participants in this research study spoke about importance of teachers having broad experience in various settings and this approach to TPL is in line with the principle in *Cosán* which states "*Cosán* will recognise the importance of teachers having access to rich and varied learning opportunities" (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 8). Participants, such as Gabrielle, spoke of the advantages of working in various roles and/ or different settings to broaden perspectives, knowledge and skills, as Nora pronounced,

> *I found moving around schools and subbing at different schools amazing, the things you picked up and ideas you could see and how one thing was done in one school and see how the same idea was done much better or much worse in another school. It's like having your own little CPD as you sub(stitute). I think everybody should sub(stitute).*

These viewpoints correlate with those of Liam, who also spoke of advice he received at the beginning of his career to not take a permanent job immediately, for in Ireland, once a teacher has a permanent job, teacher mobility between schools is limited (Coolahan, 2003). Liam was advised instead to work in different schools for a few years first to broaden his experiences which he followed and believes has improved his professional abilities and is a viewpoint shared by Hobson et al. (2009). Furthermore, although fraught with challenges, through more flexible movement of teachers between schools, professional capital circulates more freely (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

While there is a dearth of literature on beginner teachers' development in various settings, it is deemed important for student teachers in ITE to experience a broad range of classes and school contexts (Teaching Council, 2021; Salter et al., 2013) to understand and appreciate the complexity of and variety within the teaching

profession (Teaching Council, 2021) while having a variety of opportunities to put into practice pedagogy studied (Teaching Council, 2021; Zeichner, 2010). These opportunities in turn enriches the knowledge and perspectives teachers acquire to actively construct their own understanding of the world (Heikkinen et al., 2012), while at the same time the social participation, interactions and histories inherent within various contexts further influence what is learned (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012; Rogoff & Lave, 1984), while shaping the teachers' identity (Hökkä et al., 2017a; Feiman-Nemser, 2008), which is reflective of the theories of learning of constructivism and socio-culturalism which this research study is adopting. Liam declared he favourably regards a teacher with broad experience in various schools as he believes these teachers "come with a more rounded attitude and approach". To further augment the argument for teachers to have broad experiential approach to their professional learning, Laura maintained that teachers should not only have experience in various contexts but also of the different roles teaching can entail, especially SET, "you need to get out into other schools and into every single role. Every single teacher should try every role". This is not only to have the knowledge and skillset to teach to the best of one's ability but to also be reinvigorated professionally, as was alluded to by Elaine.

As ilustrated here, teachers' knowledge and skillset can be expanded through engaging in varied experiences and roles. This can result in transformative TPL as teachers reflect on their experiences and transfer these learnings to their professional practices. The following section examines how quality TPL can further benefit teachers.

4.7 Quality TPL

The teacher participants in this study recognised and sought TPL which was of high quality and evidence-based, which corresponds with the principle of quality learning for teachers enunciated in *Cosán,* as Harry summarised, "I have to believe that it [TPL] is worthwhile. I have to believe that it's informed by evidence" and further affirmed by Gabrielle, "I'd be very astute about what CPD I'd engage in and

now I'd look at who's the person that's giving it, what's the organisation behind it, is it evidence based?" The necessity of quality TPL to preface transformative practices was noted by Coldwell et al. (2017), Barrera-Pedemonte (2016) and Caeana (2011) and recognised by Gabrielle, "the most transformational one [TPL] was the postgrad in special education because I just found the quality of the lectures were amazing and the quality of the content of what we were getting was brilliant". *Cosán* refers to the necessity for quality research to support teachers in identifying impactful professional practices and the benefits of evidence-based approaches to TPL is further expounded in the literature (Coldwell et al., 2017; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Timperley et al., 2007). This was acknowledged in this study by Harry, Rachel, Liam and Elaine, as Liz described, "There's definitely an awareness of research and awareness of the place of research in our school" and she described how they used literature and articles in her school to inform their teaching of literacy. Rachel, Gabrielle and Liz all referenced how engaging in formal TPL such as postgraduate diplomas or Masters in Education afforded them the skills to read and synthesise literature and make it applicable to their professional practices. Liz referenced this when she said, "I suppose that's what my own recent Masters has given me and it has given me the lens to see the most up to date research" and Gabrielle illustrated,

> *Would I look for articles? Probably now a bit more after completing the Masters I probably would. I wouldn't have done that before, but it's probably something that I would do now because I'm more familiar with this.*

Some of the research participants spoke of using literature to inform their practices or meet a gap in their professional practices and this is advocated for by Coldwell et al. (2017). Rachel and Liz also discussed sharing articles with their colleagues, as Rachel stated, "If I find a good article online I'd share it on the school's WhatsApp because people might find this interesting". On the other hand, as contended in literature (Addae-Kyeremeh, 2020; Coldwell et al., 2017) and further identified in this research study, reading and utilising academic articles is not a skill many teachers have, as Elaine explained,

> *I would read a lot of articles. Yeah, even before I started the Masters I was reading research and studies and I was glad because then when I started the Masters, we were thrown right in at the deep end and I was glad I was familiar with academic writing, you know, because it's not easy to get your head around.*

It can be reasoned teachers need either upskilling to learn how to read and apply applicable research to their contexts or literature needs to be mediated to allow teachers to easily access it and decide whether it would be applicable and beneficial to their contexts and to then determine how to implement it practically to their contexts (Westbroek et al., 2022; Burn et al., 2021; Addae-Kyeremeh, 2020). This need to mediate literature was deemed pertinent by Elaine who spoke of the perception she believes some teachers have, "research is something that doesn't really apply to real life classrooms" and, similar to Korthagen (2017) and Pieters and deVries (2007), also believed it is pertinent to bridge the gap between academic research and teacher practice,

> *Academics who are out of touch and maybe even never worked in the classroom at all, or they're in the classroom for a short time, a very long time ago. And then you've got teachers who are in the classroom who are just too busy and too tired, you know, to get a look at research, they may do their own little action research projects, but… Yeah, I think we need more of a space in between to have time for research and to look at the academic side of things but also relate it to what's happening on the ground.*

This was further emphasised by Rachel who spoke of her appreciation of new initiatives "any course I do or any learning I get, if it's practical and if I can see it working in my classroom for my kids, that's when it's effective."

The need for quality TPL is further expanded when the participating teachers discussed the need for trusted and high-quality TPL facilitators. This is explored in the following chapter as it was identified as a factor influencing transformative TPL.

4.8 **Reform of the Individual Teacher TPL System**

A widespread approach to TPL which the participants discussed and held varying opinions on was the primary teacher summer courses. This has been an inherent part of the profession in the Republic of Ireland, since the foundation of the State in 1922 (Coolahan, 2004), as primary teachers have been encouraged to undertake TPL over the summer and, as an incentive, they would earn three extra personal vacation (EPV) days to use over the coming academic year, under Rule 58 of the "Rules for National Schools" (Department of Education, 1965). During the summer holiday period, primary teachers can engage in a face-to-face course for 20 hours over one week or online for 20 hours over two to four weeks, depending on the course provider. These courses have the potential to meet the principles of *Cosán* which aspires for accessible TPL of high quality that affords teachers autonomy. A few of the participating primary teacher considered the summer courses to be beneficial as they had the autonomy to choose from a range of Department of Education approved courses, as Hannah illustrated, "I just choose very carefully as to which ones I'm doing." These courses are also accessible and convenient, as the face-to-face courses could be held within a local school or the local education centre and the online courses can be undertaken in teachers' own time. On the other hand, many of the participants spoke about these summer courses as not being an impactful approach to TPL, as Rachel and Annette stated and Elaine reiterated,

> *I do a summer course or three every year but, to be honest, they're a tick the box exercise- I've my course done and I haven't been too picky about which course I do as long as I've one or two of them done so I get my days, which sounds lousy, but generally that is people's views on it.*

Quite a few of the participating teachers also judged these courses to be an inopportune use of TPL for a number of reasons such as, too much time passed between undertaking the TPL and implementing resultant changes for it to be effective, as Elaine confirmed, "because it's the first week of July, you've forgotten it all by the time you get to September"; it is rarely context-based or relevant, as Liam discussed in one of the focus groups, "they (teachers) are just coming back with nothing to the school after" and Annette augmented this opinion, "you're thinking about the summer course that you do, you're thinking about the course

days, but how meaningful and how much of an impact does that actually have on your practice?"; and it tends not to be very collaborative, as Rachel said, "we all go off and do little summer courses every year and we never talk about them" nor are these summer courses generally reflective. These participants' views are in line with literature which deems that for TPL to be effective, it needs to be context-based to meet individual teacher or school needs (Lipscombe et al., 2020; Korthagen, 2017; Timperley et al., 2007); it should be sustained and supported over a period of time (Brandisauskiene et al. 2021; Timperley et al., 2007; Guskey, 1991) while being time-bound (Abakah, 2023; King, 2016); TPL is also more impactful if it is collaborative (de Jong et al., 2021; Korthagen, 2017; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a; Timperley et al., 2007; Guskey, 1991) and reflected upon (Korthagen, 2017; Liu, 2015; Çimer et al., 2013, Timperley et al., 2007; Guskey, 1991). Furthermore, many teacher participants deem this approach to TPL to be transmissive in style, as described by Kennedy (2005), and as Nora remarked about online summer courses, "you couldn't immerse yourself in the activity a lot of times". This results in TPL which is of little sustainable impact as it does not take into account the complexities of the bespoke contexts of each school (King et al., 2023). Furthermore, a transmissive approach to TPL with little collaboration does not present a socio-cultural perspective that would support a more transformative model of TPL (Fraser et al., 2007).

As illustrated, many of this study's participants view the summer courses to be an ineffective approach to transformative TPL. As a result, a few of the participants want the link between summer courses and EPV days to be severed and this system to be overhauled so the TPL undertaken would be more sustainable and impactful to teachers' practices. Both Nora and Elaine spoke of bringing teachers back a few days early at the end of the summer to partake in contextual TPL, as Elaine proposed, "this would be terribly controversial, but I'd bring teachers back earlier in August and I would have mandatory CPD, but then I'd give them the days back during the year". On the other hand, some of the participating teachers, such as Laura and Hannah, spoke about being cautious and to not make TPL mandatory for, as Hannah described,

> *A good teacher will do that [engage in TPL] anyway. And a poor teacher or a teacher who is not as tuned in or as motivated will do the minimum*

> *that they are required to do. And if it is a compulsory thing they will resent it and because they resent it, they may not put as much agency into it as they could do, whereas in fact, if they are encouraged from the time that they've finished induction that that isn't the end- it's an ongoing process.*

Mandatory TPL is also not in line with the principles of *Cosán* which deem TPL to be a personal, professional responsibility which teachers undertake as they are intrinsically motivated and this is inherently trusted (Teaching Council, 2016). As referred to in the Literature Review, countries such as England, Finland and New Zealand do not have mandatory TPL either, however, it is still expected that teachers would agentically continue to develop and improve their professional practices.

Liam, Nora and Philip all suggested putting in place a system of TPL that would encourage engaging in more relevant and impactful TPL during the year and rewarding this with EPV days, as Philip proposed, "if it was a case of maybe some of the professional development that you did during the year, that that could feed into your EPV days." On the other hand, participants such as Marian, Hannah, Yvonne and Liam spoke about difficulties schools, and especially small schools, have regarding the absence of approved substitution cover on the part of the Department of Education for teachers who wish to take their earned EPV days. This challenge is seen as an inequality in rewarding teachers for TPL undertaken, as Liam summarised,

> *If the government are going to be really serious about it [encouraging and rewarding TPL], there needs to be more serious discussion around it and facilitating it. Like I said, context-based wise and also having a proper reward and carrot at the end of this that works for everyone, you know, not just some.*

Finally, Hannah had a practical suggestion of linking teachers' Teaching Council registration numbers with formal TPL completed so a database of what courses or other formal TPL each teacher has undertaken is collected, as she explained,

> *If teachers were encouraged to open a portfolio via their Teaching Council number with a central portfolio taking into account all of the CPD or training or PDST courses done in the various different education centres that we all join in from time to time and the summer EPV courses and these were all channelled in through the Teaching Council, you'd see very quickly who was engaging with the CPD process.*

This initiative would support the *Cosán* principle of acknowledging and recognising professional learning undertaken by teachers. It could also assist teachers in identifying patterns or gaps in TPL they engage in, while providing a springboard for potential supportive, professional conversations with school leaders on TPL, similar to Finland (Paronen & Lappi, 2018), Ontario (ETFO, 2024) and Scotland (GTC Scotland, 2021a). A difficulty with this system is that it would recognise only formal TPL and a different structure would need to established to attempt to capture the richness of the various ways teachers learn informally, as illustrated in section 4.4.

4.9 Conclusion

This research study set out to identify approaches which would support primary teachers in embedding the principles of the *Cosán* framework into their professional practices. Practical and sustainable approaches to support the incorporation of *Cosán* into teachers' professional practices were identified by this study's participants and included school-based approaches, networking (both across schools and online), informal learning, quality TPL, broad professional experiences and an overhaul of the current system of TPL. These approaches have been demonstrated to support the embedding of the principles of *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016, pp. 6-10) and, thus, potentially lead to transformative TPL. As illustrated here, the approaches these primary teacher participants take or would like to engage in to close a gap they identified in their professional practices are varied and further demonstrate the need to allow for a variety of accessible, contextual and flexible approaches (Abakah, 2023; Guskey, 2000), in which the teachers are trusted to exercise the responsibility to identify their professional

needs and the autonomy to then access quality TPL to address these needs (Cooper at al., 2021). Furthermore, the participants asserted that the *Cosán* framework needs to be communicated more effectively to the teaching community and teachers enabled to engage with the framework competently as it has the potential to lead to transformative practices as Rachel declared,

> *It's through professional development, that's how you develop and that's how you grow. And it doesn't have to be, it's what I've really learned from this project, and it's not about going off saying I did seven courses in the Education Centre this year. It can actually be just, I saw Mr. Murphy teaching maths- yes, terrific the way he was doin it, it was really cool. I'm gonna try it out and see how it works. [.....] It has definitely made me more aware of how easy it can be to gain professional development without having to drive someplace to do it, which is necessary again, but I would have never seen it before. I would never have even seen me going off asking another teacher, How was the course? Did you get any tips? as a form of CPD!*

The following chapter delves into the factors that enable or inhibit teachers' engagement in transformative TPL and thus, their ability to incorporate the principles of *Cosán* further within their professional practices.

Chapter 5

Findings and Discussion on Theme II:

Factors which Enable or Inhibit Primary Teachers' Engagement with Transformative Professional Learning

5.1 **Introduction**

The role teachers play in ensuring the quality of education for students is significant and many studies purport a strong link between the quality of teachers and the quality of an educational system (OECD, 2020a; Harris & Jones, 2010). Teachers need to upskill throughout their careers to keep abreast with the fast-paced evolution of society (OECD, 2020a; de Vries et al., 2013; Caena, 2011) and to continually develop their expertise to enhance their students' learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Guskey, 2000). I utilised constructivism, socio-culturalism and complexity theory as theoretical frameworks to scaffold an understanding of how teachers engage with new knowledge and learning and applied this to assist in answering this project's research questions. This research study sought and examined effective approaches to transformative TPL in Ireland and, in doing so, also posed the following research question: *What factors enable or inhibit primary teachers' engagement with transformative TPL in the Republic of Ireland?* This chapter will present and analyse the findings from this project that identified various significant factors which can enable or impede teachers' engagement with TPL. This was ascertained by engaging fourteen primary teachers in Ireland in individual interviews and focus groups, during which professional learning practices, undertaken by them both personally and within their school contexts, were discussed. The participants identified school leadership, school culture, collaborative practices, reflective practices, resources, relevance and teacher autonomy as significant factors in their engagement with TPL (Figure 5.1). Another factor of note for the participating primary teachers was the need for TPL to encompass a holistic view of the teacher if the professional learning is to be impactful and sustained long term. The participants' views on how these factors

affect their ability to engage in transformative TPL, either in a positive or negative sense, will be explored in depth in this chapter.

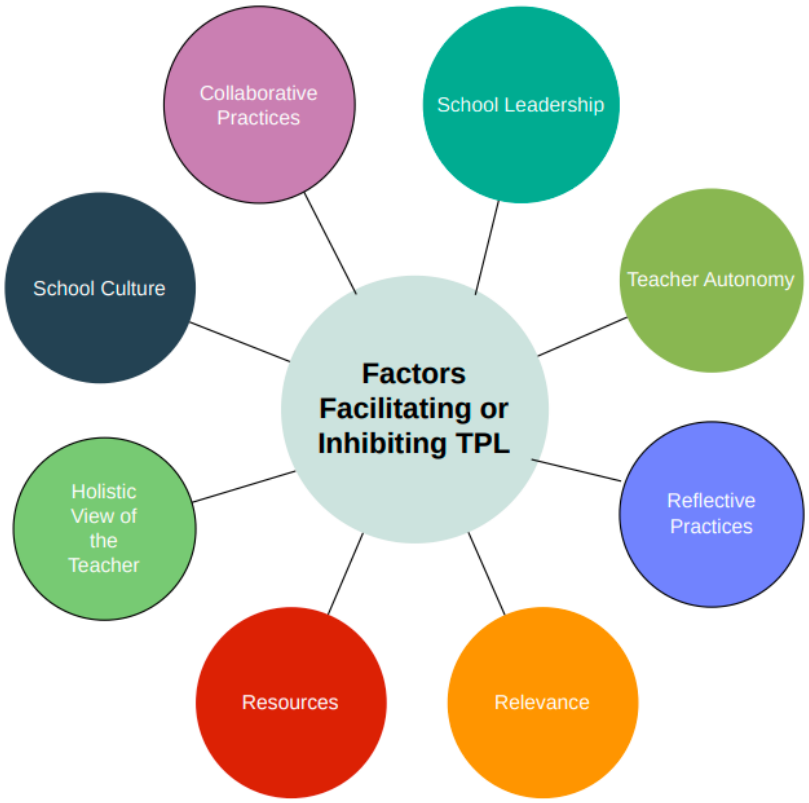


Figure 5.1. Factors Facilitating or Inhibiting TPL for Primary Teachers in Ireland

5.2 Leadership

There is a volume of literature which has demonstrated the importance and requisite of quality leadership in encouraging effective TPL within schools (Brennan & King, 2022; Bellibas et al., 2020; Brodie, 2019; King, 2011; Bubb & Earley, 2009; Stoll et al., 2006). The *Cosán* Framework (Teaching Council, 2016) highlights leadership as an integral dimension of TPL. This research project, based within primary schools in Ireland, advances these views as described here.

The value of good communication amongst the teaching staff in schools is vital in establishing a culture of trust and collaboration, especially in times of change, and this needs to be fostered by the principal, as observed by participants Liam, Liz and Harry. The research of Moynihan & O'Donovan (2021), Bellibas et al. (2020) and Day

et al. (2009a) concur with this as they believe good communication from the school leader can lead to trusting, collaborative cultures where professional growth is promoted. The importance of the principal sharing a clear vision to advance the school community with the teaching staff is also advocated for by participants, such as Harry and Liz, who both asserted that a shared vision, communicated well, can lead to effective practices which reflect the views held by Admiraal et al. (2021), Dogan et al. (2019) and Day et al. (2009a). In tandem with good communication, another necessary skill of a good leader, as noted by Maas et al. (2021) and Day et al. (2009a), is to listen attentively and take on board the ideas and concerns of staff. Annette noted that although she had 15 years' experience in other schools, including being a deputy principal and acting principal, she believed she was seen as at the "bottom of the barrel" in her current school, with no voice, a situation she found to be exasperating. This contrasts with the outlook of Harry who, similarly to Guskey (1991), recognised the need for a principal to be open, to listen to their colleagues and to build trust, as he declared, in his capacity as a school leader,

> *If you're not open to listening and to collaboration, well then your school environment is the less, your teaching is the less, your care for the children is the less and the service you can provide to the families and the community is far less if people aren't open or can be frank and, you know, being what you call, like, authentic, to have authentic discussions with each other.*

The importance of cultivating positive staff relationships in a trusting and open environment, which leads to a conducive learning setting amongst teachers, was deemed by many participants to be a significant role of the principal, as Rachel quipped, "Leadership, it's all down to leadership," and reflects the research of Bellibas et al. (2020), Merchie et al. (2016) and King (2011). Expanding on this, Yvonne noted that the development of a culture which is open, trusting and facilitates honest communication in a safe place was seen as conducive to meaningful practices, as she remarked, "They trust that I know what it's going to be best for me and for the children in the classroom". Augmenting this belief, Laura noted that having a staff with a collective positive "can do" mindset can enable transformative practices, and this was echoed by Harry, Philip, Yvonne and Liz.

Nonetheless, as Liam observed, school leaders must model change if staff are to be guided and supported when there are new practices, "leading by example and doing the hard graft first", which was a point reiterated by Liz. As Harry identified, the development of a positive culture of trust within a school emanates from the principal and the ability of school leaders to trust their teachers and afford them autonomy over their professional learning, which was also considered necessary by Gabrielle. This perspective was further built upon by Philip, Annette, Harry, Nora and Liz who discussed the need for principals to identify teachers' strengths and to purposefully and actively encourage and harness them for the schools' development, as also established in the previous chapter when the significance of workplace learning was elucidated, which mirrors views held by King & Stevenson (2017), King (2011) and Day et al. (2009a).

The importance of the principal's role in forging authentic human connections amongst their staff was recognised by the participants and relates to a transformational style of leadership which can focus on supporting the school community's wellbeing (Bingham & Bubb, 2017) and is promoted by the Department of Education in Ireland (2022b). The majority of the participants in this research study recognised this role of principals as significant to the overall culture, wellbeing and development of the staff which consequently can lead to a culture of learning and innovation, as described by Furner & McCulla (2019). Furthermore, some participants acknowledged or appreciated school leaders who demonstrated an interest in the staff's well-being and were respectful, reflecting the view of Day et al. (2009a). Participants, such as Marian and Annette, admired and wanted to emulate principals they worked with who mentored, inspired and encouraged them. Liz and Harry were very aware of supporting their colleagues' wellbeing and recognised their colleagues' lives had peaks and troughs which impacted on the extent to which they can give of themselves in a professional capacity as Harry described,

> *You need to cut slack and encourage- be kind, like. I feel that if you're kind to people, yet, still maintain a professional ethos and be kind to people and give people that space and mind them that when they eventually do come out of that slump and please God, they will, that you'll have them. Whereas if they feel that if you hassle, if you're cruel, or if you're not showing adequate*

understanding to your colleague when they're going through the bad patch, then you might have lost him or her for life.

Liz further illustrated this viewpoint when she portrayed, “I'd be very aware of where they [her staff] are personally, I'd be very aware of how much is on their plate at any one time and I wouldn't put anything overwhelming on anybody if I felt it was the wrong time for them.” These views reflected Maas et al.’s (2021) belief that school principals play an important role in providing social support to their staff. Laura and Rachel spoke of the need to be recognised and validated by their school leaders and for extra professional learning undertaken by teachers to be encouraged and acknowledged, “I don't want to sound like I need my ego stroked all the time but I think as teachers we don't get enough validation or credit for what we actually do a lot of the time, you know” and this is recognised by Schaap et al. (2019). This view was also advanced by Philip and Carrie who expressed a desire for school leaders to pause, acknowledge and celebrate successes in schools and this, consequently, can augment a school’s vision and culture (Quin et al., 2015). Carrie spoke of her principal having an annual discussion with the teaching staff individually which would focus on successes and difficulties they had encountered over the past year and how they would like to further develop as a teacher over the coming year,

At the end of the year, she normally does a kind of a- not an interview, but a little chat with everybody about how things have gone and any issues that have come up and we would fill in a form and kind of structure that before we meet with her and it's optional. But that's a good way of kind of looking back, I suppose, on the year and then looking forward to the year that's coming about things that you'd like to do or any ideas that you have and stuff like that.

This was similar to Annette's experiences in Scotland, where, as part of her annual review (GTC Scotland, 2021a), where, through a reflective, coaching approach, she discussed with her school leader what challenges she had and what support she might need. Laura wished she had this opportunity to discuss her professional

journey with her principal, in a coaching-type sense, as she believed it would enhance her professionally.

Time and resources were other structures the participants declared a need for school leaders to provide if TPL is to become transformative. Participants, such as Liz, Annette, Harry and Nora, described creative ways principals carved out time in their schools so staff could collaborate and share good practice more widely across the school. This is reflective of Visone et al. (2021), Admiraal et al. (2021) and Brodie's (2019) stances that leaders who create time and structures to support their staff in learning through professional communities encourage further engagement in these PLCs. On the other hand, Rachel spoke of the lack of platforms put in place in her school by the principal to share pertinent learnings with colleagues: "there is no one to facilitate the sharing of the knowledge or resources" and, consequently, she considered this was done in an *ad hoc* way. She suggested if a system was created in schools through which professional learning could be shared, the professional learning would be more likely utilised by the person who undertook it, grasped by colleagues and validated. A few participants noted it would be very difficult to instigate any change that would lead to sustainable new practices without the principal actively supporting the change, as Liam said, "…if you had someone at the top who was not maybe so inclined to change in that direction, it would be hard for the school to go that way." This need for a school leader to prioritise and support TPL, if it is to be impactful in a sustainable way, was also demonstrable amongst the participants, such as Rachel and Carrie, and summarised by Laura, "if you don't have the support in the school and a positive environment, no matter your will, no matter your desire to effect change, you can't effect change" and this mirrors the research of Visone et al. (2021), Ontario Principals' Council (2008) and Stoll et al. (2006) who laud dynamic, proactive and inspiring school leaders who encourage teacher development. Furthermore, as portrayed by participants Liz, Liam and Hannah, principals may have to act as a buffer to their staff when being a conduit for instigating national policies and initiatives. They portrayed school leaders having to know what to prioritise, who amongst the staff to nominate to assist in developing it and knowing if something needs to be deferred for a time. This depiction of the school leader as an interpreter of the macro-setting of the national policy to the meso-setting of the local school,

supporting a bottoms-up approach to enacting policy, is reflective of the research of Postholm (2021) and King & Stevenson (2017).

Throughout this research project, participants described the primary school principal's role as being intense and manifold, incorporating teaching for some primary principals in small schools, leading teaching and learning, providing pastoral care for the school community and cultivating a supportive, trusting school culture through which positive relationships are fostered and teachers can practice their autonomy and achieve agency in their professional practices, which is reflective of research by Maas et al. (2021), Bellibas et al. (2020), Furner & McCulla (2019) and King (2011). For a principal to attain the balance of being a manager and leading learning can be difficult, as attested to by Harry, Hannah and Laura, yet, conversely, Elaine surmised "one can be good at both". However, leadership is not the whole responsibility of the school principal but also can be found amongst middle management teaching positions and within every teacher role (King & Holland, 2022; Moynihan & O'Donovan, 2021; Bellibas et al., 2020 and Pont et al., 2008). Marian, Annette and Carrie spoke about the TPL they each undertook as empowering them and improving their reflective practices and, subsequently, each developed an interest in school leadership. Marian even observed, "I probably had never seen a teacher as a leader before I did that course" which echoes views held by King (2019). As can be observed here, the development of a teacher as a leader, cultivates teacher agency which in turn can lead to transformative change, as affirmed by Bellibas et al. (2020). Marian, Annette and Carrie, al ong with Nora, Liz and Harry, all recognised teachers as having a leadership role and teachers as leaders are recognised in the national policies of Finland (Niemi, 2015), Ireland (Teaching Council, 2016) and Scotland (GTC Scotland, 2021a) and within research (King et al., 2022; Muijs et al., 2017). Gabrielle spoke of other leaders on the staff being necessary to develop initiatives, especially in areas the principal may not fully support for whatever reason, "people who want to change something or who want to improve something…. so it'll come from others, say teacher leaders or maybe middle management, not necessarily from the principal" and this was reiterated by Carrie, "there's a lot of work that needs to be done in a school, so if you don't have people willing to stick their head up and take on those roles, it's quite hard to manage a school". In her role as principal, Liz spoke of being aware of her

responsibility to develop confidence in teachers in their leadership qualities and to provide them with opportunities to practice these collaboratively. A few participants intimated that opportunities to allow leadership skills to be fostered in teachers were often a result of teachers having autonomy to make decisions about their professional practices and development and to share this with colleagues and this capacity was encouraged and enabled by the school principal, which resonates with views held by Bellibas et al. (2020), Brodie (2019) and Quin et al. (2015). While the importance of leadership in supporting effective TPL has been clearly illustrated above it was also noted that good leaders need to be supported and even explicitly taught to promote good practice in teachers' professional learning. As Rachel contended,

> *It's not down to me or to the teacher next door to go and tell the principal what to do, you know, we need someone on that bridge to get leaders and principals together and say, look, this is what we should be doing, try this.*

This viewpoint is reflective of research by Moynihan & O'Donovan (2021), Bellibas et al. (2020) and Day et al. (2009a).

Of note in this research's findings, two participants questioned their perception of a lack of oversight and accountability primary principals have in Ireland with thorough, in-depth school inspections seldom occurring. This assessment can be substantiated by the statistic that only 414 of the 3,239 primary schools in Ireland were inspected in 2023, a rate of 12.8% of primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2024). While, as a national system, I would not like to see Ireland going down a rigid standardisation road, as seen in England (Department for Education, 2016a), the participants' thoughts may indicate a need for more oversight within and across schools so best practices can be identified, recognised and shared, as in Finland (OECD, 2012b) and New Zealand (Ministry of Education NZ, 2022b) and poor practices given adequate supports to improve.

The research findings clearly ascertain the role of leadership in mediating transformative TPL. This section illustrated the participants' views that a school leader significantly influences the school culture and capacity and the extent to which teachers can engage meaningfully with TPL. The style of leadership they

espouse principals to manifest can be encapsulated by a transformational style of leadership. The transformational leadership style is deemed appropriate to meet the needs of modern-day schools and manage change leading to impactful teaching and learning practices (Wilson Heenan et al., 2023; Anderson, 2017; Quin et al., 2015). This can be characterised by a school leader who leads by example, builds trust and capacity, communicates a clear vision and inspires others to work together and build change towards the shared vision (Lin et al., 2022; Anderson, 2017). School leaders who engage in transformational leadership are more likely to motivate teachers to develop a culture where changes in attitudes and practices occur, and sustainable, impactful TPL is more likely to ensue when collaborative practices are encouraged (King, 2011). It thus may be ascertained that transformative practices occur in schools when TPL is impactful, sustained and engaged with a purpose.

The findings of this study strongly reinforces prior literature showing that principals have a profound influence on the success of TPL in schools, as summarised by Rachel,

> *It's all down to leadership. I think if you've good leadership personnel in place I think this whole concept of working collaboratively, sharing information, playing on each other's strengths, you need a good leader to kind of employ that in a school and if you don't have it, or especially if they're not interested in cpd themselves, you know, it's impossible because you're kind of going up against issues……and always trumped by something else.*

Participants consistently link quality leadership with the creation of a collaborative, trusting, and open school culture, all of which are essential for meaningful TPL. Furthermore, leaders who model change, nurture leadership potential in teachers through trust and opportunities and foster an environment where teachers feel safe to experiment, lead to more impactful, effective TPL. Additionally, school leaders who proactively create time and structures for collaboration empower deeper TPL and help to enact national policy in a bottom-up approach. However, this leadership

needs to be supported through systemic support and guidance to help principals embed transformative TPL practices in their schools.

5.3 Culture

School culture influences many aspects of school life, including, TPL (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Kennedy, 2011; Timperley et al., 2007). Developing a democratic, collaborative culture that promotes teacher autonomy is imperative if teachers are to make meaning of new knowledge and utilise it for change, using both constructivist and socio-cultural approaches (Caena, 2011; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). The primary teacher participants in this research project determined culture as a major factor when considering the impact of TPL on transformative teaching practices. They spoke of a need for open doors amongst colleagues and the development of collaborative practices, which school leaders nurture. The Teaching Council promote collaborative practices within the *Cosán* framework (2016), while recognising that each school has a distinctive culture. Nevertheless, the framework's inherent flexibility should be malleable enough to encourage engagement in TPL that meets teacher, school and system needs.

The cultivation of a flourishing culture within a school does not happen by good fortune but is fostered by the school community, as they develop customs and build practices together and are strongly influenced by its school leaders (Zepeda et al., 2023; Dogan et al., 2019). School culture is something school leaders need to be very cognisant of as class teachers spend most of their working lives in isolation from their colleagues, within their classrooms, and, thus, nurturing positive relationships and providing opportunities to collaborate is necessitous (Zepeda et al., 2023). This is especially as the culture of a school can mould a teacher's identity (Reinius et al., 2024), as the ecological context of the school impacts a teacher's ability to engage with new learning using a socio-cultural approach (McMillan et al., 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This viewpoint was recognised by Liam, who noted, "I've worked in schools where teachers have been very forthcoming and innovative and in other schools which were, unfortunately, not as collaborative." Similarly,

stymying culture was also keenly observed by Elaine who noted primary teachers can “just close their doors”. On the other hand, the majority of the participants either appreciated or yearned for a school culture which was open, trusting and colleagues shared with and encouraged each other readily and collaborative practices were to the fore. This can be developed by providing opportunities to foster relationships though collaborative practices (Wilson et al., 2021). This was demonstrated by Gabrielle who, interestingly, discussed layers of culture within her school, some of which she perceived as a safer space for her to engage in, such as within her special education teachers’ team, where there was a strong, trusting, collegial team approach to professional learning.

Trust is a considerable factor in the development of a positive school culture which is conducive to collaborative practices that enable TPL (Visone et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2021; Kennedy, 2011; Timperley et al., 2007). The participants in this research study concurred with this synergetic association between trust and culture. As a school leader, Harry speaks of a strong culture of trust and openness amongst his staff which is a safe place where everyone can speak up if they have something to say and this, in his opinion, was needed to develop professional relationships which support TPL. Liz agreed with this and also spoke about how she helped to nurture this through knowing her staff, being keenly aware of how she communicated new messages or practices and of knowing who to engage or encourage to lead an initiative for it to be successful, which reflected the thoughts of Admiraal et al. (2021) and Day et al. (2009a). Of note, Liam also discussed needing to “filter” new messages or practices as a school leader and to take modest incremental steps as there is not a strong culture of trust amongst his staff, but he is hoping to nurture this incrementally, which speaks to a re-culturing being undertaken.

Marian spoke to constraints within her school as well, discussing how some personalities within the small staff impinged on colleagues’ ability to be as open and honest in their engagement as they wished and is reflective of Liam’s observation that “culture is born from, I suppose, the personalities in the school”. It could be inferred here that, as a result of this more stagnant culture, the status quo is being maintained, to an extent, in both Liam’s and Marian’s schools, as there is not a desire to agitate the culture which may result in less effective practices as ideas can

be critiqued safely, as elucidated by Hargreaves & O'Connor (2018) and Timperley et al. (2007). Similarly, Elaine discussed a lack of openness, trust, collaboration and communication in her school which she felt was quite constraining to her development as a teacher and to her teacher agency. As Elaine noted, this can have a bearing on her capacity to engage in learning and make it her own as she is not afforded a co-participatory, collaborative experience which is necessary for meaning making and leads to more transformative practices (King, 2016; Kennedy 2014, 2005). This approach also encapsulates a socio-cultural approach to learning and even a constructivist approach. This experience was at odds with Yvonne's, who strongly felt her school principal trusted her to do her best for her class, "[There's] a huge amount of trust that I know what it's going to be best for me and for the children in the classroom." This affords autonomy which cultivates agency, as argued by Brodie (2019). This cultivation of teacher agency, through strengthening a positive school culture, may become a rich resource for schools to tap into, according to Zepeda (2023). Nora has experienced both ends of the scale as she has worked in various schools, under different school leaders with contrasting leadership styles, and she discussed some school leaders who afforded trust in their staffs, resulting in a stronger collaborative culture and other school leaders who engaged little with their staff, lacked strong, positive communication and did not give their staff autonomy leading to more insular teaching practices. Elaine, Annette and Laura all described similar negative school cultures where practices were insular, collaboration was at a minimum, communication poor and there was resistance to change, which leads to them each feeling hampered and limited in their professional growth, autonomy and agency. These experiences are reflective of Brodie's belief (2019) that lack of teacher morale and strong hierarchal relationships within schools lead to low levels of trust amongst staff in schools.

As noted in section 5.2 on leadership, school leaders need to build a shared vision with their staff and continually communicate this well as this leads to a more cohesive, positive school culture (Lin et al., 2022; Admiraal et al., 2021). Liam, Liz and Harry, in their principal roles, alluded to needing to temper policies and mandated procedures from the Department of Education or the school itself to make the changes manageable for their staff, as teachers are often resistant to and mistrusting of change (Brodie, 2019; King & Stevenson, 2017). The need for

principals to translate policies from the macro setting of national policies, procedures and curricula and the meso settings of the school policies, to the meso setting of the school, and even the micro setting of the individual teacher is demonstrated here. Their ability to navigate this is dependent on varying levels of trust, such as individual, collegial and organisational (Day et al., 2009a). Trust should extend between individual teachers, schools and national bodies or authorities if transformative practices are to lead to sustainable reform, as in Finland (Sahlberg, 2014). However, the space between the teachers, schools and national bodies can be contested, as illustrated in the Literature Review Chapter, and trust in the Teaching Council from the teaching profession was slow to develop initially (McGuire, 2011). This was exemplified by Nora, who observed "an over-reliance" on new initiatives by bodies such as the Teaching Council and Department of Education and overuse of "buzzwords" such as reflection and self-evaluation. She observed that *Cosán* could be just another initiative that boxes need to be ticked for, as echoed by Harry, and not be an effective tool to enhance professional learning and growth through which teacher agency can be cultivated, as anticipated by the Teaching Council (2016). A distrust of academia and research was also apparent in the research findings, as it is perceived that they are not reflective of the real, everyday teaching world and, thus, not generalisable, and this corresponds with the findings of Joram et al. (2020).

As determined in the findings of this study, school culture plays a crucial role in teachers' professional learning becoming transformative. Participants strongly agreed that school culture significantly shapes how TPL is experienced and teachers thrive in environments where collegiality and mutual support are encouraged, leading to transformative teaching practices. As mirrored within the section on leadership, a positive, trusting, and open school culture supports collaboration and enables effective TPL. Some participants described efforts to alter their school's culture through small, consistent actions, such as modelling or strategic collaboration, however, this change is contingent on relationships, trust, and leadership vision. Additionally, the school's culture can also determine the extent to which collaborative practices are successful as they are synergetic with each other (Eshchar-Netz et al., 2022; Visone et al., 2021; Stoll et al., 2006), and this impacts the degree to which TPL can be effective and transformative. The following

section will examine the extent to which the research participants believe collaborative practices can support teachers' professional learning.

5.4 Collaborative Practices

Collaborative practices have been identified as a potential notable model of transformative TPL in the literature as it is relevant and pertinent to teachers' practices since it is embedded within the workplace setting (Lipscombe et al., 2020; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Durksen et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2014). Collaborative approaches to learning amongst staff can also strengthen new knowledge, as through a constructivist perspective, they construct and re-construct the knowledge they have attained and develop practices which suit their needs and contexts (Lambirth et al., 2021; Kennedy, 2007). The symbiotic approaches to learning of constructivism and socio-culturalism (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000) can enhance this, as through a collaborative, co-participatory approach, new meaning is made of knowledge to suit the context teachers are in, which supports a transformative approach to TPL. Collaboration is also advocated for in *Cosán* and this study's findings further support this viewpoint, as this section will illustrate.

The participants noted that collaborative practices lead to teachers sharing best practices and knowledge acquired so TPL can be enhanced and impactful. This was summarised by Annette who stated that good collaboration amongst a staff entails "getting teachers to talk to each other, sharing plans, sharing good practice, going out, observing other teachers", which is reflective of Visone et al.'s (2021) and Vangrieken et al.'s (2015) research findings. Many participants observed the power of collaborative practices to dissuade individual, isolated practices and to harness the strengths and expertise of colleagues, which is also noted by Dogan et al. (2019) and Hargreaves & O'Connor (2018). Consequently, best practices can be shared and a community of learning can develop amongst the teaching staff. Team teaching was utilised by the majority of the participants' schools as a mode of collaboration as it is an established approach that primary teachers comprehend and are comfortable with, as Liz noted, "collaboration in its most practical form is in team

teaching". This was at odds with the view of Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018), who deem team teaching to be a potentially threatening form of collaboration unless there is a solid trusting foundation first, which then leads to more formal collaborative practices. On the other hand, some participant teachers noted how, as collaborative practices embedded within the school through team teaching, they were able to develop other approaches to collaboration, such as mentoring or collaborative action research, as the school's social capital developed and a culture of trust and collegiality was cultivated, which is also attested to by Visone et al. (2021).

The above section is a succinct overview of how this research project views the substantial impact of collaborative practices on TPL. The factor of collaboration and its influence on primary teachers' TPL will be examined comprehensively in the following chapter, which will consider the theme of The Development of Reflective, Collaborative Cultures in Primary Schools to Enhance the Positive Impact of TPL. Teachers' capacity to build their own knowledge through collaboration can be more powerful if reflective practices are utilised too (King, 2016; Kennedy, 2014, 2005) and the participating teachers' views on this will be explored in the next section.

5.5 Reflective Practices

Reflective practices are deemed significant by all participants to enhance their practices and development as teachers and, thus, have a positive impact on their students' learning, and this is also asserted by Šaric and Šteh (2017), Çimer, et al. (2013) and Barnett and O'Mahony (2006). However, the reflective practices the participants engaged with varied widely. Most of the teachers in this research engaged with reflective practices on a cursory level, for example, as Gabrielle captured, "if I'm to be honest, I'd say the vast majority of the time it is probably skimming just the surface of what went well" while a minority of them reflected more deeply, such as Philip "I had to kind of go off and reflect on what was the best way of doing it" or Yvonne "It's a continuous process of looking", whereas Elaine would reflection as integral to her professional practices as, "we should always try

to be learning and be reflective practitioners". It is widely recommended for teachers to reflect on their professional practices, such as by the Teaching Council (2016), Day (1999b) and Schon (1983), as it allows teachers the space and opportunity to take a step back from their teaching and examine how they can improve their practices and develop their capacity. Annette expanded on these views by stating that what was most important in reflecting was "the action that follows". However, many participants agreed that primary teachers have not been taught or shown how to reflect, but it is exhorted and expected of them. Annette, Rachel and Marian all described how they had been specifically guided to reflect in professional learning they undertook, as Rachel encapsulated, "If I wasn't taught how to do it I don't think I would be doing it as effectively as it could be….. we need to be shown as teachers, this is how you actually do it". They each attested to the power of critical reflection on their professional practices and the resultant improvement in their teaching and their students' learning.

The above paragraph summarises of how this research study regarded the significant impact of reflection on TPL. Reflection and its impact on primary teachers' engagement with TPL will be considered in depth in the next chapter, when the theme of The Development of Reflective, Collaborative Cultures in Primary Schools to Enhance the Positive Impact of TPL is analysed and discussed.

5.6 Resources

Resources were perceived by the participants to be an important factor when it came to the extent to which TPL could be transformative. Time, structures, finance, facilitators, accessibility and system resources were the notable resources identified by the participating teachers, as Figure 5.2 illustrates. This section will elucidate why the participants deem this to be a multi-faceted factor of importance.

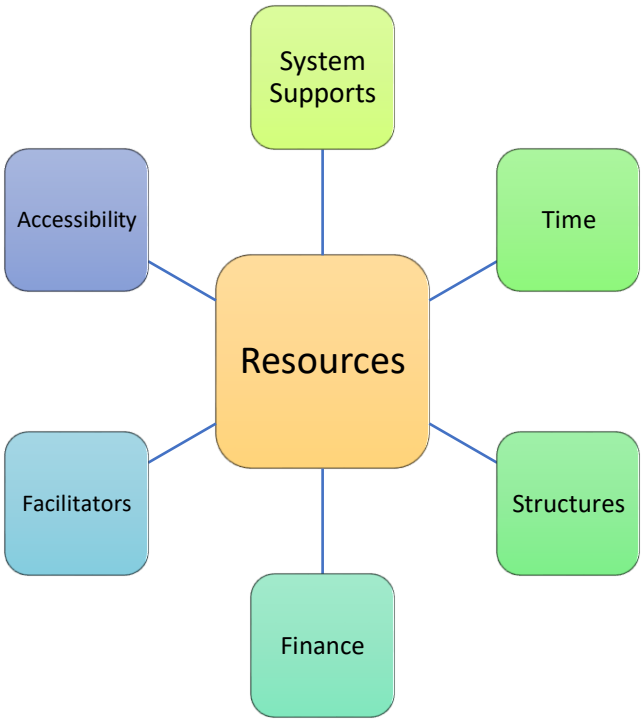


Figure 5.2 Resources Needed to Support Transformative TPL

5.6.1 Time

Time is a crucial and essential factor that impacts both positively and negatively on teachers' ability to engage effectively with TPL (Visone et al., 2021; Maas et al., 2021). Designated time is deemed necessary by many of the participating teachers to actually engage in TPL and to have time to plan for and try new practices within schools and classrooms. The extent to which this is available to primary teachers depends on how a school utilises its "Croke Park hours". These mandated hours came into effect in 2011, under an employment agreement (Department of Education & Skills, 2011) and involve teachers working 36 hours outside of regular school hours annually. These hours can be used for a variety of activities such as school planning, CPD, induction, pre/post school supervision, policy development, staff meetings and nationally planned in-service (Department of Education & Skills, 2016) and are planned locally. A few of the participants, such as Philip, Carrie, Rachel and Nora wished that some of this time was used for more TPL, or more collaborative practices or that TPL undertaken by an individual could count towards a percentage of their Croke Park hours, as described in the previous chapter.

A few teaching participants, such as Marian and Liz noticed that “time is an inhibitor” and “we’re all rushing”. As a result, it can be determined that there is not sufficient time to pause, reflect meaningfully, identify a need and determine how to meet it and take stock of the effectiveness of the TPL, which leads into another cycle of reflection, as advocated for by the Teaching Council (2016) and Timperley et al. (2007). For this to be most effective, time for collaborative, reflective dialogue with colleagues is most valuable, as promoted by Bergmark (2020) and King (2019) and encouraged in the *Cosán* Framework. Further building on this, some participants, such as Philip and Liz, also wanted time to embed new practices and make change sustainable, as advocated for by Bubb & Earley (2013), Timperley et al. (2007) and Guskey (1991), and not to move on too quickly to the next new initiative, even if many of these are mandated by the Department of Education. However, as noted in the leadership section of this chapter, time for teachers to collaborate was also deemed unsustainable by some participants if school leaders did not put structures in place to allow for it, as this is a mutually stimulating relationship (Visone et al. 2021; King & Stevenson, 2017). Hannah, Marian, Carrie and Philip all alluded to the numerous initiatives, policies and procedures they have to undertake as mandated by the Department of Education and, as a result, both individual teachers and the schools they work in lose autonomy in focusing on learning areas they would like to pursue and develop, as Philip surmised, “I do feel with flags and various different initiatives, I know the agentic teacher is down, as is teacher’s autonomy. If we don't have time to have a bit of autonomy, which can happen quite easily as well, you can't try things out” and Hannah quipped, “It's part survival, quite frankly”. The growing profuse in the number of government circulars, which lay out policy, guidelines or procedures for schools to follow, has increased immensely over the years, for example, from 56 in 2000 to 130 in 2022 (Government of Ireland, 2023a).

A way to be creative with time is to start small (Guskey, 1991) and attempt to build in success which is acknowledged by the school leadership. This is reflected by the participant, Liz, who discussed an approach to enable transformative TPL in her context, such as, “not piling on too much, too soon, doing it as a staged approach, introducing stuff as a pilot….” which echoes the views of Moynihan & O’Donovan (2021). Once capacity is developed amongst the staff and it is realised there is

potential for the initiative to have a positive impact on their professional practices or students' learning, the teachers are then intrinsically motivated and more likely to invest further time into the initiative (Pantić et al., 2022; Moynihan & O'Donovan, 2021).

5.6.2 Structures

Structures, in conjunction with time, is another resource necessary to support TPL (Goodnough, 2019; Caena, 2014; Timperley et al., 2007) and this was recognised by most of the participants. Clear structures are necessary to nurture a trusting culture within the school where collaborative practices lead to transformative development (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). On the other hand, if these, along with time, are not adequate then teachers' practices will become more individual and transformative practices will be less likely to occur (Chu et al., 2016). This lack would culminate in teachers being unable to reflect on new knowledge and engage with it to build new understandings, in a collaborative approach. Structures are also necessary to provide continued support over time to embed new practices, at a realistic pace, as noted by Liz, and this is acknowledged by both Moynihan & O'Donovan (2021) and Guskey (1991). Additionally, if the structures and allocated time are not in place to allow for collaborative practices that lead to transformative TPL, teachers may view TPL as not being prioritised, whether by school management or national policy (Enthoven et al., 2023). Some participants spoke of a desire for platforms to share TPL they undertook, if they thought it was relevant, and to share best practice with their colleagues, but the structures were not in place within their schools to allow for this, as Rachel illustrated, "if I could just at the start year maybe explain a few of the things and add whatever I had onto the drop box or the share drive it would be a lot easier."

5.6.3 Finance

Finance was noted to be a resource, which generally inhibited the participants from engaging in transformative TPL. Gabrielle spoke about TPL needing to be "cost effective for people, and I think that it can't be prohibitive". While one-off short

courses or workshops facilitated by local education centres tend to be either free or nominal, more substantial TPL tends to be paid for by individual teachers in Ireland as primary schools do not receive finance for professional development from the Department of Education. The marginalisation by education systems for a TPL budget was noted by Boeskens et al. (2020), who observed education systems putting the onus for TPL on individual teachers, and this lack of investment and forward planning for TPL has the potential to have long-term adverse effects on the teaching profession. Hannah described how her school prioritises a budget for TPL,

> *The board of management would agree a budget for CPD. So if we need extra training or the courses that come up, they will agree to pay for a substitute that will come in that will cover for that. You know, they shouldn't have to do that.*

This decision to have a small budget for TPL was made as the school she worked in has a staff of two teachers, so there was no other teacher available to cover classes if a teacher engaged in TPL during the school day, thus she said it was more of a necessity than a luxury. Nora, Annette, Rachel and Philip all lamented that the courses they engaged in often had wonderful ideas, but the cost can be prohibitive to invest in resources to realise the potential of professional learning and to support the implementation of a new programme. This was illustrated by Nora when she declared,

> *And there have been some excellent course, and we've had some excellent people come to schools. But do you remember when the PDST people [professional development service, currently known as Oide] came in and you'd have to just sit there and them showing you all these lovely things that you could do in maths and you're thinking, well, we don't have any of those resources. The cost on that?!*

As Postholm (2012) declared, TPL needs financial support from the system if it is to be sustainable.

5.6.4 Quality of Facilitators

Another resource the primary teacher participants, such as Marian, Philip and Elaine, remarked on as being a factor in their TPL was the quality of facilitators or advisors, which corresponds with the findings of Merchie et al. (2016). They noted it was necessary for facilitators of TPL to have quality content and an engaging style that would encourage and motivate them to use the new skills or knowledge gained during the course in their teaching practices afterwards. The Teaching Council (2016) also advocates for TPL that is of high quality and some of the participants in this research agreed that this was a necessary factor if TPL is going to lead to transformative practices. Whether a course was face-to-face or online was not a factor deemed very relevant by the participants as Hannah stated, "depending upon what you choose and depending on how the thing is enabled and who's running it, they can be very beneficial, whether they're face-to-face courses or whether they're online". As Hannah noted, quality interaction was influenced by the facilitators' abilities to engage the attendees and to encourage collaboration amongst those present, as Enthoven et al. (2023) and Conway et al. (2009) advocated. School advisors can achieve this if they support teachers to find their own solutions to difficulties they encounter and self-construct knowledge for their contexts (O'Donnell, 2023). This can also be realised if advisors acknowledge and cater for participants' autonomy from the outset of a formal TPL activity to empower them to engage further in the TPL activity (King & Holland, 2022). Teachers who choose autonomously to engage in a TPL activity are more likely to be motivated and to use it effectively in their contexts (McMillan et al., 2016; Banks & Smyth, 2011). Some participants, such as Elaine and Gabrielle, chose to engage with TPL facilitated by someone they know and trust professionally. As Elaine asserted,

> *Teachers are incentivised by what they've seen in the content of the webinar or the quality of the speaker or whatever it might be, they're not incentivised to listen to a webinar from the NCCA or from speakers from the PDST or the inspectors, you know? Sometimes there's that attitude of, like, when was the last time they were in the classroom? What do they know? Whereas I think a lot of the webinars are people who are in classrooms.*

As illustrated here, TPL facilitated by someone from a Department of Education or Teaching Council provider can be viewed with scepticism, especially if the TPL activity is mandated (Banks & Smyth, 2011) or linked to standards that the teacher must measure up against (Conway et al., 2009) and relates to a perception of a contested space here. O'Donnell (2023) spoke of teacher educators within CPD adopting a third space identity when attempting to be a conduit for policy between schools and policymakers which corresponds with the view of Korthagen (2017) who asserts the need for advisors to build a bridge between the strengths of teachers and academic knowledge, to make the new knowledge transferable.

Resonating within this statement are the concepts of trust and contested spaces, which were further deliberated on in section 5.3 on the factor of culture on TPL.

5.6.5 Accessibility

Many of the participants engaged in online summer courses as they felt they were more accessible and flexible to fit their personal lives. Some participants noted that the ability to access TPL to be both a facilitating and inhibiting factor. Marian described her contrasting experiences of the two schools she has worked in, one within an urban centre near an education centre and the other in a rural area over an hour's drive from the nearest education centre. She recalled how she did not realise initially how fortunate she was to work in a school that engaged with its nearby education centre so often and thought that all teachers experienced such engagement in TPL until she moved to her current school, where the teachers rarely attended face-to-face courses, "I would have done a lot of courses in total and the A Centre, I found it was really handy. That was close to school. And another thing, when I started off teaching for CPD you got out of school to do it. I just thought that was the norm." Access and proximity to other schools, communities of practice, professional networks or to the resources of local education centres and universities to support TPL and to encourage teachers to engage in research and evidence-based practices are instrumental in enhancing TPL (Enthoven, et al, 2023; Boeskens et al., 2020). Carrie, Hannah, Gabrielle, Philip and Elaine all spoke positively of TPL they engage with regularly online. Carrie, Hannah and Gabrielle spoke about its accessibility and ease, while both Philip and Elaine spoke of online

professional networks and communities of practice being instrumental in reinvigorating her professionally and cultivating their teacher agency. According to Cranton (2016), online learning can be transformative as it is accessible, there are easy links to further learning, and participants can be just as willing to engage and collaborate with peers online, if not more so than face-to-face, as they may be more open. The myriad of online workshops and courses have been a sea change for TPL. This was expedited as a result of the Covid pandemic and subsequent lockdowns in Ireland which provided an unexpected evolution in professional learning as teachers' capacity to navigate the virtual landscape increased immensely as they learned to connect with their students and advance teaching and learning in this space during this time. Consequently, teachers developed an interest and capacity to engage in learning on this platform and interest in online courses has expanded since then (McInerney, 2022).

5.6.6 System Supports

An interesting resource, which the participants discussed, was the Department of Education and the perceived lack of support in the area of TPL, they believe they receive from the national system. Linking to a previous section, which discussed finance, some of these primary teachers noted that there was paltry financial support given to primary schools to encourage teachers to engage in TPL, as Marian described, "in a small school, even to get out [for TPL] you need sub cover, it's getting really, really hard because of the lack of subs". Many participating teachers also noted that there was no financial incentive to engage with TPL as the qualification allowances, which were extra payments made to teachers who earned Masters or Doctorates were discontinued during the last recession (Department of Education and Skills, 2012b), as Laura contended, "I feel that removing the Masters allowance means that people like me who would love to undertake or complete their Masters will no longer go to the trouble." It was further observed by some participants, such as Elaine, Liz, Gabrielle and Laura, that they believe there is little acknowledgement from the Department of Education for TPL undertaken, as it is now not explicitly credited in interviews when primary teachers are going for a promotional post within a school (Department of Education & Skills, 2019a). To

further compound this unfairness, according to a few of these participants, primary teachers can only apply for study leave for exams, but there is no similar leave for time to complete a thesis or dissertation (Department of Education and Science, 2000). Harry gave an interesting example of what he believed demonstrated a lack of prioritisation of TPL by the Department of Education when he described a recent engagement he had with professional learning provided by the Department of Education, when, as a teaching principal, he was asked to engage in TPL after school hours as part of the new national curriculum roll-out, as he stated, "they don't even value this curriculum enough to provide us with the time off to do it".

Another system resource, which the participating primary school principal bemoaned the lack of, was substitute cover. This resource is a national system support and, due to systemic reasons, such as the current chronic shortage of primary teachers in Ireland (Harford & Fleming, 2023; Ryan-Christensen, 2023), the Department of Education's policy of providing no substitute cover for primary teachers who apply to their Board of Management for extra personal vacation (EPV) days earned for undertaking summer course professional learning (Department of Education, 1965) and is also attributable to the lack of substitute cover for primary teachers to attend courses or workshops during school hours, as indicated by Laura and Marian. This difficulty is further exacerbated in small schools as there are too few colleagues to rely on to cover their class, as noted as a real obstacle by Marian, Hannah and Yvonne, resulting in them rarely taking their EPV days. This lack of substitute cover from the Department of Education is perceived by some of the participants as being indicative of a lack of support by the Department of Education in supporting and promoting TPL, as Liz said, "I don't think there's a whole lot of support for it [TPL] from anybody". Contrary to this, some of these smaller schools prioritise TPL themselves and provide their staff with a budget for substitute cover so they can engage in extra courses available during school hours, as described by Hannah, although she noted they should not have to do that.

The views of the participants and the perceived lack of support from the Department of Education for TPL can all be summed up by Gabrielle who stated,

> *And I do think there has to be a reward for the teachers that are doing it [TPL], because there's an awful lot of teachers doing an*

awful lot of CPD off their own back. And that doesn't seem to be rewarded or acknowledged, or there's actually no merit at all for doing it, which is disheartening because, you know, a lot of people won't do it then because of that and I do think that there could be more done definitely to try to promote it and aid it.

5.6.7 In Summary

As determined in this section on resources being a factor which can either enable or inhibit TPL, it is a multi-faceted concept with significant and varying influences on the extent to which TPL can lead to transformative practices. Time is perceived as a double-edged sword. It can be viewed as a significant barrier as a lack of time can lead to reduced opportunities for meaningful reflection, collaboration and embedding of professional practices, due to heavy workloads and mandated initiatives. On the other hand, time can be an enabler if designated or creatively structured to support meaningful, sustained learning and the participants recognised that the Croke Park Hours have the potential to more effectively to support TPL. School-level structures, such as enabling guidelines, scheduled collaboration time, or platforms for sharing, play a pivotal role in transformative TPL. The teacher participants perceive that inconsistent or absent structures often lead to isolated, individual practice, nevertheless, clear structures support trust, collaboration, and can help sustain transformative TPL. Financial constraints are another inhibitor to TPL, and cost is a recurring barrier to transformative TPL, especially for resources and courses not subsidised by the Department, along with a lack of systemic funding, as there's no incentive or compensation for undertaking higher-level study for teachers. Quality and trust in facilitators are deemed crucial to enable TPL, as the engagement, experience, and relevance of TPL facilitators matter to the participants. The accessibility and format of TPL were other determinants for enabling TPL. Online TPL was generally viewed positively for its flexibility and capability to support participation in networks. Finally, the participants strongly perceive a lack of systemic and policy-level support for TPL in Ireland, and there is a belief that the Department of Education does not value teachers' TPL efforts.

These resources play a multi-dimensional and interconnected role in enabling or inhibiting transformative professional learning. When these resources are lacking, teachers feel unsupported, undervalued, and unable to meaningfully embed learning. Conversely, when present and aligned, these factors can foster autonomy, motivation, and long-term professional growth. The next section will examine the factor of relevance and how it can either hinder or aid TPL.

5.7 Relevance

The participating primary teachers in this research study, such as Annette, Rachel, Yvonne and Nora voiced their opinion that the professional learning they undertake should be relevant if it is to be meaningful and impactful, as Gabrielle contended, "I think it's really important that they [teachers] do CPD in something that's relevant to what's needed for the children that they're teaching" and this is echoed by Boeskens et al. (2020) and Postholm (2012). This is also referred to in *Cosán*, where the relevance of the content of TPL undertaken and an evaluation of its quality and impact should be considered when reflecting on TPL. The research participants discussed relevance pertaining to TPL undertaken to either meet a gap in their professional knowledge or skills or accommodate a need in their school. These identified needs should be ascertained through a critical reflective process, so what is deemed relevant by the teacher, whether for personal or professional needs (Teaching Council, 2016), is worth engaging with and learning (Boeskens et al., 2020; Timperley, 2010; Guskey, 2000). This process was discussed in Chapter 4 when the participating teachers noted linking the school self-evaluation system (Department of Education, 2022a) to the *Cosán* framework to identify needs which would be relevant to the school and possibly the teacher, so TPL undertaken as a result would be relevant to the context which results in transformative practices. Annette concurred with this, as she reflected, she was currently not as engaged in reflective practices or in her professional journey, and this had resulted in her participating in TPL, which had not been as purposeful or relevant.

Nora spoke about TPL undertaken to be engaging, active and practical, if it is to lead to effective practices, as she contends,

> *I find it very hard to find a course to do every year because there's an awful lot of very "samey" courses and it is death by PowerPoint really. And with the face-to-face, I mean, most people I know if you say, the kids aren't in school on Fridays and we've got a course- Oh, God, this day is going to crawl. We're going to be sitting there and just staring at the wall as part of our CPD.*

This view was reaffirmed by Carrie, Rachel and Harry and reflected in the literature, Boeskens et al. (2020), Timperley et al. (2007) and Harris et al. (2006). The participating teachers also spoke about informal TPL often being more relevant and beneficial to their practices. This occurs when colleagues see a need and assist each other to meet this with context-specific, practical ideas and these viewpoints have been expanded in Chapter 4. The *Cosán* framework recognises informal TPL as being of equivalent merit to more formal TPL and encourages teachers and school leaders to acknowledge it as such. The significance of the potential efficacy of informal TPL is also mirrored in Moonie Simmie et al. (2023), King (2014) and Kennedy (2011).

Nora considered that the TPL undertaken should have knowledge or skills which are easily transferable. She discussed many instances when the TPL she engaged with was not relevant to her school's context, as it is a DEIS school, with children of a very low socio-economic background and a significant percentage of the student population are from other countries without English as their first language, therefore the general course or workshops undertaken do not meet their complex needs. This thought resonates with the findings of Brennan & King (2022), Goodall et al. (2005), Guskey (2000) and Lieberman (1995). As Bierema (2016) stated, there needs to be an inherent flexibility to TPL so it is responsive to the needs of the teacher undertaking it so they can mould the knowledge or skills gained to fit their context. Nora deliberated further and spoke about structures within her school that allowed for expertise within the school to be harnessed to directly meet recognised needs or for TPL facilitated by an outside expert to be more specific to meet the particular needs of teachers and classes, for example, "She [the principal] goes and looks for things her teachers could do and share and she makes it as easy as possible for the others to access it." The enabling of TPL may be carried out by an internal or

external facilitator and schools should have the option to utilise both (Teaching Council, 2016; Kennedy, 2011; Timperley et al., 2007).

The participants of this research project spoke about the need for TPL to not only be relevant but also transparent. Harry was quite vociferous when he spoke about teachers needing to know the "why" behind why they engage in any TPL activity if it has any hope of being transformative, "it has to come down to the reason why." This viewpoint is expanded on by Timperley et al. (2007) who determine that if TPL is not seen as evidently relevant to the practices of teachers, their busy professional lives will inhibit their ability and want to engage in new resultant practices, unless it is deemed practical, impactful and sustainable. This is also reflective of Korthagen's (2017) and King's (2014) views of who espouse the necessity for teachers to engage with TPL and apply it in a way that connects the teacher's professional practices with their values and belief systems if TPL is to become sustainable and transformative. The teacher participants also put forward the idea of TPL being evidence-based in its effectiveness so that the learning they undertake will potentially have impact and the Teaching Council (2016) and Timperley (2010) concur with this.

As highlighted in this section, relevance is a notable factor which this study recognises. The participants clearly view relevance, practicality, contextualisation, and intentionality as core components of effective and transformative TPL. Furthermore, they favour TPL that meets real and current needs; is practical and engaging; respects their time and professional judgement; is based on evidence and relevance to their context; and provides clear value both to them and their students.

A balance needs to be sought as teachers need to be able to practice their agency when deliberating whether a TPL activity will be relevant or effective (Lambirth et al. 2021). The next section will delve into the factor of teacher autonomy.

5.8 Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy is an important factor when determining how TPL can become transformative to teachers' practices, according to this study's participants. Many

of the teacher participants believe they have autonomy over what TPL they engage in but a few of the participants, such as Hannah, Liam, Harry and Elaine, added a caveat to this: the TPL you engage in in your own time is autonomously chosen while the TPL engaged with during school time is usually decided for you because the school leadership see a school need which needs to be addressed or the TPL is mandated by the Department of Education. Hannah termed this "pretend autonomy". Nevertheless, there is a need for this directed TPL, as the needs of an education system, in parallel to the needs of individual teachers, ought to be met (Teaching Council, 2016). The participating teachers generally appreciated their autonomy over what TPL they chose to meet their relevant needs, and this is recognised and promoted in *Cosán*. It is believed that having autonomy over professional growth, in conjunction with effective leadership, may be related to a teacher's wellbeing (Bingham & Bubb, 2017). Korthagen (2017) expands on the importance of autonomy in teachers' professional lives when he asserts that it is a basic psychological need for teachers to lead a contented professional life with a strong sense of efficacy. Both Liz and Harry spoke of empowering their staff, trusting them and affording them autonomy, "You get the best out of them", and this resonates with the views of King & Holland (2023). Ontario and Finland are seen as paradigms of best practice when teachers' autonomy over their professional learning is considered (Visone et al., 2021), however, increased government regulation of the teaching profession, as in England, is believed to lead to an erosion in teachers' autonomy and leads to falling satisfaction levels within the profession (Boylan et al., 2023) and a difficulty in retaining teachers within the profession (Worth & van den Brande, 2020).

The teacher participants in this research project also gave their opinions on the autonomy they perceived they had over opportunities to make TPL undertaken, and transformed into actions. Most of the participants believed they had some degree of autonomy over this but the extent to which they exercised autonomy was dependent on how practical or relevant the TPL activity was; on how much time they had afterwards to implement change; on the school's context and culture and whether this constricted growth or allowed change to flourish; and the teachers' mindset and whether they were inclined to engage in new practices. It is interesting to note here that these factors are comparable with the factors which can enable

or inhibit TPL in general. This may be because if autonomy is afforded to teachers, it can beget social capital as collaborative practices are further developed and teachers feel more empowered (Visone et al., 2021) and, furthermore, teacher autonomy can cultivate teacher agency (Boylan et al., 2023; Kennedy, 2014). Conversely, Elaine and Philip both spoke of having autonomy within their classrooms but not within their schools, *per se*, "the reality is you close your door, and you do your own thing, really". Another set of opposing views from the participants was related to the school staff's size and teacher autonomy. Yvonne spoke of having a lot of autonomy as she worked in a school with two classroom teachers, so she was able to make a lot of decisions about her teaching and development autonomously. This perspective was supportive of Harry's, Hannah's and Liz's views that the smaller school staff led to more professional engagement and collaboration with each other, as Harry contended, "And in a small school, it's amazing what you can do because you're constantly meeting one another" a finding with which Caena (2011) concurred. In contrast, Marian spoke of not having autonomy over practices within her school, with a small staff number, as decisions needed to be made cohesively amongst the staff as they all had to "sing from the same hymn sheet".

Participants' autonomy over their professional growth and journey was also discussed during this study. Liz and Nora both asserted they had autonomy over their professional journeys and also wanted and needed to have this autonomy. Carrie, Rachel, Laura and Elaine all spoke about having autonomy over the type of teacher they can be in the classroom but they do not necessarily have it in their professional journey as this can be opportunity dependent, such as lack of promotion opportunities, unless they become a principal, or the school culture may be too constraining or negative to allow them to develop as teachers, grow their autonomy and nurture their agency, as Boylan et al. (2023) and Çimer et al. (2013) advocate for.

Teacher autonomy is inextricably and positively linked to teacher agency and teacher agency is identified as a significant factor for transformative professional practices (Bellibas et al., 2020; Biesta et al., 2017; Lai et al., 2016). This will be dealt with further in Chapter 7 of this research project when the research theme *"The*

potential ability of Cosán *to be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency"* will be explored in detail. The following section will examine how TPL is interconnected with the affective side of a teacher and how this should not be overlooked if TPL is to be transformative.

5.9 **Holistic View of Teachers to Enhance TPL**

A significant factor that arose from the findings of this research study was the need for teachers to be recognised, developed and supported using a holistic approach. Teachers are encouraged to use a holistic approach to children's education and to recognise that each child's learning journey is unique, resulting in children needing to be supported differently to optimise their learning potential (Department of Education, 2023a; Bautista et al., 2016). A holistic approach to education can be defined as engaging all facets of the learner through supporting their academic, psychological, social, creative and emotional aspects (Forbes, 2003). The primary teacher participants identified a need for a similar approach to support their TPL to make this effective and transformative, as this section will elaborate on and Figure 5.3 summarises.

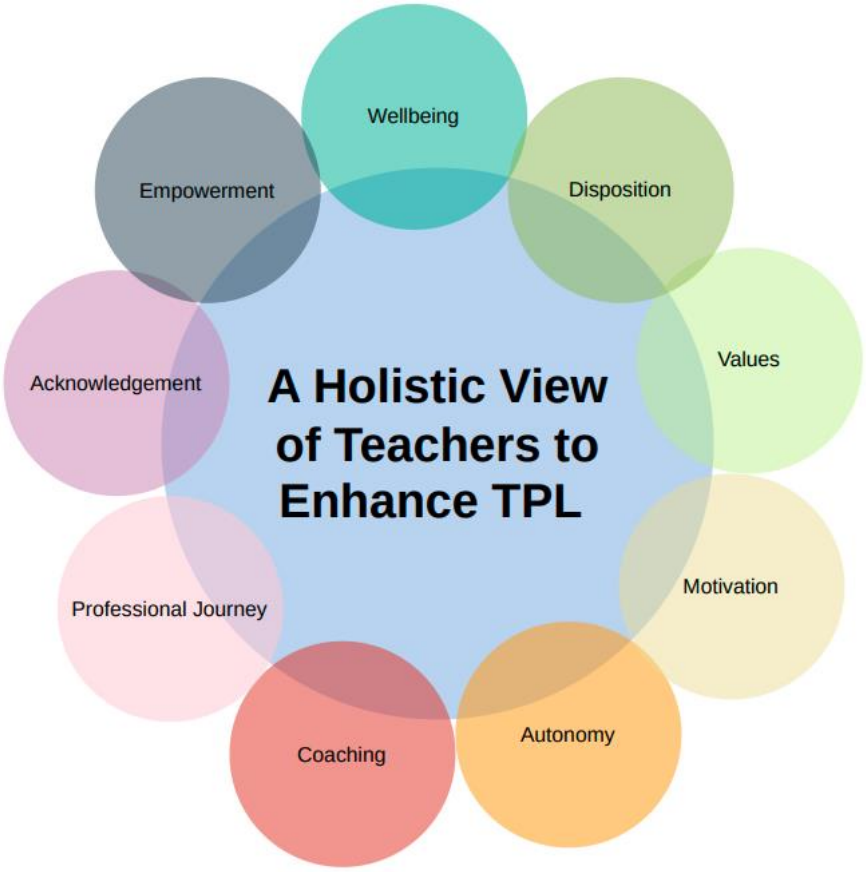


Figure 5.3 Holistic View of Teachers to Enhance their Professional Learning

The teaching profession, and to a further extent, school principalship, has become very demanding (Admiraal & Kittelsen Røberg, 2023; Han & Yin, 2016; Timperley, 2010; Butler, 2007). The participants in this research alluded to this and observed "feeling shattered in the evenings", "it was a way too stressful" and "I honestly did find the last year a bit trickier". Some of the primary teachers involved in this research voiced their concern over how long they can sustain being a teacher, especially now that new teachers who began teaching from January 1, 2013, will not receive their full pension until they are 66 years of age, which means for many teachers, they will be working over 40 years, as Marian testified "I can't teach until I'm 65. It's not fair on them [the students] and it's not fair on me". Furthermore, four of the participants have seriously considered leaving the profession as they do not feel fulfilled, lack autonomy in their schools, perceive their schools as having a negative culture, or feel a lack of control over their professional lives, as Laura demonstrated, "for the last few years, I was veering towards quitting teaching". These experiences are consistent with the findings of Coldwell et al. (2017) and Gu

& Day (2013) who determine that teachers who work in schools with a positive, supportive culture where teachers feel valued and have a say in its development are more likely to remain engaged in the profession, whereas a lack of this leads to a teacher retention difficulty. In contrast to the experiences of those four participants, the vast majority of the teachers in this study are motivated and interested in their careers as they enjoy the interaction with children, as Harry remarked, “You’re just so worn out, but other than that, it’s brilliant!”

As noted, many of the participants were motivated in their careers. Motivation in a profession can also lead to a greater sense of engagement and fulfilment, resulting in teachers being more inclined to undertake TPL (Boeskens et al., 2020; Han & Yin, 2016). A vital motivating factor for some of the participants was the sense of empowerment that TPL can generate, such as Gabrielle and Marian who noted they felt much more confident in their teaching styles and leadership abilities since undertaking formal further teaching qualifications, as Marian stated, “then I signed up for that course, but I didn't realise that course would change my teaching completely”. The assessment that TPL can support not only the individual teacher but also meet the school’s needs was also observed by the participants and this perception of being needed, recognised and assisting colleagues was remarked on by Rachel, “if you’re encouraged to do that, it would be brilliant because that would be an incentive to actually go off and learn something you are really interested in, especially if you knew it was going to be used when you got back to school”. This is reflective of Dogan et al. (2019) who note collaborative cultures diminish feelings of isolation and cultivate a sense of support and appreciation. This sense of empowerment and validation can potentially foster teacher agency, which resonates with views held by Boylan et al. (2023), King (2019), Hallinger et al. (2017) and Kennedy (2014).

As previously illustrated in this chapter, when teachers have autonomy over their TPL, they are more likely to be motivated as the TPL they undertake meets their needs. Furthermore, if this TPL aligns with their interests and significantly, their values and beliefs, they are more likely to gain from it (Boeskens et al., 2020; Korthagen, 2017). The findings of this research project correlated with these views. Harry articulated this when he expressed a need to address “the why of what we teach or why we teach”, to determine whether the TPL to be undertaken aligns with

your values and beliefs, for it to result in transformative practices. This is also reflective of Caena's (2011) view who espouses if teachers are given time to reflect on and have insights into TPL they have engaged in and allow it to align with their beliefs and values, then it is much more likely to be transformative and sustainable, and King (2019) advances this by asserting this experience of TPL can empower teachers.

Along with people's sets of values and beliefs, people's affective attributes and disposition also have a bearing on whether TPL engagement becomes transformative (Lin et al., 2022; Hökkä et al., 2017b; Korthagen et al., 2017; Fraser et al., 2007). The findings in this research highlight this too. Rachel, Laura, Liam Elaine, Gabrielle and Marian all indicated they worked with colleagues who may be less responsive to change, with a more fixed mindset, and this impedes their ability to collaborate, share best practice and make TPL effective, as Gabrielle stated "there'll always be people who won't be interested". On the other hand, many of the participants either indicated or displayed attributes which would be conducive to engaging effectively with TPL, such as they enjoy a challenge and show initiative, are flexible and motivated and they have a growth mindset, strong work ethic and evolving, lifelong learning outlook. Teachers who are engaged in their work practices with positive emotions are more likely to achieve agency (Hökkä et al., 2017b), and Chapter 7 will explore this further. Interestingly, many participants also spoke about engaging further with TPL, if it made them feel empowered, validated, capable and motivated and if it boosted their self-efficacy, thus enhancing their learning and practices, a point also attested to by Korthagen (2017). On the other hand, Timperley et al. (2007) warn that the measure of effective TPL should not be in how it makes a teacher feel but the impact it has on the students.

Throughout this research study, the participating teachers spoke about how career and life stages intertwine and determine the extent to which TPL can be engaged with, resulting in transformative practices, as Hannah determined,

> *I think it depends on the personal life of the teachers who are engaging or not engaging with it [TPL]. So for instance, my usual assistant principal in school is currently on maternity leave. She has two children who are under three and so the idea of asking her to do CPD when she has already got two children [……] that is a problem for the younger family oriented teacher.*

Teaching careers are not on a linear trajectory but rather are iterative and varied with peaks and troughs (King & Holland, 2022; Gu & Day, 2013) and this was recognised by the participants. Some, such as Harry and Liz, spoke of a need to be mindful of their colleagues on the continuum of their teaching career and, while maintaining professionalism, being cognisant of how much can be asked of teachers, thus taking a nurturing stance which promotes staff wellbeing. These views concur with those of the Teaching Council (2016, p.8) who, in the *Cosán* framework, state that each teacher has their own career path linked to their priorities and life stage and TPL should also take into account "teachers' values, emotions, motivation and professional confidence". To support teachers at more stressful stages of their career, due to personal or professional contexts, the participants suggested they should be given more time and space, not be asked to lead new initiatives and ensure collaborative practices are strong within the school to support all teachers, as attested to by Admiraal and Kittelsen Røberg (2023).

It was interesting to note in these interviews that only a few participating teachers had a semblance of a plan for their future careers or a sense of control over their professional journeys. This may indicate an absence of agency in the participants' professional lives as they are not engaged enough to shape the course of their careers, although this may also be due to ecological factors inhibiting their achievement of agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). It may also be due to the lack of emphasis on career trajectories within the teaching profession, as advanced by Ghamrawi and Abu-Tineh (2023). Interestingly, a few participants proposed having access to some form of coaching to support their professional development and bring into focus their professional journey, as advocated for by Admiraal and Kittelsen Røberg (2023). Coaching has the potential to develop autonomy, self-reflection and self-efficacy in teachers (Veenman et al., 2001) and this approach to TPL may align well with *Cosán's* principles and values. As previously discussed here, Carrie spoke of her school principal annually discussing with her, in a mentoring or coaching approach, her professional experiences over the year and her plans for the following year, which is similar to practices in Finland and Scotland. Annette spoke about her experiences in Scotland, which were akin to Carrie's, and appreciated the collaborative, reflective dialogues which led to her growth as a professional practitioner and this

was something she missed in her current teaching post in Ireland. A resounding eight participants, while maybe satisfied to different degrees within their teaching jobs, were unsure where they would be in their career in the future. Gabrielle and Laura both explicitly wished for access to coaching, in some form, to support them in exploring how they would develop and where they could go within their careers, as Laura stated, “it would be nice that if a principal had that time that you could go and talk to them about your journey or about the possibility of where you'll go from here.”

The study highlights that transformative TPL must be holistic, taking into account not only skills and knowledge but also teachers’ emotional wellbeing, motivation, professional identity, and life context. Many of the teacher participants reported feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and stressed, with some considering leaving the profession. Key stressors they identified included, increasing professional demands; limited career progression opportunities; and a perceived lack of recognition and autonomy. These findings mirror broader concerns in literature about teacher burnout and retention issues (Suarez & McGrath, 2022; Hökkä et al., 2017b). When these elements are recognised and nurtured, through autonomy, support, coaching, and alignment with personal values, teachers are more likely to remain in the profession, grow, and positively impact student learning. The significance of the link between teachers’ professional development and teachers’ affective attributes and positive disposition is apparent in the literature on TPL (Boylan et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2022; Sancar et al., 2021; Korthagen, 2017; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Fraser et al., 2007). The participants in this research study also referenced the importance of recognising this relationship if TPL is to become sustainable and impactful. As illustrated in this chapter and further elucidated in this section, the participants spoke of a need to feel acknowledged for the work they undertake, for this to be validated, to work within a positive school culture, to support colleagues, to be supported through collaborative practices, to have choice over the TPL they undertake and to have the autonomy, time and supports to attempt to put it into practice. They also demonstrated a need to make the connection between TPL undertaken and the benefit it will bring to their classroom practices explicit, resulting in more motivated teachers to harness each other’s strengths and be

aware of the type of teacher they want to be and what their career trajectory may be, to realise their teacher agency. For these reasons, TPL needs to be viewed holistically, notwithstanding that this is more complex and nuanced (Korthagen, 2017), leading to approaches to TPL that instigate changes in practice, as advocated for by Kennedy (2014), which results in more sustainable, transformative teaching practices.

5.10 Conclusion

This research study sought to determine if the *Cosán* framework can augment transformative TPL for primary teachers while also enhancing teacher agency. The findings of this chapter elucidate what factors may enable or inhibit primary teachers' abilities to engage in TPL which leads to transformative practices. These factors may be construed as interconnecting elements which interact with each other dynamically and these elements, along with teachers as actors who further influence how they interconnect, create a complex system (Strom & Viesca, 2021). This complex system could be at a school level but this in turn interacts with parallel systems at the local, national and international levels (Strom & Viesca, 2021). Hence, while the factors were described here as generally separate entities with some relationships in this chapter, there is a complex, synergetic interconnectedness amongst them, and these converge to promote non-linear approaches to transformative TPL (Raduan & Na, 2020). This research determined factors that can support transformative TPL and they include school leadership, school culture, collaborative practices, reflective practices, resources, relevance, teacher autonomy and a holistic view of the teacher when viewing TPL. These findings are reflective of many of *Cosán*'s principles which recognise and promote the factors of school leadership, school culture, collaborative practices, reflective practices, relevance, teacher autonomy and, to an extent, a more holistic perspective of the teacher when engaging with TPL. This can be seen in Figure 5.4 below.

In the final chapter of this research project, *Conclusions, Recommendations and Final Reflections*, I will put forward suggestions to promote the factors identified in this chapter, which facilitate transformative TPL. The next chapter will delve into the findings of the third research question, which asked the participants if the development of reflective, collaborative cultures in schools has the potential to enhance the positive impact of TPL.

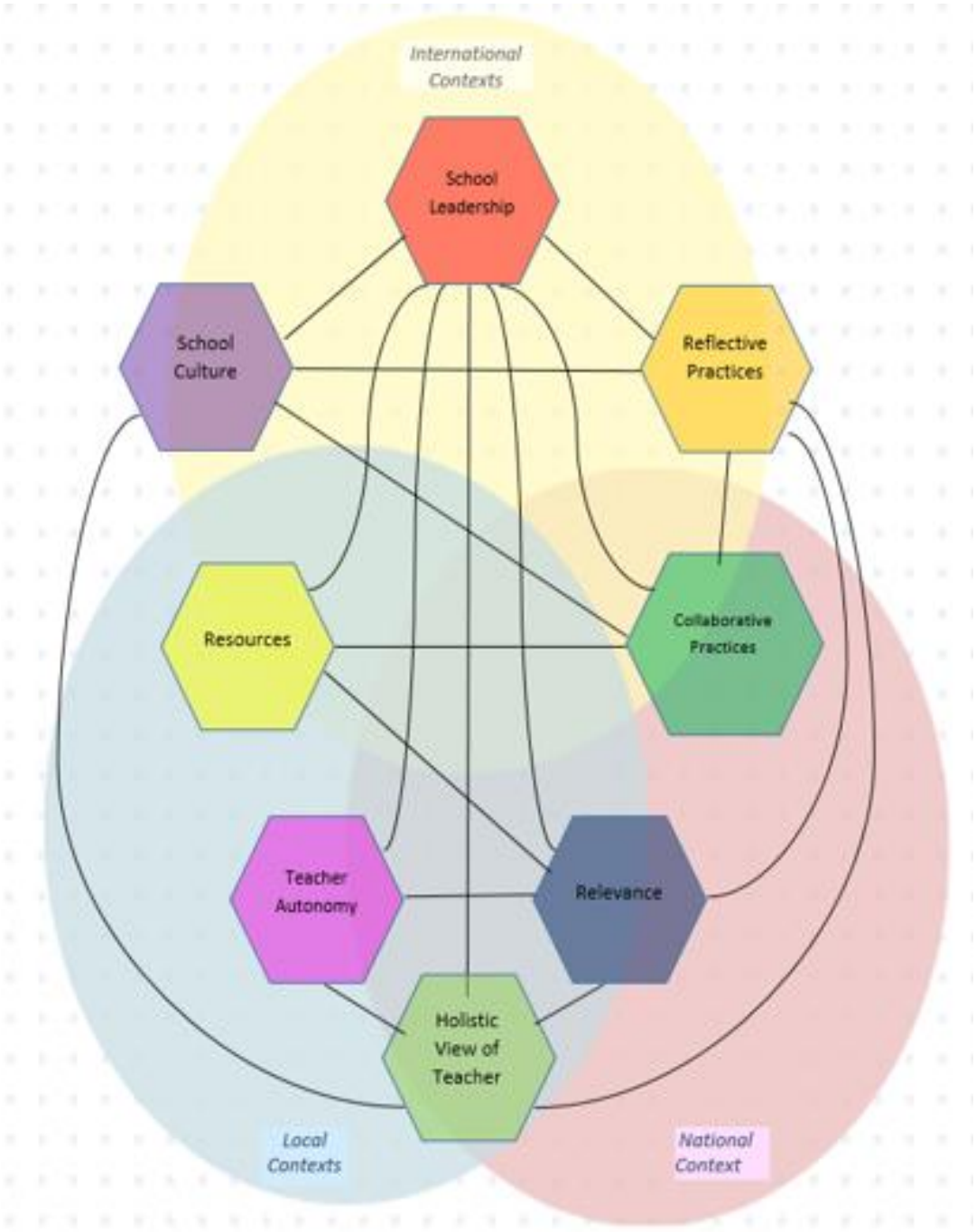


Figure 5. 4 Contexts and Factors Influencing Transformative TPL

Chapter 6

Findings and Discussion on Theme III:

The Development of Collaborative, Reflective Practices in Schools to Enable Transformative TPL

6.1 Introduction

The development of collaborative reflective practices in schools is deemed by many to augment and support transformative TPL, as examined in the literature review. To develop this culture both reflective and collaborative practices need to be promoted and fostered within schools to facilitate successful engagement with collaborative reflection (Dogan et al., 2019). Collaborative reflective practices are also advocated for by the Teaching Council in the *Cosán* framework (2016) to support teachers' engagement with professional learning and lead to transformative practices.

This study focused on effective approaches to support transformative TPL in primary schools. In examining this topic, the following research sub-question was simultaneously posed:

- *Can the development of collaborative, reflective practices in schools enhance the positive impact of TPL?*

This chapter will present and analyse the findings from this study on this question. The theoretical framework devised to inform this project incorporates constructivism, socio-culturalism and complexity theories and this framing was employed as a lens to support answering the research questions. The data gathered from the fourteen participating primary teachers on this topic were analysed thematically and the resulting findings on the development of collaborative reflective practices and their potential influence to support transformative TPL will be illustrated in this chapter.

6.2 Collaborative Practices

Collaborative practices are recognised as being crucial to advancing transformative TPL (de Jong et al., 2021; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a) as they have the potential to develop social capacity amongst educators and lead to sustainable, impactful practices which improve students' learning (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) while promoting teacher agency (Reeves et al., 2017), as previously elucidated in this study's Literature Review. The teaching participants in this research study spoke about their participation in and experiences with collaborative practices in their school contexts. These findings will be presented in this section.

6.2.1 Understanding of Collaborative Practices?

The teacher participants spoke of collaborative practices enabling their ability to share newly acquired skills or knowledge and best practice and this is also promoted by Tonna and Shanks (2017) and Vangrieken et al. (2015). As supported by the theoretical framework scaffolding this study, teachers are actively constructing their own knowledge and understanding, through an interactive, collaborative process (Duncombe & Armour, 2004) and this involves teachers working collectively to solve problems, increase capacity, and provide one another with support (Teaching Council, 2016; Vangrieken et al., 2015). This was recognised by the participants who spoke about sharing new learnings with colleagues, as Gabrielle explained, "I was able to spread that expertise with the SEN team and collaborate with the class teachers"; or asking colleagues for help, as Liz stated, "I can't do that, somebody help me"; and working with each other to improve their teaching and meet their students' needs, as Marian illustrated in one of the focus group meetings when describing team teaching as an approach to collaborative practices, "team teaching, that's a great one. Like the classroom door is open now, […] there's a few other teachers that know how children are getting on, they know how to help, when to help". Teacher collaboration highlights teamwork to improve both teaching and learning (Vangrieken et al., 2015) and this was demonstrable in this project as the majority of the participants spoke of collaborating with their Special Education Teacher [SET], especially using a team teaching model, as illustrated by Liz, "collaboration in its most practical form is in team teaching" and she further

expanded on this in one of the focus group discussions, “I think that the whole promotion of team teaching over the past six or seven years has greatly aided and abetted collaboration”.

Collaboration with colleagues can take many guises in schools (Vangrieken et al., 2015) and can include informal activities such as chats at the staff table or sharing resources (Visone et al., 2015), as mentioned by Annette, Liz and Yvonne and described by Laura, “It can be informal like somebody meeting somebody in the corridor and then having a chat and they’re telling you about something that they'd like to do and you say let me get involved in that or I know a bit about that or I'll send you files or I did a course on that, I'll send you the notes.” Annette also elaborated on how she gains satisfaction from being able to share professional learning with colleagues, “And I'm more than happy to then share that practice with other colleagues of mine, without needing to, it’s just something I love” and this is reflective of Rogoff’s (2008) stance on socio-culturalism that views learning as participating in a shared endeavour. Meanwhile, Liam spoke of informal collaboration as being “extremely powerful” while Harry spoke of preferring to engage in informal collaboration in his school context as he viewed formal collaboration as being a “tick the box exercise”, to serve the interests of the inspectorate, as it was seen as contrived and may not be relevant, authentic nor teacher led which is a view reflected by Enthoven et al. (2023) and Kennedy (2014). While collaborative practices may be informal at times, the teacher participants, such as Liam, Gabrielle and Liz, spoke of many instances of more formal collaboration, such as communities of practice or focused meetings with and within special education teams of teachers, and in school management teams which reflects Kennedy’s (2011) viewpoint that collaborative practices can be on a continuum from the unplanned instances to more formal, structured activities. Kennedy (2011) further considers collaborative practices to range from transmissive activities, such as listening to colleagues in the staffroom, to co-operative actions such as planning for curriculum delivery, to more effective endeavours, such as school-based action research. This study’s participants similarly recognised activities, such as peer learning, termly planning at a class level or school improvement plans to be collaborative and described and appreciated diverse engagements at these various levels, as Gabrielle encapsulated, “there's lots of

different layers for the collaborative practices". This emulates the Teaching Council's assessment that teachers value collaborative practices, whether formal or informal, and the support they receive from colleagues through these practices and this augments the argument that teachers' learning should be socially constructed (Teaching Council, 2016). The participants' experiences also acknowledge the importance of culture and co-participation as they learn from and with their colleagues which is a central tenet of a socio-cultural conceptualisation of learning (Tonna & Shanks, 2017; Lave & Wenger, 1991)

One example of a more formal, collaborative TPL which participants in this study, such as Marian and Annette spoke of, were experiences they had with sustained support from the PDST [Professional Development Services for Teachers, now Oide] with the new Primary Language Curriculum (Department of Education & Skills, 2019b). Marian especially felt these were powerful learning experiences that led to transformative teaching practices because the teachers had the time and space afforded to them to engage constructively with each other and they were facilitated by an outside professional who focused, challenged and supported their collective engagement. This experience was also encountered by Elaine who, in her role as a facilitator of workshops in primary schools, witnessed primary teachers reflecting on their practices and collaboratively developing new approaches to meet the learning needs of students in their schools. This mirrors the viewpoint of Nguyen et al. (2021) who contend that job-embedded opportunities for collaborative TPL can lead to sustained, innovative, transformative practices. On the other hand, Servage (2008) warns against focusing on the functional sharing of best practice amongst colleagues as this may not lead to sustainable, effective practices.

The participating teachers also discussed how in many of their schools, they engage in collaborative practices to harness their colleagues' strengths and expertise, and this echoes the view of Lipscombe et al. (2020) who state that teachers are a considerable human resource within schools that should be utilised. While this viewpoint was considered in Chapter 4 when examining approaches to support transformative TPL, the emphasis here is on how class exchanges may support collaborative practices. Many of the teachers, such as Liam, Laura, Yvonne, Harry and Philip, spoke of teachers having the opportunity to swap classes and teach

lessons in areas they were more comfortable in. This collaborative approach to teaching was aspired by Elaine and by Rachel, who wanted the opportunity "to allow a teacher who might have a better strength, a better talent, a better background knowledge to teach it because it is the kids who are going to benefit" and through this experience her own professional learning would improve as she also would learn from her colleagues' best practices. This is reflective of Visone et al.'s (2021) perspective that through TPL activities such as peer observation, not only is instructional ability enhanced but social capital is also advanced within the school as colleagues learn to share the workload and further supports the utilisation of the theories of socio-culturalism and constructivism to scaffold the project. Collaborative approaches to TPL are also promoted by national TPL policies in Scotland (GTC Scotland, 2019) and New Zealand (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021) where collaborative cultures are supported to enhance the teacher's professional learning, while benefiting the school.

6.2.2 Difficulties with Collaborative Practices

As noted in the literature chapter, a potential difficulty in developing sustainable, collaborative, reflective models of professional development in Ireland, as advocated for by the Teaching Council (2016), would be the reality that 44% of primary schools in Ireland have a staff of four teachers or less (Department of Education and Skills, 2020), thus, the small size of these professional communities and the findings suggest this may be challenging in promoting collaborative practices. The participants in this research project suggest that the school's teaching staff size influences the extent to which collaboration can be fostered. The participants who worked in very small schools of fewer than four teachers also spoke about fewer opportunities to collaborate, as there was no time for the staff to cover classes to facilitate professional learning, whether formally or informally. Conversely, teachers who taught in medium-size schools of 4 - 13 teachers found their ability to collaborate, especially informally, led to transformative practices within the school, as Harry surmised "the one [the type of TPL] that counts is the informal" and this perspective was echoed by Liz, Liam and Yvonne. The five teachers in this research who taught in relatively larger schools of fourteen or more

teachers did not describe school-wide collaboration but collaborated within certain circles, such as with colleagues who taught at the same class level to share resources and develop school plans together. In contrast to these views, one participant, Marian, discussed extensive collaboration which occurred in the previous large school she worked in, which she took for granted as it was the first school she taught in. She also indicated that the collaboration amongst the staff in a larger size of school led to impactful TPL as there were more opportunities to engage in collaborative practices and potential for more innovative ideas as there were more people involved in TPL, as also noted by Nguyen et al. (2021). The participating teachers who taught in small schools of three or fewer teachers noted they needed to have a consistent approach regarding their school practices and this may be related to school culture, as supported by Hinde (2004) who discusses school culture as being elusive yet, determining how a school "works". Marian believed that, as a consequence, there may be fewer opportunities for innovative initiatives. This maintenance of norms within certain school cultures challenges collaborative, reflective practices which may lead to transformative practices (Eshchar-Netz et al., 2022). Philip further spoke of collaboration maybe being easier in a smaller school but dependent on the staff's positive relationships and collegiality. Liz discussed inter-staff relationships as being something her staff, especially the in-school management team, were very conscious of and this need to foster positive inter-staff relationships was a perspective Harry also expressed when he discussed fostering "healthy, professional relationships with colleagues". The importance of positive relationships in developing collaborative practices is widely noted (Enthoven et al., 2023; Visone et al., 2021; Lipscombe et al., 2020; Stoll et al., 2006) and James et al. (2007) demonstrated in their research that strong collaborative relationships have the potential to augment the collective ability of the individual teachers which echoes complexity theory (Strom & Viesca, 2021) which underpins this research project. The need for a culture within the school which was open and trusting with individual teachers who were willing to engage in TPL collaboratively is not always discernable in some schools (Šarić & Šteh, 2017) and this was also voiced by Liz who stated, "collaboration is not a valued practice or an experienced practice within some staffs and, you know, it's not a positive experience for some people." Interestingly, Philip was not a strong advocate for collaborative practices

and voiced another perceived difficulty with them, “I do find that sometimes collaboration can kind of slow things down”, especially if trying something innovative within a school for the first time for he prefers action. This reflects the views of Sales et al. (2017) who noted innovation as a generally isolated endeavour.

The lack of time was a recurrent difficulty for collaborative practices the participants of this study voiced often and they further expanded on this by exemplifying a dual need for time. Firstly, they declared time was needed to physically meet with colleagues and engage in collaborative practices to cultivate professional learning, as Hannah, Marian, Gabrielle and Laura stated and also espoused by Visone et al. (2021), Brodie (2019) and Timperley et al. (2007). The need for time to enable collaboration is also supported by the ITE policies of Finland (Darling-Hammond, 2017) and Ireland (Teaching Council, 2015), however there is no Department of Education structure or policy for collaborative practices in primary schools (Shevlin et al., 2009), outside of the Droichead programme. As illustrated in the previous paragraph, time is at more of a premium in smaller schools as there is not the staff to support and enable collaboration within school hours, as Hannah described regarding team teaching in her school, “it takes up a lot of time to set it up and to do it properly and to plan it and so forth”. The need for time was also described by some participants, like Liz and Harry, as essential to develop relationships to nurture a culture of trust which enables collaboration and leads to professional learning and this is reiterated by Moynihan and O’Donovan (2021). Once trust is fostered amongst a staff, the ability to engage collaboratively with each other is facilitated, as Harry asserted, “if the culture is positive towards one another as a staff, then there's no limits to the levels of collaboration”.

6.2.3 Learning Communities

The participants in this research project spoke of being involved in various forms of learning communities, as acknowledged by Timperley et al. (2007), and these will be portrayed in this section. In viewing these learning communities through the combined lenses of socio-cultural, constructivist and complexity theories, the contextual collaborative endeavours within a school’s particular culture, alongside the various dynamic, complex influences, affect the extent to which TPL is enriched

and become transformative (King et al., 2023; Eshchar-Netz et al., 2022; Strom & Viesca, 2021; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Gabrielle described a learning community where she collaborated with a cohort of her colleagues, those on the SEN team, and they shared new knowledge or expertise, reflected on children's progress and worked together to decide how to best plan forward, "we would sit down and say, OK, look, this is not working. What did we do? Can we look at results or analyse things a bit more carefully?" She also spoke of this CoP then reaching out and working collaboratively with class teachers which further fostered a culture of professional learning within the school, "I was able to spread that expertise with, say, my SEN team and then, kind of collaborate with the class teachers". This reflects King et al.'s (2023) and Stoll et al.'s (2006) assessments that learning communities, such as CoP or PLCs, can precipitate a collaborative culture across the school. Gabrielle's experience also described a CoP which was developed in a centre-out approach as advocated for by the OECD (2012a) and Opfer and Pedder (2011a). Teacher-led, situated, collaborative professional learning can lead to the development of a culture that promotes teacher agency (GTC Scotland, 2019). These practices were recognised by Nora "collaborative practices would be common, but they are teacher driven and teacher led". She believed teacher-led, collaborative practices met teachers' specific needs within the situated context of the school she worked in and this approach is also lauded by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018).

Liz discussed in the interviews a PLC within her school which was centred on the whole staff engaging with and developing a school improvement plan that emanated from the school self-evaluation process (Department of Education, 2022a) which is analogous to the Professional Growth Cycle in New Zealand (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021). As part of this process, she allowed time for ideas to embed and for staff members to reach out to professional networks to gather approaches for best practice in the specified area. She also mentioned that in her role as leader, she encouraged all staff members to voice their opinions, which emulates the research of Sales et al. (2017) that for transformative practices to occur, a collaborative endeavour with everyone having a role in the process of change is necessary. Liz's actions reflect both Brodie (2019)

and Stoll et al.'s (2006) beliefs that effective leadership promoting collaboration and cultivating trust is the foundation for successful learning communities.

Carrie spoke of being part of a strong learning community in her school which consists of her collaborating with three other class teachers teaching the same class level. She described how they work very well as two of them have many years' experience, while the other two are recent graduates who are very open to collaborating and reflecting, "the combination when we do get together to plan is really good". Within this learning community, Carrie spoke of a strong, trusting, safe collegial relationship between these teachers which leads to critical dialogue and the sharing of expertise and resources and this, according to Visone et al. (2021) and Brennan & Gorman (2023), has the potential to grow professional capacity.

Interestingly, Marian spoke of the necessity of an outside facilitator to support TPL within a CoP and make it impactful. This was experienced as she and her colleagues engaged in support from the PDST services in their efforts to embed the new primary language curriculum within their setting. As Marian declared, "If you had a few more days like that, you know, with the right kind of facilitator, it's unbelievable what you can achieve." Philip attested to the need for facilitators to not only support and focus a CoP but also to validate good practices which are occurring. The need for facilitators to support transformative TPL reflects the views of Brennan & Gorman (2023), de Jong et al. (2021), Timperley et al. (2007) and Guskey (1991) who concur that external facilitators foster professional dialogue, assist in new learning and, thus, promote transformative TPL. Further augmenting the case to use external facilitators was the view that these facilitators can challenge assumptions and enhance TPL in schools as advocated for in England's TPL policy (Department for Education, 2016a). Communities of practice can be effective if there is a modicum of agitation to question the status quo and consider alternative practices which can lead to transformative learning (de Jong, 2021; Teaching Council, 2015; Timperley et al., 2007). This view was reiterated by Annette who stated, "Nothing changes if nothing changes" when discussing the need for collaboration which is authentic and leads to change.

Marian, in the interviews, spoke of another CoP in her local area which was akin to networking which was an initiative to support peace organised by a cross-border

peace body. Within this community of practice, she was given opportunities to meet with other class teachers teaching at the same level as her to share ideas and enhance their professional learning, “I introduced the girls to that and then they introduced me to something else. So it's like, we all have the knowledge.” This experience emulates the viewpoint of King and Holland (2022) and Admiraal (2021) who considered the importance of teachers networking with others to share knowledge and best practices. Marian especially appreciated this CoP as her reality of teaching in a small rural school meant “that was the first time that I got to work with two other teachers that had children at the same level and now we have a WhatsApp group.” Hannah, who teaches in a school comparable to Marian’s, also spoke favourably about networking between schools for similar reasons. Nevertheless, while Hannah extolled the benefits of networking with local schools, she also noted one considerable difficulty: when she engaged in these CoPs she had no one to teach her class,

> *But my issue with collaborative stuff is that takes me out of the school and if it takes me out of the school, that means I have to have substitute provision provided and that is always assuming that there is a substitute available in order to be able to cover it. So, increasingly this year, unless there's CPD on a Monday when I'm in the office anyway, I'm saying no, I can't do it.*

In this study, Liam discussed collaborating and networking with other local principals regularly. He found this advantageous to him as he got advice or other perspectives, “I would have found that very good as regards CPD myself that I would have informal chats with others on their experiences.” Liam’s experience reflects the position of Pont et al. (2008) who contend that a principal’s role now includes collaborating with local schools. Networking across schools to share best practices is also encouraged in Finland (Lavonen, 2020), New Zealand (Ministry of Education NZ, 2022b) and Ontario (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Finally, another form of community of practice which participants such as Elaine, Carrie and Philip described were those which took place online. Elaine and Philip engaged in numerous professional learning online as there were webinars available, both nationally and especially internationally, in areas of teaching and learning

which they were specifically interested in. This was observed by Ghamrawi (2022) and Enthoven et al. (2023) to be a noteworthy approach to TPL as it accommodated a way to connect with experts in given fields that would not be normally accessible. Philip, Elaine and Carrie have all connected autonomously with like-minded individuals online and they felt empowered by their online learning which has resulted in authentic, transformative TPL and this perspective is also held by Ghamrawi (2022).

The participants of this study outlined not only the need but also the benefits for strong collaborative practices to be intrinsic to teacher development in schools. In conjunction, they also surmised that collaboration allows for teacher autonomy while fostering capacity building across a school and can beget agency which reflects *Cosán's* underpinning values. Liam summarised this in one of the focus groups, "collaboration would be huge and without it, I don't know how schools would function really, like they'd function, but they definitely wouldn't be working to their efficiency."

This study recognises the various learning communities and the extent collaborative practices lead to transformative practices. Collaborative practices are imperative in supporting teachers' critical reflection (OECD, 2012a) and the following section will examine the teacher participants' views on reflective practices and its impact on TPL.

6.3 Reflective Practices

As noted in the Literature Review, reflective practices have been lauded as an effective and influential support to hone and develop professional skills, knowledge and practices in education (Dogan et al., 2019; Liu, 2015; Edwards & Thomas, 2010; Day, 1999b; Eraut, 1995; Schon, 1983). In this research study, the fourteen primary teacher participants discussed reflective practices and how they engaged with these within their differing contexts. These findings are illustrated in the following sections.

6.3.1 Understanding of Reflective Practices

A majority of the teacher participants described their reflective practices as mainly a retrospective, contemplative, individual endeavour, as depicted by Hannah, “I'm ticking off and reflecting on what I've done, what I haven't done, why it didn't get done, what happened in the meantime.” This perception of reflecting on professional practices as a predominantly individual exercise is also observed by Kramer (2018) and Šarić and Šteh (2017). The participating teachers’ reflections tended to be technical and descriptive or comparative, as depicted by Šarić and Šteh (2017) and Liu (2015), and mainly about the lessons they taught, how the children engaged, what went well and where improvements could be effected. Rolfe (2014) noted there is a propensity to focus on Schön’s (1983) model of reflecting on action rather than in action and this inclination can be also observed in this study. Gabrielle elucidated on this when she described this type of reflection to be “superficial”, as not a lot of time is spent considering or analysing the “why” of particular outcomes, emulating Korthagen’s (2014) viewpoint that reflection should be meaning-orientated to have a deeper understanding of situations and experiences. This also reflects Kramer’s (2018) and Çimer et al.’s (2013) views that some cursory reflective practices risk only validating and not challenging professional practices. This was further illustrated by Rachel who spoke of some retrospective reflective practices, when engaged individually, they tend to affirm the same professional practices and not lead to change as it is difficult for an individual to critique their own work and there is the danger of complacency too. Rachel also spoke about reflection being essential to improving professional practices as teaching can be a difficult, stressful job, so she advocates for taking time to reflect, identifying difficulties and developing a plan to resolve it. Rolfe (2014) subscribes to these views and similarly states that reflection is not just about thinking but is also an active endeavour that involves considering and trying something new, in line with our evolving skills and knowledge, and reviewing to determine the extent of its success. This understanding of reflection is also held by Annette who declared, “it's not just being reflective in and itself, but it's the action that follows as a result of that reflection, so, what am I going to do about it?”, a perspective reiterated by King et al. (2023) and Liu (2015).

In this research study, the participating teachers spoke of reflecting on their professional practices, noting both strengths and where there may be gaps in their knowledge or skills. The ability to self-evaluate their skills was a question posed to them during this project. The majority of the teachers, such as Marian and Elaine, spoke of it being something they either hope or believe they could do, and reflection and experience supports this, which is supported by Çimer et al. (2013). Liam spoke of being partly able to self-evaluate, however, he also believes the perspective of someone else would be very beneficial and something he would welcome as "no one is 100% honest with themselves at all times". Annette and Elaine also appreciated another person's perspective when evaluating their professional practices and the importance of reflective dialogue is emphasised in both Ontario's (Ministry of Education, 2021) and Scotland's induction programmes (EIS, 2020) as this can develop efficacy. Marian and Liam spoke about being self-critical and quickly identifying their flaws or instances that did not go well, as Philip noted, "there is a bit of a perfectionist in a lot of teachers." Relatedly, Philip spoke of now acknowledging his successes when evaluating his practices while Rachel spoke to yearning for someone, whether a colleague, school leader or inspector, not just to critique her practices but to validate what goes well within her classroom. On the other hand, Annette, who trained as a teacher in a different jurisdiction, has had a different experience with reflective practices from her Irish-trained counterparts. She spoke of the focus in her development during her probationary year to be about constantly evaluating her abilities, through reflection and in discussions with her mentors, and as a result self-evaluation is inherent to her teaching, "I'm constantly reflecting and thinking do I need to do better for me [professional practices] and for them [the students]." This concept of reflection being a skill which is learned and practised before one becomes proficient. Rachel also acknowledged it becomes an intrinsic part of teachers' professional practices and this recognised in the literature by Šarić and Šteh (2017), Liu et al. (2015), Lewis (2013) and Çimer et al. (2013).

Liam stated often that he would be self-aware and engage in reflection that viewed a difficult situation from different perspectives, as advocated for by Brookfield (1995) and these are noted to be effective reflective skills by Lewis (2013). Both Harry and Philip would also describe their reflective practices to include self-awareness and Harry also spoke about aligning his practices with his values and

beliefs, linking to a broader social context as advocated for by Šarić and Šteh (2017), Çimer et al. (2013) and Edwards and Thomas (2010). Participating teachers such as Laura, Elaine, Gabrielle, Liam and Liz spoke about engaging in more considered critical thinking if there is a problem or difficulty. They prioritise reflection when they need to understand the "why" of a particular situation or dilemma and allocate time for it. The Teaching Council in the *Cosán* framework (2016) advocates for time to reflect, however, according to the participants this guidance to prioritise reflective practices has not occurred in practice settings. The predicament of time and reflection will be further examined in the following section.

Throughout this research study, the participating teachers demonstrated that though their engagement and reflective skills may vary, as Šarić and Šteh (2017) also observed, they all value reflective practices, as noted in one of the focus groups by Liam, "I really don't think how anyone could improve in any aspect of their careers, in any discipline, you know? You need to reflect on decisions made and how you've handled something in order to improve further." This was reiterated by Gabrielle who declared,

> *if you don't do it [reflection] on your own practice and your own learning, you're never going to actually improve, you're just going to stay in your own rut, you know, in your own kind of rigid teaching practices and not change and not upskill and not improve. And then your children's learning doesn't improve either.*

The participating teachers spoke of reflective practices allowing them to discern the student's level of engagement, enjoyment and attainment in lessons, as described by Nora, "It makes you kind of see what you shouldn't be doing and what you should be doing and what I would do differently if I could" and this evaluative component to reflection was noted by King (2014). They also discussed how reflective practices can assist them in realising where there are weaknesses or gaps in their practices and to engage in TPL to meet this need, as Yvonne acknowledged about TPL she partakes in, "I have seen a need for it somewhere, at some stage along the way." Engaging in reflection has led to some of the participants, such as Laura, to endeavour to challenge their teaching practices, as she declared, "nothing is ever going to be perfect, but you're all the time pushing and refining and changing and

altering and strengthening." Many of the participants discussed reflection as being an individual endeavour but it can be argued a sociocultural lens mediates this as teachers are influenced by their social, cultural and historical contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As illustrated in this section, reflective practices can motivate teachers to take action and follow up with a TPL activity, for as Korthagen (2017) declared, motivation is an essential part of the teaching profession. Reflecting on professional practices has the potential to make TPL purposeful, as there is an identified focus, and it can lead to transformative practices if the TPL engaged with becomes enacted, experiences which Liz, Gabrielle and Harry described and affirmed by King et al. (2023).

6.3.2 Difficulties with Reflective Practices

Both the literature review of this study and the previous section, outlined numerous benefits that reflective practices can bring to teachers' professional practices but along with these advantages there are also drawbacks which the teacher participants in this study identified.

One difficulty some of the teacher participants noted was the ability to engage in reflective practices. The uncertainty regarding the intention of reflection and how to engage in it was summarised by Carrie who spoke of a monthly reflective sheet to be filled out in her school, "We haven't been given pointers so and I don't know to what extent the reflection is required and how deep are we to go on it" and this viewpoint emulated the thoughts of Korthagen (2014) that reflective practices may be perceived as vague by teachers and those of Šarić and Šteh (2017) who argued teachers are exhorted to reflect but not adequately trained nor given the time to do so. Many of the participants such as Liam, Liz, Laura and Rachel attested that they learned how to engage in reflective practices through formal, sustained TPL, such as post-graduate diplomas or Masters, and that reflection was not a significant part of their ITE. Reflection is now an integral part of ITE programmes in Ireland (Teaching Council, 2020) and this is further cultivated in the teacher induction programmes of Ireland (Teaching Council, 2015), however, this was not always the case (Leonard & Gleeson, 1999). As Rachel declared about reflective practices, "I was taught how to do it. If I wasn't taught how to do it I don't think I would be doing

it as effectively as it could be. I think it's a skill this word reflection." The idea of reflection being a skill that can be taught, developed and honed over time is posited by Lewis (2013) and Çimer et al. (2013). Some participants in this study used prompts to support their reflective practices, such as Annette who used the approach of "you were constantly in the mode of giving yourself a star and a wish", or Liz who utilises Rolf et al.'s (2001) approach, "What? So what? What is it? So, what is the problem is it a problem? And now what? What do I do next? So that would be my way of thinking" and Philip who has reflected using "I think and I feel statements." On the other hand, Liu (2015), Rolfe (2014), and Edwards and Thomas (2010) all warn against reducing reflection to a technical process with guidelines to follow to satisfy the expectation of reflective practices, but to creatively and subjectively reflect on the why of particular situations and to consider whether this aligns with our values. To engage in reflection at that level is multifaceted, time-consuming and can be challenging to our assumptions but it has the potential to lead to more sustained transformative practices, as attested to by Keay et al. (2019), Liu (2015) and Korthagen (2014). Keay et al. (2019) further believe that reflection is a self-organising process which enables teachers to sustain their professional development, as complexity theory illuminates (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014). Thus, the TPL engaged with becomes embedded and inherent to our professional practices. Reflective practices are an expected dimension of teachers' professional practices but the understanding of what it entails can be ambiguous, as asserted by Liu (2015) and Korthagen (2014). Gabrielle advanced this thought and referred to various connotations of reflective practices as she declared,

> *Like what is reflective practice? You know, it doesn't have to be us, sitting down and thinking deeply on our own in the classroom, you know, reflective practice can be chatting it out over a cup of coffee about what went well in station teaching today or what didn't go well. So, I suppose there's different areas of reflection, like you can do journalling or you can think amongst your own thoughts.*

A further problem with reflective practices some of the participating teachers spoke about in this research project was the propensity for teachers to focus on the negative and to berate themselves. This experience was described by Philip, "I tried

this and it went wrong. But, I suppose, I, probably like many people, particularly in teaching, generally focus on the part that didn't go well"; Laura, "You go away feeling, Ohh, God, I don't have a clue here. I'm a failure as a teacher. I have so much to learn. I have so much to do"; and Rachel "I felt a bit crap afterwards and that's the vulnerability that you'd be talking about. I was like, why didn't I think of that? Do you know, or why haven't I done that before? And she is a better teacher than me. You know, this little voice in your head." This self-doubt is recognised by Šarić and Šteh (2017) and Korthagen (2014) as a difficulty with reflection as some people may be more inclined to ruminate rather than being open-minded and seeking solutions and they both also consider the need to focus on positive, creative experiences. This was appreciated by Laura, Philip and Rachel who all acknowledged positive experiences when reflecting, as Philip stated "celebrating the successes as well." Carrie spoke of a platform within her school that further validates successful professional practices whereby at staff meetings, colleagues share instances of what went well to change the narrative so that "it's not just all doom and gloom".

Finally, another difficulty with engaging in reflective practices, which many of the participants recognised in this study, was time, or more so, the need for it. Gabrielle encapsulated this by stating, "as teachers, we don't normally have the time to sit down and go how'd that lesson go now? Where are the areas that we need to improve on as a staff or for teacher professional learning?" Elaine also spoke about the need to take time to reflect on teaching, "I suppose, like every teacher does, in the moment, like you're making decisions all day long and but taking time outside of that to maybe look at what's happening in the classroom and thinking about the why" and her viewpoint mirrors Schön's reflective model (1983) of reflection in action and reflection on action. Carrie and Hannah both spoke of having a time constraint when reflecting. Carrie spoke about the importance of reflecting close to the time of the instance so the experience is fresh in the mind, as advocated for by Mohamed et al. (2022). Hannah, on the other hand, is discouraged from engaging in reflection without a purpose or actionable conclusion which is a viewpoint promoted for by Mohamed et al. (2022) and Antoniou and Kyriakides (2013). This thought was furthered by Annette who spoke of her recent experience of not prioritising her reflective practices, due to various personal and professional reasons, leading to her feeling a disconnect with her professional practices and thus

not engaging in purposeful TPL. This viewpoint is echoed by Keay et al. (2019) who noted that without reflective practices, TPL becomes less meaningful and time, which is already at a premium in the teaching profession, is squandered. Keay et al. (2019) further suggest that without reflection, teaching practices become stagnant and this point was reiterated by Rachel, "if you don't give yourself the time to actually look back on the day and reflect on it then you're going to go back in the next day and doing the same thing everyday." This is also reflective of Dewey's "reflection on action" (1983) and Greene's (1984) and Hobbiss et al.'s (2021) beliefs that it is necessary at times to take a moment and be cognisant of actions rather than proceed in our teaching practices through routine, leading to habit formation. However, Šarić and Šteh (2017) warn against presuming that teachers will readily prioritise time for reflective practices in their everyday practices, and this is reiterated by Gabrielle who spoke of this struggle, "We don't have time normally to do that but there is huge importance on it." Principals can support reflective practices by allocating time for it and supporting it (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006) and, as noted in the previous section, the Teaching Council (2016) promotes the concept of time being prioritised for teachers to reflect.

6.3.3 Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner and its Relationship with Teacher Identity

The participants in this study observed the link between reflective practices and teacher identity, as attested by Suarez and McGrath (2022). Annette voiced having a very solid knowledge of herself as a professional, reflective teaching practitioner and also described her intention to remain engaged in her career through reflective practices. She spoke enthusiastically about her formative years as a teacher, where reflective practices were central to the process and how these experiences have led her to having this strong professional identity today. The influence of formative years in the construction of a teacher's identity is supported by Suarez and McGrath (2022) and Flores and Day (2006). Rachel also declared how reflective practices have led to her growing in confidence as a teacher and as a result, she has a strong professional identity and is very motivated in and committed to her career and this viewpoint is substantiated by Suarez and McGrath (2022) and Tonna and Shanks (2017). Philip depicted how, in his reflections, he has mused about how he has

changed as a teacher over his career and he can track this development by noting approaches or theories of education he was influenced by which he implemented at certain times. This viewpoint echoes Korthagen's (2014) level of "beliefs" in his model of levels of reflection. Within this model of reflection, there are also layers of reflection concerning professional identity and mission which Harry expressed he gave much consideration to as he spoke ardently about why he became a teacher and principal. Liam described engaging in reflective practices to be aware of not only his professional strengths but also his weaknesses and how to mitigate them. It is not easy to be this honest with and critique oneself in reflective practices and both Rachel and Gabrielle alluded to reflection being difficult for this reason, as attested to by Keay et al. (2019) and Šarić and Šteh (2017) and furthered by Flores and Day (2006) who discussed the vulnerability experienced by teachers when their professional identity is challenged.

Throughout this research, the teacher participants described varying levels of engagement with reflection; some spoke of it being an inherent part of their professional practices, while others spoke of having to work on engaging with reflective practices. As demonstrated in this section, through engaging with reflective practices, an awareness of the identity of self as a teaching professional is augmented, which can enhance teachers' ability to achieve agency (Vähäsantanen, 2015) and this will be examined further in Chapter 7. Personal, individual reflections are not the only type to influence the construction and deconstruction of teacher identities but collaborative reflections can also shape these (Suarez & McGrath, 2022) and this will be further explored in the following section.

6.4 Collaborative reflection

Collaborative reflection is a deeper, transformative model of collaboration (Kennedy, 2011). It can be challenging to attain as relationships, culture, leadership, trust, and open-mindedness on the parts of those engaging need to confluence to facilitate its implementation (Šarić & Šteh, 2017). The Teaching Council, in the *Cosán* framework (2016), note that reflection can be an individual or collaborative practice

and there is a place for both, although they do advocate for collaborative reflection as an approach to foster transformative TPL. The participants' understanding of and views on collaborative reflection will be examined in this section.

6.4.1 Understanding of collaborative reflection

The teachers who participated in this study were all asked about collaborative reflection and their responses demonstrated varied understandings of what it is and what it entails. Their discussions mirrored their thoughts on collaborative practices and reaffirmed Kennedy's (2011) stance that collaborative practices can range from impromptu meetings to more formal, organised activities. Hannah spoke of her and her colleague grabbing time in the corridor to reflect with each other, while Elaine, albeit in a larger school, spoke of a culture which is not conducive to collaborative practices as these are not prioritised by the school leadership, "there's just not really a culture of it, like, I mean, people do collaborate, but there's nothing kind of formally in place." Interestingly, Harry, at the commencement of this research study, believed informal collaboration took precedence in his school as the culture and the small size of the staff enabled colleagues to collaborate informally with each other on job-embedded concerns. However, by the last interview, Harry's position had shifted and he had found himself, in his role of principal, beginning to bring to the fore collaborative reflection in staff meetings, while attending to TPL, "So, as a school leader, it's absolutely got me thinking about having a more organised approach to the provision of CPD within the school" which emulates an approach described by Dogan et al. (2019). Remarkably, Gabrielle did not initially recognise the collaborative practices in her school as collaborative reflection, yet, she illustrated a situation which could be deemed as such. In a focus group, she referred to an audit of skillsets her SEN team had been undertaking with the intention of noting gaps and engaging in TPL as a team to meet these, and this emulates viewpoints lauded by Dogan et al. (2019) and Çimer et al. (2013). Similar to Gabrielle, Rachel spoke of collaborative reflection within a small-scale community of practice within her school, amongst her job-sharing partner and special education teacher, which she asserts contributed to the development of her professional practices, "It's improved my teaching because you're conscious and that's where

professional development comes in." She believed this occurred as it was a trusting, safe space where different perspectives and experiences accumulated to devise best practices in their teaching, as attested to by Dogan et al. (2019). Nora spoke about the principal in her school putting a structure in place to create time and space for teachers working at the same level to engage in collaborative reflection and this advances King et al.'s (2023) and Antoniou and Kyriakides (2013) research on the need for school leaders to promote collaboration.

One participant in this study, Liz, spoke emphatically on the potential of collaborative reflection and of being cognisant of fostering a culture which would be conducive to it, as advocated by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018),

> *We have really grasped this team teaching thing and how to do it effectively and that you must collaborate and there has to be time for collaboration and there has to be, what now etc. So we would be coming to reflective practice with that very solid base of trust and collaboration and ease with each other, you know, and I would say that we have very strong working relationships, but we work at our working relationships.*

Liam and Harry spoke further about being aware of their schools' cultures and its impact on collaborative reflection and how they, in their roles as principals, can influence this. Liam discussed how collaboration has the potential to lead to capacity building amongst staff, "it does depend on the individual, but also, I feel by empowering others within the staff to have their opinions you definitely probably gain a bit more as well"; while Harry stated, "if people aren't open to being frank and, you know, being authentic in discussion with each other" then the impact it would have on their teaching, and, thus, their students' learning would be diminished. This echoes Annette's sentiment on the necessity for open-mindedness and equity amongst staff to enhance collaborative reflection, "every idea is useful. They may not all be taken on board, but every idea is important. It's listened to…. within weekly staff meetings, nobody felt as if their voice couldn't be heard." The necessity of leaders supporting a dynamic, collaborative culture is also promoted by Moynihan and O'Donovan (2021) and Servage (2008) and is something Liz has tried to emulate

> *it does take a lot of time and effort to get collaboration and I think you have to be careful even in things like staff meetings that every voice is heard and that people get a chance like some people have their answer ready before the meeting. Some people need time to reflect. So you do need to find a way to capture every voice and for every voice to feel they have been captured. […] But if we could engage in that collaborative process of actually all contributing to it before it goes out, you know, and just sitting around the table and hashing that out, like, I think that would be very powerful. And as a staff as well, you would see the value of it as well because you were there to engage in the process of creating it.*

Through dialogic, collaborative practices (Fraser et al., 2007), like the examples given above, a socio-cultural interpretation of transformative TPL can be further advanced as individual teachers collectively make informed, situated decisions to improve teaching and learning within their schools.

6.4.2 Collaborative Reflection to Support National Policy

As indicated in the literature review chapter, schools in Ireland are required to engage in a school self-evaluation [SSE] process (Department of Education, 2022a) by utilising the "Looking at our Schools Framework" [LAOS] (Department of Education, 2022b). This framework encourages schools to appraise the learning, teaching, leadership and management practices in their schools according to a set of standards (Department of Education, 2022a) and to then put a school improvement plan [SIP] in place to enhance the school's professional practices through reflective, collaborative practices and to harness *Cosán* to inform their SIP. In this research project, some participants spoke of employing collaborative, reflective practices as part of the SSE process as Philip attested "it's all very good with collaborative practices and I think it will feed into the school self-evaluation as well because you're identifying the needs of the school." Liz spoke in the interviews and focus group about how she is harnessing the SSE process to foster collaborative reflection amongst her staff and using Rolf et al.'s (2001) reflective framework as a catalyst, "Everybody's off thinking about that at the moment [….] and we're feeding

back at the next meeting […] So that's going to be teacher led." Liz's consideration of how to employ the SSE process to promote collaborative reflective practices echoes the recommendations of Barnett and O'Mahony (2006) in furthering a reflective culture within schools. Furthermore, her approach of using the principles of *Cosán* along with the LAOS framework (Department of Education, 2022a) to initiate transformative TPL resonates with Barron et al.'s (2023) viewpoint.

Alongside internal evaluations of professional practices, some of the participants spoke of external evaluations by the inspectorate, leading to augmented reflective collaboration amongst their work colleagues. Annette described how a recent school inspection instigated collaboration across the school, "So I saw a lot of collaboration and late nights those two weeks but as for every other time of the year, maybe not so much. But it's just interesting to show how much of it could be done". These practices could also be perceived as "managed professionalism" (Barron et al., 2023) as they are not autonomous but influenced by the inspectorate. Annette welcomed the inspectorate's visit as she deemed it an affirming, invigorating experience within which she could gauge her practices and improve them for the benefit of her students, "I'm taking on board that feedback because that was really crucial feedback for me". This school inspection not only boosted collaboration amongst the staff and led to more effective practices for Annette but it also led to more professional dialogue amongst the staff, "it kind of sparks a little bit of conversation amongst the staff". Nevertheless, these professional conversations are not easy, as Gabrielle attested to when she described her school's recent experience of a discouraging inspection in a curricular area and this resonates with the viewpoint of Šarić and Šteh (2017). She explained that in their collaborative reflection, after the inspector's feedback, the teachers found it difficult to collaboratively reflect as a staff as they had to reveal flaws in their practices which evokes vulnerability, "So it's something that we've had to reflect on in the last year and that has been hard you know? It's hard when people expose weaknesses in the school and you have to sit down and go, this is actually really hard". Gabrielle also conveyed that having colleagues who are willing to be brave and vulnerable supports others to act in a similar manner, "Some people are uncomfortable with it [collaborative reflection], but when they see yourself bearing your soul, then they feel like it's OK for them to bear their soul as well." Liz too spoke

of harnessing the confidence and experience of more senior members of staff to instigate and model collaborative reflection at meetings,

> *I suppose, like, in every staff, your most junior members of staff are slow to expose a gap in their practice or admit that something they did was an unmitigated disaster. Whereas I would have people on staff who were coming from, you know, more than 20 years' experience so they're very confident in themselves and I suppose we would have a very strong working relationship with a number of them, so they wouldn't have any qualms about saying hands up that just didn't work for me, I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know where to go from here, I'll take any suggestions. So, we'd be trying to engender that kind of an atmosphere at a meeting as well.*

This study builds on existing literature (Brennan & Gorman, 2023; Dogan et al., 2019; Kennedy, 2014) and asserts that these collaborative, reflective dialogues are professional learning at its prime as it leads to transformative practices and improvements in school culture.

6.4.3 Difficulties with Collaborative Reflection

The previous sections on collaborative practices and reflective practices outlined a range of difficulties with each of these and collaborative reflection is no different as a conducive culture and enabling leadership is necessary for it to succeed. Meaningful collaboration can be challenging to introduce and sustain (Brodie, 2019) and this professional learning process is a complex endeavour necessitating various intricate and unpredictable dynamic parts to confluence and engender the culture to cultivate it, which complexity theory can inform (Keay et al., 2019). Collaborative reflection is viewed as a transformative approach to TPL (King et al., 2023; Dogan et al., 2019; Liu, 2015); however, as ascertained previously in this chapter, the participants' appreciation of what it essentially is differs. This can be problematic as the varied understandings of collaborative reflection detract from its value and potential, unless it is enacted properly, as surmised by Vangrieken et al. (2015) and Kennedy (2011) when discussing the spectrum of collaborative practices. Liz

signified this difficulty when she contended that collaboration was not perceived as a valued, positive practice in some schools. Elaine also referred to this and inferred its complexity when she spoke about teachers potentially needing training in how to collaborate effectively with each other as "not everybody is very good at it."

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed and analysed the findings of the second research question: *Can the development of collaborative reflective practices in schools enhance the positive impact of TPL?* As illustrated here, this research determined that collaborative reflective practices can be an engaging, motivating and transforming approach to TPL, as long as several factors such as clarity in understanding of what reflective practices, collaborative practices and reflective collaboration actually are, teachers are given the time, structures, platforms and experience to engage in these practices, the leadership and culture of the school is conducive to them and teachers' mindsets are open, curious and willing to take risks and engage in these practices.

Recommendations pertaining to the development of collaborative, reflective cultures, and informed by this chapter, will be offered in the final chapter of this study, *Conclusions, Recommendations and Final Reflections*. In the next chapter, I will present and discuss my findings on the research question, *Can* Cosán *be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency?*

Chapter 7

Findings and Discussion on Theme IV:

The potential ability of *Cosán* to be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and, thus, promote teacher agency

7.1 Introduction

This research project has sought approaches to support primary teachers in Ireland to engage with TPL which leads to transformative practices. It also investigated factors which support or inhibit primary teachers' ability to engage in transformative TPL and examined if collaborative reflection could further enable transformative TPL. This last analysis chapter examines the research participants' viewpoints regarding agency, what conditions lead to it, how collective agency can emerge through collaborative practices and the importance of teacher identity in supporting the progressive achievement of teacher agency. Finally, the potential of *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016) to assist teachers in achieving agency when they engage with its principles was investigated.

7.2 Teacher Agency

7.2.1 Overview

Teacher agency is a key factor for transformative TPL to occur (King et al., 2023; Imants & van der Wal, 2020; Lai et al., 2016; Vähäsantanen, 2015). This study adopts an ecological view of agency, which sees it as shaped by the interaction of individual efforts, available resources, and contextual/structural factors in unique situations, as espoused by Biesta et al. (2017), Priestley et al. (2015a) and Emirbayer and Mische (1998). Agency is understood as having three dimensions

- Contextual (influenced by environment),
- Relational (shaped by interactions with others), and

- Temporal (linked to the past, present, and future) (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Importantly, teacher agency and transformative TPL can be mutually reinforcing, for as one develops, it can support the growth of the other (Boylan et al., 2023; Vähäsantanen, 2015).

7.2.2 Capacity of Individual Teacher

Teacher agency can enable teachers to choose and make judgement calls about their professional practices, whether when supporting their students' learning, or when working towards the enactment of their beliefs and values in an ecological approach (Priestley et al., 2015c). The research participants discussed instances and factors that support teachers' capacity and can determine the achievement of agency, as illustrated in this section.

Teachers' pedagogical knowledge, professional skillset and understanding lead to teachers having the ability to critically make decisions about their professional practices through which teacher agency can emerge (Leijin et al., 2022; Verástegui Martínez & Úbeda, 2022; Cooper et al., 2020). Timperley et al. (2007) and Ó Breacháin (2023) concur and both refer to teachers' need to access and understand the content, theory and knowledge before teachers can transform their practice, improve self-efficacy and become agentic. There is an evident need to engage in professional development to enhance teacher knowledge, skills and aptitudes which can nurture agency (Ó Breacháin, 2023). This was noted by participants such as Elaine, Gabrielle and Rachel and articulated by Liz who stated,

> *I think they'll have to put in place […] more avenues for teachers to explore their own learning because you can't really be agentic unless you have some knowledge or understanding of some theories you want to try out. Like, you can't be agentic without new ideas. So, where are you going to pick up the new ideas? You have to you have to be exposed to them.*

Interestingly, Yvonne contended that teachers need to be provided with a baseline of knowledge before they can become agentic,

> *Maybe people who are running courses will feel well, we're professionals, we should take from it what we want to take from it, but I kind of feel will start with the absolute must you know, here's what must be achieved in the curriculum and we will, as professionals, build and put our own spin on it. But don't give me a course where you're just, you know, giving me all these lovely peripheral stuff and really staying away from the absolute nitty gritty of the content.*

The new Irish primary curriculum (Department of Education 2023a) promotes teachers as agentic in applying the curriculum to suit their classes' abilities, needs and contexts. Historically, primary teachers in Ireland were perceived as curriculum implementers (Walsh, 2018) rather than having the autonomy and agency to negotiate and renegotiate the curriculum, contingent on the context within they teach. However, in implementing the new curriculum (Department of Education 2023a) it may be queried whether teachers are supported in developing capacity to achieve agency and have opportunities to explore and discuss this.

Teachers' self-efficacy is fostered as they develop their professional knowledge and competency (Caena, 2011) and this, in turn, enhances the achievement of agency (Lin et al., 2022; Heikonen et al., 2020). This was reiterated by Rachel who remarked, "if training or development or a course gives you confidence and, I suppose, kind of increases your self-efficacy then that's a good course or a good thing to enter into". The belief in one's self-efficacy is cultivated through engaging with TPL and this can lead to transformative practices (OECD, 2019b), as Gabrielle stated,

> *When I went back to school [after a postgrad] I was going back armed with a lot of knowledge and a lot more information about inclusion and how to improve the culture and just different practices that I tried to impart to the other SET teachers.*

This was also exemplified by Marian who spoke of her principal encouraging her and describing her teaching practices as "innovative"; however, she acknowledged that she did not possess the self-efficacy to recognise this, which inhibited her achievement of teacher agency. Nevertheless, having engaged in TPL, Marian spoke of a change in her self-efficacy which enabled her to enact change, "I came to realise

I was a practitioner and I can do it my way". Self-efficacy develops confidence in professional practice leading to further engagement in learning and cultivating agency (Brodie, 2019). This connection between TPL and confidence was acknowledged by Rachel who noted, "by making ourselves better, teachers more knowledgeable, teachers more confident, it's the kids that are going to benefit from it". This was expanded on by Elaine who noted the emergence of teacher agency when competency, confidence and self-efficacy converge,

> *You need confidence, you need knowledge, content knowledge. You can have one without the other but that's not great. So you do need both. You need to know what you're doing, ultimately. And that you believe that you know what you're doing. So, I think you need to know what's relevant in the curriculum, to know what approaches are most effective, and then you need the belief and the confidence to know you can do your own thing without relying on texts.*

The mindset of teachers is another factor within a teacher's capacity in their achievement of agency (Stoll, 2020) as teacher agency has not only cognitive and behavioural aspects but an emotional dimesion as well (Hökkä, 2017b; Liu et al., 2016), and as acknowledged by the teacher participants. Participants, such as Laura, Elaine, Harry, Rachel, Philip, Carrie and Liam all spoke of teachers needing various positive dispositions such as flexibility, innovation, proactiveness, having a growth mindset or integrity and being a lifelong learner to engage in TPL meaningfully and thus leading to the emergence of agency. This was observed by Hannah, "I think they need to be allowed to be organised, creative and flexible without necessarily being placed into a straitjacket which directs them in a particular shape or whatever the current colour trend is that comes down from on high" and furthered by Liz who pronounced,

> *We need to be flexible. So in order to be flexible then we need to be more knowledgeable and we need to be more aware of new approaches, of best approaches, of other people's practices- how did that work for them and in that context? Can we move their context into our context and work what they have in our context? So I think it's essential. I'm a big believer in lifelong learning. I'm a big believer*

> *in upskilling, up-training and keeping things fresh. So yes, I do believe in CPD. I do believe in further education for teachers.*

The ability to observe a difficulty and have the agency to orient one's perspective towards the future, to be innovative and break routines to remedy this, is described by Emirbayer and Mische (1998). Gabrielle portrayed this capacity when she spoke of, "people who want it to happen, people who want to change something or who want to improve something or who wants to solve a problem". Nonetheless, Gabrielle also spoke about how this achievement of agency could be hindered due to contextual factors, as section 7.2.4 will demonstrate.

A teacher's capacity to flourish is linked to teacher motivation (Stoll, 2020) and this supports teacher agency as when teachers are intrinsically motivated they are more likely to engage in transformative practices as a result of TPL (Leijin et al., 2022; Kauppinen et al., 2020). This was demonstrated by Rachel who, after completing a post graduate course in SEN, claimed,

> *I became probably the best SET teacher that I was going to be, as it gave me all the knowledge, all the skills, fair enough, but it gave me that motivation, that desire, that absolute fire inside me to go in and know I'm going to do my job and I'm going to ace it today.*

Motivation can be a cause-and-effect conundrum as Carrie indicated,

> *I think CPD is motivating, but I think you have to be motivated to do CPD. And so I'm not exactly sure which comes first but I would say in general that doing CPD does motivate because I think, depending on what you do, it can either kind of affirm what you believe or what you've been practising or what you've been trying to get a handle on or it can give you a new way of looking at things.*

Furthermore, the duality of the extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions of motivation can be nuanced with respect to TPL (Boeskens et al., 2020; McMillan et al., 2016; Pyhältö, et al., 2015); nevertheless, the need to balance both, while fostering an environment to strengthen intrinsic motivation can promote agency (Boeskens et al., 2020). Liam and Hannah both stated that intrinsically motivated teachers tend to engage further with TPL, and this can lead to teachers achieving agency, as Liam

remarked, “[for agency to emerge] I suppose there has to be intrinsic motivation anyway within them, I suppose motivation to improve and motivation to work at a high standard.” The advantage of a positive disposition towards TPL is noted to be advantageous (Timperley et al., 2007) and, when changes enacted positively support professional practices, teachers are further motivated to engage again in TPL (King, 2016). This was recognised by Harry and further commented on by Liz, “constantly change your perspective, change your lens, do something different, learn a new way, bring in a new thing, and that's how you stay motivated and that's how you stay fresh. And that's how you stay liking what you're doing.” This positive cycle supports Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998, p. 970) “chordal triad of agency” which, as Priestley et al. (2015a) explained, is a temporal view of agency being achieved when, based on past experiences, teachers take deliberate actions in the present, influencing their future outcomes in meaningful ways, which in turn enhances overall motivation towards achieving these desired outcomes.

As elucidated in chapter 6 of this research, the role of reflection is imperative to teachers’ capacity building (Keay et al., 2019) and this augments their capacity to achieve agency (Boylan et al., 2023; Heikonen et al., 2020; Kauppinen et al., 2020). This was recognised by Elaine who affirmed, “I think the agency and the reflective practice have to go together. There's no point having agency if you're not reflecting on your practice.” Rolfe (2014) characterises reflection as not just thinking about something but as an active endeavour that involves trying something new, in line with evolving skills and knowledge, as Laura described when she discussed that as a result of her reflections she would be “pushing and refining and changing and altering and strengthening” her teaching practices. Biesta & Tedder (2007) further asserted that agency is achieved through reflective practices, as people shape responses to challenges and this perspective supports a constructivist theory of learning (Flaherty & Sagas, 2021). This practice was not only reflected in Laura’s quote above but also in Gabrielle’s experience of her professional development, “I think that as the more TPL you do it, the more self-worth you kind of get of yourself and you’ve more agentic action and that you feel empowered that you can change things inside your school”.

Kramer (2018) acknowledges that reflection is a crucial practice to support the achievement of agency but furthers this argument by asserting that collaborative reflection, as depicted in section 6.4 of this study, augments agency and can have a transformative effect on professional practices. The following section will explore collective agency and its promotion.



Figure 7.1. Enhancers for the Individual Capacity from which Agency can Emerge

7.2.3 Collective Agency

As discussed in the previous findings Chapters 4 and 6, engaging in situated, workplace learning and collaborative reflection with colleagues not only enhances TPL but may also lead to capacity building and transformative practices and a similar phenomenon is identified with teacher agency (Bellibas et al., 2020; Priestley & Drew, 2019). Agency is "possible only within social structure" (Edwards & Thomas, 2010, p. 407) and this social aspect to agency (Vähäsantanen, 2015) demonstrates the interdependence between collective agency and the social context within which

teachers are working, which socio-culturalism supports (Leijin et al., 2022; Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Collective agency can be understood as a group recognising their ability to exercise influence in their context (Hökkä et al., 2017a). The significance of collective agency in fostering a culture where teachers influence professional practices which lead to school improvement and further engagement in TPL (Bellibas et al., 2020; Priestley et al., 2015a) was appreciated by some of the participants of this research. This was recognised by Liz, "I do think that a community of collaboration is important for teacher agency" and further illuminated by Elaine,

> *You have to have the knowledge and then you have to have the ability to be reflective on your own practice and you have to look at that collaboration element as well. You have to be able to work with the other teachers in your school. You know there's no point saying- well, I'll close my door and I do whatever I want and that's me being agentic. It has to work within the school context and the wider context as well.*

A collaborative approach, within the unique contexts of schools, not only promotes agency but could also lead to sustainable, impactful TPL as interested colleagues could assemble to further adapt and develop professional practices, if the school culture is conducive, as acknowledged by Liam, "everyone will kind of be involved in it [decision making] and gives everyone kind of a bit more empowerment within the job, that it's not just coming from the top" and Gabrielle asserted, "I think it [TPL] empowers them, and then you have to try and spread that amongst the school if you want to make progress." These viewpoints reiterate Boeskens et al.'s (2020) realisation for the need to change the perspective from TPL cultivating individual teacher capacity and agency to collective capacity and agency. This viewpoint is echoed by Hökkä et al. (2017a) and Liz reflected this stance when she voiced,

> *Any teacher who undertakes any course or any level of study will end up with more knowledge, more ability to express and interpret what they have learned, and then that will give them more scope within the classroom to effect their teaching and therefore the learning of*

the students in front of them. And then that has scope to affect teachers outside of the classroom.

Teacher agency, whether collective or individual, is dependent not only on the capacity of the teacher(s) but also on the ecological conditions characterising school settings which the following section will elucidate.

7.2.4 Ecological Conditions

As portrayed, this research project is utilising the ecological perspective of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Biesta et al., 2017; Priestley et al., 2015a; Biesta & Tedder, 2007) which conceives of agency as not a capacity nor as a quality an individual can possess, but rather, agency progressively emerges and can be achieved when people's capacities, available resources and other contextual factors converge in unique situations. These resources and factors are often recognised as being at the meso-level of the context (Pantić et al., 2022) and the teacher participants of this research concurred with this belief when they noted various ecological conditions which they believed either facilitated or hindered their ability to achieve agency, as this section will illustrate.

Achieving agency is contingent on the school's culture (Pantić et al., 2022; Bartell et al., 2019; Etelapelto et al., 2013) and the research participants were in agreement, as Gabrielle voiced, "it's the culture and the school that you're in and it's the colleagues that you're with […] that inspire you." Time is also necessary to nurture the development of relationships within schools so a culture of trust and collegiality is established which leads to teacher agency (Boylan et al., 2023; King & Holland, 2022) and this resonates within Gabrielle's statement when she declared, "Start to make it become part of the culture but slow and steady. I'd say, it will definitely get there but it just takes time." Agency is also nurtured if the social context of the school fosters collaboration and a positive, collegial culture (Bartell et al., 2019; Biesta et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2016) as Harry declared, "but it needs to be a safe environment where teachers feel valued and feel that they can be honest and also that they know that they'll be challenged on it, but it's OK to be challenged." Philip also recognised this when he maintained that for agency to be promoted in a school

what was necessary was, “I suppose number one a culture within the school that allows teachers to identify their specific needs and are given the opportunity to develop those**.”** As elucidated within this study, in the literature review chapter and further contended in chapter 5 on the factors which can support transformative TPL, school culture is influenced and shaped by school leadership (Visone et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2008). Furthermore, teacher agency mediates the efforts of school principals to support TPL within school contexts (Liu et al., 2016). The three principal participants all acknowledged the role they had in fostering this culture, as Liz affirmed,

> *I'm always striving for them to be the best teachers they can be and, you know, to be confident and to develop and to what do we do next and how can we move this and where do we go next with it.*

Harry concurred with this perspective when he asserted, “if you give them [the staff], certainly autonomy, if you give them agency, if you give them a bit of authority, you get the best out of them” and he provided the example,

> *I just allowed the teachers to lead away with what they were telling me, what they were doing and how they were working. I went in to look at it myself but I left it up to them, I gave them the agency and gave them, you know, the responsibility.*

On the other hand, Harry discerned that, as a principal, he felt his agency and autonomy was stymied due to,

> *I do feel that what is hindering teachers is that tremendous level of scrutiny. You never know when you're going to get an incidental* [an unannounced visitation from a member of the school inspectorate] *and when you are under that restriction of massive scrutiny, it naturally hobbles your ability to innovate, to authentically innovate, both in your engagement with staff and with children.*

The teacher participants acknowledged the role leadership plays in promoting teacher agency, as Annette declared, “I think you have to have a management as well that would be supportive of it [agency], you know, that would encourage you to do that” and Carrie added, “there is some sort of leeway for people that they're

trusted as professionals and they know what they're doing." Elaine also determined that leadership was a significant factor in the emergence of agency, "there's other principals who trust you to try new things and to do your own thing and to play to your strengths but others might be more um, dictorial maybe." Gabrielle expanded on this when she contended,

> *The senior management might be quite strict and they might not give teachers the free range to use their own initiative or to bring in new practices that they might have learned or, you know, to change their teaching. It takes a special type of principal to allow you to do that.*

Teachers who have autonomy and are motivated to enhance their practices, as they see benefits which will impact their teaching, tend to engage willingly in TPL (Timperley et al., 2007) and, in doing so, they knowingly change the trajectory of their future practices (Priestley et al., 2015a; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The importance of autonomy for teachers' TPL is regarded by Postholm (2012) and was recognised by Carrie who contended, "I think you certainly have autonomy over the type of teacher that you are and the type of work that you do and how you want to develop your teaching or enhance your teaching." Carrie reiterated this when she asserted,

> *I suppose to feel that you have agency, you need to feel a sense of control in some ways. You know, that you are able, that you can teach your class in the way that you see fit, depending on every classroom as each context is different. So, I suppose that's about being given that freedom to do that. So, while there might be policies or procedures everybody has a little bit of leeway in how that is implemented either in your classroom or in your school.*

Hannah spoke about having autonomy and agency over her teaching practices and pointed to the Department of Education (2021b) guidelines which promote these, "the guidance on preparation for a teaching and learning allows me the autonomy I've always exercised. And I can always point to that and say actually this is how I'm choosing to do it. This is me being agentic." In contrast to teachers having the autonomy to make decisions about their professional practices and development

which in turn cultivates teacher agency, three participants spoke of feeling frustrated professionally as, while they had agency, they were inhibited in practising their agency, they did not have much autonomy and felt their opinions were not heeded, due to poor school leadership, as Elaine conceded, “it can be very constraining and at times, you have to be quite determined to push against that, to be OK with, say, “causing trouble”. But that's confidence again. You need confidence to be able to question things.” Buchanan (2015) and Etelapelto et al. (2013) both acknowledge that agency can be practiced when teachers “push back” against practices or policies they disagree with while Biesta et al. (2017) suggest that teachers can experience agency and constraint simultaneously, in response to ecological conditions, and teachers exercise this by achieving and practising agency within their classroom, while feeling powerless and less agentic within their school context, which is representative of the spatial dimension of agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). This was demonstrated by Elaine and Annette, as Elaine illustrated,

> *The use of autonomy, so let me appreciate their [the students’] learning. So I think that side of teaching really appeals to me, like being able to bring the class in whatever direction you want to, but also you know that you can follow their lead and you know let things work out. Every day is different. You never get bored.*

Time is another factor denoted in the literature which could facilitate or inhibit teacher agency (Brodie, 2019), as Hannah remarked, “your agency is last because you don't have the autonomy of time”. Philip concurred with this and lamented the amount of time spent on initiatives and other outside influences which draw on teachers’ time, “the agentic teacher is down, as is teacher autonomy. If we don't have time to have a bit of autonomy, which can happen quite easily as well, you can't try things out.” Elaine noted that teachers need to be good with time management for teachers to become agentic, otherwise they could become overwhelmed with everything there is to do and “then you don't progress. So it’s easier to just go back to basics” and Nora remarked on the amount of paperwork which teachers have to do which again draws on time leaving less time to reflect, plan and achieve agency. Time is needed for agency to emerge (Bartell et al., 2019) and to build on past experiences and understandings, as explained by the temporal

dimension to agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Gabrielle recognised this but noted the lack of time could be a difficulty as she asserted that for teachers, “having the time and the ability and setting aside time in a in a busy school to actually reflect on the practice and how to integrate that then and update our teaching can be a challenge.”

Priestley et al. (2015b) noted the importance of time in the achievement of agency as it is temporally constructed and dialogically situated, as recognised by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), yet, included the significance of resources too. Resources which can facilitate teacher agency can be recognised as material (Priestley et al., 2015b; Etelapelto et al., 2013) such as, books, equipment, the curriculum and school facilities, or can be human which would include the expertise, knowledge and experience of the school community (Brodie, 2019; Kauppinen et al., 2020), again encompassing a socio-cultural approach to learning (van der Zwet et al., 2011; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Annette and Nora both spoke about how a lack of material resources resulted in them not progressing their teaching as they would have liked, while Carrie was pleased with how some courses provided practical resources which supported her ability to implement it herself afterwards. As mentioned, colleagues are a resource (Lipscombe et al., 2020) which can support teachers’ agentic practices, especially when collaboration takes place and everyone’s strengths are employed, as Philip affirmed, “we have our collaboration, but we also, I suppose, harness the uniqueness or the unique talents of all our teachers as well.” Annette also recognised this when she reiterated, “who's confident in math, who enjoys teaching that and who's going to run with it? You know, you're tapping into the resources that you have and your trust in those people too.” Another resource that can be inferred from the participants as supportive of teacher agency is the proximity and relationship a school would have with its local education centre. This was noted by Marian who, as previously contended in section 5.6.5 of this research study, appreciated how accessible professional learning could be when her school was very near to the local education centre which assisted in augmenting a proactive, collaborative culture towards TPL within her school. Philip also indicated how his engagement with not only local but more nationwide education centres through online engagement developed his professional practices and, thus, made

him more agentic and these encounters were also experienced by Elaine who recognised this as a turning point in her career.

The professional journey of the teacher was another condition which could enable the emergence of agency which the teacher participants discussed in this research and the significance of a teacher's career journey on their professional practices is recognised in the literature (Cooper et al., 2020; Priestley et al., 2015b; Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017; Postholm, 2012). This was voiced by Hannah who described how the stage of a teacher's professional journey can determine the extent to which they can engage in TPL, develop their professional practices and thus achieve agency,

> *Some of us are depending on where we are on a career path, we have more or less time to do these things, depending on our family circumstances or commitments and various other things. So there may be times when you could do a lot of CPD and then you'll have a period, probably quite lengthy if you've got small people, where you might do your summer course and that's all you can manage. And that's OK.*

Elaine echoed a similar career trajectory when she asserted,

> *Now I'm in the time of my life, in my career, where I can give it more. But that definitely has changed over time. I suppose, at the beginning of my career as well, I was in a space where, I was really enthusiastic and wanted to develop and knew there was so much to learn and then, you know, then I had periods that I had children and all those life things. So I suppose I have kind of come full circle in a way.*

Harry and Liz also acknowledged this and, in their roles as principals, felt they needed to recognise where their teacher staff were within their careers and support that, as Harry remarked, "it is an increasingly long career for many teachers. We all go through different stages in our lives." Gabrielle deliberated on how, as a result of her reflections on her teaching practices and being more intentional with her TPL, she has become more agentic over her career,

> *I think I was bobbing around just choosing anything, but now it's more strategic and sometimes you kind of have a journey mapped out in your head and you see where you want to go and you can choose TPL that will, you know, enhance your professional journey so it is more direct as opposed to meandering along and choosing anything.*

As examined in this section, the participants recognised many factors and resources which need to come together to support the achievement of agency. This was synthesised by Rachel who asserted that what was needed included,

> *school climate, the resources available to you, the time available to you. Leadership is a massive one there […] Definitely reflection. Definitely collaboration. Definitely communication. And definitely, the skill to adapt and to modify and to be flexible.*

A teacher's capacity and agency can be enhanced if there is an understanding of their teacher identity (Vähäsantanen, 2015; Flores & Day, 2006; Emirbayer & Mische 1998) and the following section will delve into this in detail.

7.3 Teacher Identity

A teacher's evolving identity is also linked to their career journey, as expounded in section 7.2.4, and to a teacher's life stage, as depicted in section 5.9, when the holistic view of the teacher was exploredOn the other hand, the research participants broadly agreed with the above theories and further developed their own thoughts on the evolvement of teacher identity and agency.

Many of the participants spoke of engaging in effective reflection, as elucidated in section 6.3.3 of this study, which made them aware of, not only their professional practices, but also their professional identity, as Liam remarked, "I suppose just reflecting really and being honest with yourself." Liz also described the actions of a colleague of hers who she would describe as agentic and she believed this was ue to being "very self-aware and very reflective." Reflective practice deepens teachers'

perspectives and understanding as they actively construct their own knowledge of the world (Heikkinen et al., 2012), while at the same time, the social contexts, interactions, and historical influences present in different settings shape what is learned (Rogoff & Lave, 1984). These experiences, in turn, contribute to the formation of teachers' professional identities, as explained through constructivist and socio-cultural perspectives (Hökkä et al., 2017a).

Similar to views expounded by Korthagen (2017) and Hökkä (2017a), Harry demonstrated a strong intuition regarding his identity and this was linked to the understanding of his belief and value system and how this resonated with his role as principal, as he asserted,

> *Different people have different priorities or different aspirations for their children. And, you know, maybe you learn after a certain length of the time not to impose your own sets of values on what families expect from you as a school and the service you're providing for children.*

He also believed he partly gained this insight as a result of a course he undertook which encouraged him to reflect and delve into his beliefs, values and identity and to bring these into his professional role, as he acknowledged, "it really got you to focus on what's your *reason d'etre* as a teacher or school principal." Carrie was another participant who revealed a perceptiveness into how her values shaped her professional identity when she declared,

> *I got into teaching because I always wanted to be a teacher and I wasn't always a teacher. I worked in the bank for a long time and I liked it, but it wasn't… And I now realise what the problem was. It didn't align with my values. So while I liked it and the money was good, it just wasn't me and all I ever wanted to be was a teacher.*

Some of the teacher participants, such as Yvonne, Rachel, Philip, Elaine and Nora were aware that their identity was culturally embedded (Buchanan, 2015; Day et al., 2006) and conceded their identity was partly due to others' perceptions of them, as Philip remarked, "Like I'd be really techie, you know I'd be the person that they come to." This "organisational identity" is negotiated within social settings (Hökkä

et al., 2017a, p.39) and Yvonne also discussed how this evolved when she stated, “I could be the go-to person for STEM in the school, maybe.” Teachers’ self-perception of identity as a professional is of significance and dependent on not only the socially constructed component of their identity but also on the stage of career a teacher is at (Admiraal & Kittlesen Røberg, 2023; Zamir, 2018) and this viewpoint is compatible with the contextual, relational and temporal dimensions of agency achievement (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). This was keenly observed by Rachel and also Annette who described,

> *I think some people are just happy to just come in, do the job, go home, you know- they've family commitments. They're not there for anything else. But putting your ideas out there- I can see there's a couple of people that don't do it, and I think it's just because they don't want to rock the boat there. And maybe it's a lack of confidence, maybe they don't have the background that I have that I would have been confident in doing for 10 years. I mean, I was never always like that. I took years to develop into that kind of a practitioner in person, you know?*

Elaine and Laura also discussed the difficulty of moving schools once you have a permanent position and spoke about wishing for more flexibility for teacher mobility between schools if it is believed a school is not compatible with a teacher’s professional identity, beliefs or values and it can be surmised this leads to agency being hindered. Elaborating on these views, Annette, Rachel, Liz and Carrie spoke about the lack of opportunities to be promoted within teaching and fearing becoming stagnant in one’s professional role, as acknowledged by Zamir (2018), and as Annette conceded, “I just feel I'm kind of losing myself as that teaching professional [….] and I don’t want to lose that.” They also deliberated that while they may undertake TPL to develop themselves professionally, they do not believe many opportunities are afforded to them to be professionally challenged or motivated to utilise gained professional capital or knowledge, unless one becomes a principal which can be viewed as not only a different professional identity (Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2021) but also as a different career (Amitai & van Houtte, 2022). Other participants, such as Philip, Marian, Annette and Gabrielle, discussed being

unsure where their career trajectory was going, as Philip quipped, “I'm not sure where the final destination is, or even the middle destination as well!” Annette deliberated on not only her professional journey but also on her agency within this, as she commented, “So I'm just trying to explore now what to do next and, again, that will be me pushing myself.” Gabrielle expanded on this when she declared,

> *You're using your initiative to go and do CPD in the first place that is going to enhance your development as a teacher. Then I suppose it's up to you to see and choose where you want to go with it and I actually don't have a plan, but I suppose I do think that I have power over where I could go.*

This self-determination is a manifestation of agency, according to Kauppinen et al. (2020). Conversely, a lack of self-determination was noted as a constraint for agency by Biesta & Tedder (2007) and the assessment of teaching possessing a flat career is also promoted by O’Donnell (2023), Ghamrawi & Abu-Tineh (2023) and Kelchtermans (2017). Self-determination, as depicted by Ryan & Deci (2020), is promoted when teachers are intrinsically motivated and when their emotional and psychological needs are congruent with their identity. Liz demonstrated a strong sense of teacher agency and self-determination when asked who might have control over her professional development which echoed findings from McMillan et al.’s study (2016) that many teachers believe it to be themselves,

> *I don't want them to take responsibility for it. It's my development, you know, I'm doing, you know, if I wasn't doing my job fair enough in you come and say ‘upskill, Liz!- you need to do this, you need to do that!’ I'm doing my job to a very satisfactory level, I would imagine. I wouldn't imagine, I'm telling you I am and so then my development is my business outside of that.*

As established, reflection is a key component to being cognisant of one’s identity (Suarez et al., 2022; Keay et al., 2019) as it provides a moment to pause and consider actions and question rather than engaging in habitual practices (Hobbiss et al., 2021; Greene, 1984). These reflective practices evoke the characteristic of “feedback loops” that are self-organising as per complexity theory (Strom & Viesca, 2021; Keay et al., 2019), where there is a tendency to maintain overall patterns of actions. This

resonates with Leijin et al.' s (2022) views that teachers tend to engage in habitual behaviour that has been known to be successful in their professional practices and this iterational dimension of agency reflects the continuity and stability in a teacher's decision-making that is embedded in their knowledge base, life experiences, and prior professional experiences. Elaine illustrated how she needed a "physical reminder" to encourage and remind her to change her teaching practices, while Carrie elaborated on steps she took to embed new practices,

> *Like, with the maths talk. So I'm trying to bring that into the class. But once you start doing it and it works then it becomes part of your practice, like if it's no good, you'll stop doing it anyway, you know. So I suppose, I have to be conscious of it, like, anything you have to make a conscious effort to use and integrate it. And you may have to change what you do.*

This study further builds on the research that teacher identity and teacher agency are synergetic and engaging in TPL and ensuing effective reflective practices foster their evolvement and manifestation. The following section will examine if and how the *Cosán* framework can further promote agentic practices.

7.4 The *Cosán* Framework & Teacher Agency

One of the purposes of this research study was to determine if *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016) could promote teacher's agency. As ascertained in section 2.4.6.1 of this study, *Cosán* acknowledges the potential of transformative models of TPL (Rawdon et al., 2020) which supports a democratic view of the teaching profession (Day & Sachs, 2005), while also recognising that teachers' professional journeys are not linear (Teaching Council, 2016). Reflection on teachers' professional practices, whether individual or collaborative, is promoted and teachers are encouraged to engage in cyclical, reflective, professional learning and to assess the impact of actions taken (Teaching Council, 2016). The framework's principles, as explored in chapter 4 of this study, which encompass autonomy, responsibility, flexibility, accessibility, relevance, acknowledgement and impact (Teaching Council, 2016, pp.

6-10), further support my determination that when compared internationally, *Cosán* can be deemed to be a progressive framework for TPL. Interestingly, *Cosán* does not mention teacher agency nor teacher identity and the necessity to undertake transformative TPL to manifest these phenomena. Nevertheless, I needed to establish what this research's participants' opinions on *Cosán* were and whether they considered it had the potential to support teacher agency.

The vast majority of the participants saw potential in *Cosán* to support teachers' professional learning and, hence, agency and appreciated its flexibility, that it recognised the importance of TPL and also supported teacher autonomy regarding their TPL. This view was voiced by Rachel who declared that she liked how it encompassed and recognised various forms of TPL and encouraged collaboration which would nurture teacher autonomy. On the other hand, many participants also noted the need for *Cosán* to be more widely and clearly communicated, as depicted in section 4.3 of this research project, and as Gabrielle contended, "[it needs to be] more visible certainly because you know, I think people will refer to something more if it's readily accessible." Research participants such as Annette, Gabrielle and Liz valued *Cosán's* capacity to support teachers' TPL and further agentic practices, as Liz remarked, "When you're trying to put a spine on something that can be as intangible as reflective practice so that a framework is helpful." Annette developed this further when she affirmed, "it's good to have that framework that would capture that [reflective practices] and I suppose if you use it as a framework that would identify where maybe you felt you needed some CPD, then it would give you agency" and Philip supported these opinions. Harry also considered this when he spoke about *Cosán* supporting teachers' agency through being purposeful with TPL, "it [*Cosán*] provided the framework, the mindset- it negated that *ad hoc* nature". However, participants such as Hannah and Gabrielle believe that the principles of *Cosán* are intrinsic to many teachers' practices, as Gabrielle stated, "[they] are innate in a lot of teachers anyway". Furthermore, Hannah believes that, unbeknownst to many teachers who are unaware of the existence of *Cosán*, "we're doing this already. By and large, we're using these tools." Notwithstanding this, the majority of the participants saw a benefit in utilising *Cosán* to guide and support teachers in reflecting on and identifying professional needs, which leads to ownership of their professional journey, a deeper understanding of their identity

and cultivates the achievement of agency, for as Gabrielle opined, anyone who engages in purposeful TPL demonstrates agency and she further asserted, “any framework is helpful because it helps to steady yourself and to refer to something and to come back to again.”

7.5 Conclusion

As established in this chapter, the research participants deem the manifestation of teacher agency to be contingent on various conditions which include the capacity of the individual teacher and ecological conditions. These need to confluence within the right context for agency to be achieved, either individually or collectively. The conditions identified as enabling the emergence of agency in this study were distilled and illustrated in Figure 7.2. Agency is not a static entity and is continually in flux, due to the dynamism between contexts and agency (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and, analogous to professional identity, as agency is constantly shifting, teachers are continually attempting to achieve it. This study also concurred with wider research that teacher identity and teacher agency are entwined and cultivated through reflective practices (Leijin et al., 2022; Korthagen, 2017; Flores & Day, 2016). While teacher agency is not mentioned within *Cosán*, the participants also broadly considered the framework *Cosán* to have the potential to promote teacher agency if it was disseminated more widely and teachers were made more aware of how it could support and scaffold a teacher’s professional journey.

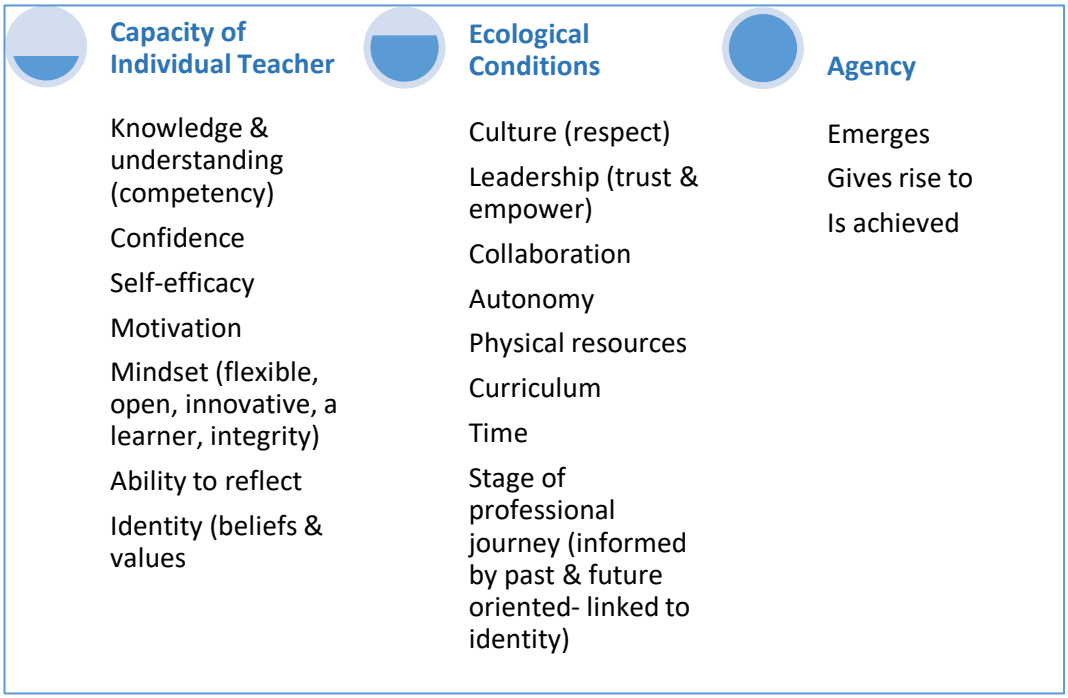


Figure 7.2 Conditions leading to the emergence and achievement of teacher agency

The following final chapter will provide a synthesis of this research study and offer conclusions, recommendations and final reflections.

Chapter 8

Conclusions, Recommendations and Final Reflections

8.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this research project was to identify approaches to adopt the principles of *Cosán* (Teaching Council, 2016) into the professional practices of primary teachers while cultivating teacher agency through the process. This final chapter highlights the conclusions of this study, which evolved from a synthesis of the research findings. This chapter also presents a summary of the research dissertation, identifies the study's limitations and provides recommendations for this research for future policy, practice and research.

This doctoral study was informed by an extensive literature review on TPL and a tripartite theoretical framework of socio-culturalism, constructivism and complexity theory. The research questions were explored through engaging fourteen primary teacher participants in a multiple case study, and the research design for this project was illustrated in detail in Chapter 3. The participants' views on TPL were gathered through the utilisation of the data collection instruments of surveys, individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Data analysis was conducted by employing a reflexive thematic analysis approach while being cognisant of my subjective positioning within the research through a reflexive journal. There were four research questions which I intended to answer through this study, namely:

- *What approaches can be employed by teachers in primary schools to incorporate the core principles of the* Cosán *framework into their living professional practices?*
- *What factors enable or inhibit primary teachers' engagement with transformative TPL in the Republic of Ireland?*
- *Can the development of reflective, collaborative cultures in schools enhance the positive impact of TPL?*

- *Can* Cosán *be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency?*

Overarching themes emanated from each of these research questions and were elucidated in the four findings chapters, i.e. chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. The conclusions derived from these findings are expounded in the following section.

8.2 Conclusions

The research questions and the tripartite theoretical framework adopted inform the conclusions arising from this doctoral study. These conclusions stem from the key findings and discussions in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. Several conclusions emanating from each research question are presented in this chapter and, while there is an overlap of the themes in reality, for the sake of clarity within the conclusions, there is a separability of these themes. These conclusions will lead to recommendations for policy, practice and for future research in section 8.3 of this chapter.

8.2.1 Conclusions on Theme I: Approaches to Support Engagement with the Principles of the *Cosán* Framework to Enable Transformative TPL

This research study ascertained TPL approaches, which emanated from the first research question posed, which was, *What approaches can be employed by teachers in primary schools to incorporate the core principles of the* Cosán *framework into their living professional practices?* Many of the approaches the participants identified can be deemed to be non-linear due to dynamic interactions amongst the various elements and settings which create the conditions for an approach to be practiced (Raduan & Na, 2020), and one such approach they proposed was school-based TPL. They also advocated for the efficacy of this approach as they believed it was more sustainable, collegial and met the needs of the contexts of their schools. These assertions build on existing research, such as Owen (2016), Barrera-Pedamonte (2016), and Desimone (2009), who contend that

workplace professional learning is highly effective. Research further espouses the significance of informal TPL activities within the workplace such as peer learning, observations, informal mentoring, professional dialogues and teacher cooperation (Lipscombe et al., 2020; Postholm, 2021, 2012; Eraut, 2007, 2004) and the findings of this study provide substantial evidence that the participants clearly concur with this. Lave & Wenger (1991) also recognised co-participatory situated learning to support socio-culturalism, one of the learning theories underpinning this study. Furthermore, through professional conversations, knowledge is co-created (Lipscombe, 2020), which is an example of a complex system through which learning occurs, as through these dialogues, sense is made of a difficult situation from which transformative learning can emerge, as complexity theory proffers (Hager & Beckett, 2024). Another approach to workplace learning that this study identified was a need for a coaching-type mentorship to support teachers in not just identifying gaps in their professional practices but also enabling TPL to become part of the professional practices of teachers, as commensurate with the literature (Abakah, 2023; Geeraerts et al., 2015). As evident within this study, there is a demonstrable need for more sustained, flexible, school-identified support from professional learning services that is contextual, as also supported by literature (Korthagen, 2017; OECD, 2014b). Linked to the autonomous identification of professional learning to undertake to meet a need, this study also suggests integrating the school self-evaluation process [SSE] (Department of Education, 2022a) with *Cosán* through collaborative reflection, as advocated for by *Cosán*. Correspondingly, the findings of this study also promote the utilisation of *Cosán* as a scaffold to establish a flexible, autonomous TPL plan for individual teachers, similar to what is in place in Finland (Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2021).

The evidence in this study also supports the significance of networked learning communities as an approach to support TPL. These networked learning communities support teachers in collaborating across schools to support TPL and has the capacity to develop transformative professional practices (Coppe, 2024; Barrera-Pedemonte, 2016; Katz & Earl, 2010; Desimone, 2009) as teachers are self-motivated and engaged, which fosters agentic practices. Similarly, the participants' experiences highlighted how online professional communities support TPL. These learning approaches support a constructivist approach to learning (Heikkinen et al.,

2012; Illeris, 2009; Murphy et al., 2005), another theoretical perspective adopted to inform this study. This study clearly demonstrated these iterations of learning communities to be authentic, learner-centred approaches to TPL which can lead to transformative teachers' professional practices, as supported by the principles of *Cosán*.

This study has also revealed the benefits for teachers to have a broad experience within teaching and to have more flexibility to teach in various roles and across different settings. As previously illustrated in section 4.6 of this study, these learning opportunities also foster a constructive and socio-cultural approach to learning within complex settings (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012; Rogoff & Lave, 1984) while shaping the evolving identity of teachers (Hökkä et al., 2017a; Feiman-Nemser, 2008). *Cosán* supports teachers in having the prospect to engage in not just rich and varied learning opportunities but also the right to be able to access quality TPL. This study noted a difficulty which exists for some teachers to access current research, as reading and considering literature in the light of their professional practices and school setting was a skill some participants said they acquired through undertaking further formal education, such as a post-graduate diploma or Master's degree, as commensurate with the views of Addae-Kyeremeh (2020) and Coldwell et al. (2017). The evidence of this study also supports the need for teachers' access to quality TPL, as promoted by Coldwell et al. (2017), Barrera-Pedemonte (2016) and Caeana (2011).

Finally, this study also conclusively recognised the need for the current primary TPL system to take a cohesive approach to supporting both individual teacher and school professional learning needs. While the remit of the Department of Education, a desire to change the system of only awarding extra personnel vacation (EPV) days for completing a summer course was demonstrable in this study, as they were deemed to be rarely impactful, seldom led to transformative practices, and rarely met an identified need of a teacher or school. This study proposed awarding EPV days for TPL undertaken throughout the year that met an identified professional or school need.

To summarise, this study has identified non-linear approaches to TPL that can lead to transformative professional practices and these are in concordance with the principles of *Cosán*. These are:

- Formal and informal school-based professional learning
- Coaching and mentoring
- Networked learning communities
- Online professional learning communities
- Broad experience
- Quality TPL
- System overhaul of the individual teacher approach to TPL.

However, this study has indicated a distinct lack of knowledge or understanding among the participants of *Cosán*. Until this challenge is surmounted, this national framework for TPL will not become a central tenet of the professional practices of teachers in Ireland.

8.2.2 Conclusions on Theme II: Factors which Enable or Inhibit Primary Teachers' Engagement with Transformative Professional Learning

The second research question this study sought to answer was, *What factors enable or inhibit primary teachers' engagement with transformative TPL in the Republic of Ireland?* This research identified many factors that facilitate TPL for primary teachers and several of these factors are interdependent. This section will expound on these.

This research ascertained the significant role of leadership in mediating transformative TPL, further contributing to the literature on this topic. A transformational style of leadership can encapsulate the style of leadership the participants espouse principals to manifest. The transformational leadership style can meet the needs of modern-day schools and manage change, leading to impactful teaching and learning practices (Wilson Heenan et al., 2023; Anderson, 2017; Quin et al., 2015). As illustrated by this study, this can be characterised by a school leader who leads by example, builds trust and capacity, communicates a clear vision and inspires others to work together and build change towards the shared vision (Lin et al., 2022; Anderson, 2017). Strong, enabling leadership is vital to support TPL, as this study holds, and this leadership can nurture the TPL of individual teachers while augmenting school capacity. While the participants

recognised the school leaders' role as being complex and onerous, they still expected the principals and school management to create the right conditions to encourage the staff and foster trusting relationships in which teachers' autonomy and agency could be practised.

There is a strong correlation between school leadership and school culture as school culture, to a considerable degree, is determined by its leadership, as both the literature and this study illustrated. This research supports the necessity of a positive school culture for TPL to lead to effective and impactful practices. The participants determined that an open, trusting and supportive culture, which was open to change, promotes impactful TPL. This study concurs with the literature (Eshchar-Netz, et al., 2022; Visone et al., 2021; Stoll et al., 2006) that the school's culture can also determine the extent to which collaborative practices are successful as they are synergetic to each other and this impacts on the degree to which TPL can be transformative. Furthermore, school cultures which promote collaboration support socio-culturalism (Rogoff, 2008; Kelly, 2006). Collaborative practices, along with reflective practices, are both determined to be critical factors to support TPL. These will be examined in depth in the following section, 8.1.3, which assesses the ability of collaborative, reflective practices to support transformative TPL.

This research highlighted resources as a multi-faceted factor of significance when determining the extent to which TPL can be impactful. This study emphasised time, of which it was deemed there was never enough, as being vital to support TPL and this concurs with the views of Brodie (2019). Some participants within this study described creative ways their schools may carve out time to focus on TPL and allow for initiatives to embed when this was a noted priority. This study also revealed that schools wish for more autonomy over the use of the Croke Park hours [the 36 mandated non-student contact hours each primary teacher undertakes annually (Department of Education and Skills, 2016)] to allow for opportunities to engage in school-based TPL. In conjunction with time, this study established clear structures as necessary to facilitate a culture that fosters collegial, collaborative practices that may lead to transformative TPL, as previously ascertained by Hargreaves & O'Connor (2018). Furthermore, the evidence from this study indicated that primary teachers want TPL, which is flexible and accessible, building on the views of

Boeskens et al. (2020). This study further identified a perception that primary teachers in Ireland have that the national education system does not do enough to prioritise, acknowledge or support TPL.

As evident in this study, relevance was deemed to be another noteworthy factor for primary teachers when engaging with TPL. As noted, this study illustrated that time is at a premium within primary teaching, therefore teachers need to engage with TPL that meets their needs and is relevant to the schools' contexts otherwise, the TPL undertaken is not an optimum use of their time, corresponding with the research of Boeskens et al. (2020) and Postholm (2012). The teachers within this project wanted the reason for undertaking TPL to be made explicit by the providers so they could determine how relevant the TPL could be to their needs and if it may lead to more impactful TPL. This explicitness could potentially motivate teachers to further develop their professional practices, enhancing the conditions for teachers to achieve agency.

Teacher autonomy is a critical enabler of transformative professional learning, but it is highly dependent on context, including school leadership, size, culture, and the nature of the TPL. Autonomy, when nurtured, cultivates collaboration, motivation, and sustainable change. While classroom-level autonomy is often intact, professional journey-level autonomy is more limited, and true transformation in practice requires authentic agency, not just surface-level choice. This research acknowledges there are system needs that must be met, which requires some TPL to be mandated. On the other hand, many of the teachers in this study sought a further balance so they could engage in TPL that they were more interested in, or needful of, rather than having to prioritise initiatives from Government bodies and engaging in what this study has determined as "pretend autonomy". This conditional view of autonomy was limited by teachers' lack of professional time to engage in TPL of interest to them and this reveals a tension between system/ school needs and individual professional autonomy and agency.

Lastly, a holistic view of teachers and their engagement with TPL has been deemed necessary by this study if it is to be transformative. Teachers are more motivated to undertake TPL and engage in resultant transformative practices if they have choice over the TPL undertaken (Worth & van den Brande, 2020). The continuum of

teacher education is a non-linear, iterative path over the length of a teacher's career (King et al., 2023), dependent on life stages and varying contexts. Consequently, TPL needs to be more bespoke to meet the needs of individual teachers within their current ecological and temporal contexts. Responsibility for TPL is not just the remit of Government bodies, universities or education centres but the responsibility also falls to individual teachers; however, for this to occur, teachers need to be afforded trust and autonomy, as the *Cosán* framework promotes. In an ideal world, there should be consensus between the relevant government bodies, such as the Department of Education, the inspectorate, the Teaching Council, Oide and the education centres, to cohesively plan for and support TPL. Currently, each body is placing competing demands on teachers and schools, leading to a lack of time and initiative overload, which can negatively impact teacher autonomy (Gemmink et al., 2021). As a consequence, this study recognised that many school leaders end up "firefighting" in trying to prioritise matters for the school and system, resulting in a loss to teacher autonomy over their TPL, which can lead to demotivation and "burnout" within the profession, especially when teachers' psychological needs are not being met (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Hence, as previously established by Hökkä et al. (2017b), this study appreciates the need for teachers to be cognisant of their emotions and understand its relationship on evolving teacher identity and achievement of teacher agency. Of note, a few teachers demonstrated a lack of a clear plan for their future careers, suggesting a lack of ownership or direction in their professional journeys. Many of the participants expressed interest in coaching or mentoring, which could enhance reflection, support goal-setting and strengthen professional identity

In summary, the factors this study identified as enabling or, correspondingly, inhibiting transformative TPL, in primary schools in Ireland are:

- school leadership
- school culture
- collaborative practices
- reflective practices
- resources

- relevance
- teacher autonomy
- a holistic view of the teacher.

8.2.3 Conclusions on Theme III: The Development of Collaborative, Reflective Practices in Schools to Enable Transformative TPL

The third research question this study undertook to answer was, *Can the development of reflective, collaborative cultures in schools enhance the positive impact of TPL?* The evidence presented within this study acknowledges the significance of collaborative, reflective cultures on the impact of TPL, leading to transformative professional practices and corroborates previous research that established similar findings.

Collaborative practices have been deemed to be of merit as an approach to support TPL and lead to school-wide capacity building and effective professional practices (de Jong et al., 2021; Vangrieken et al., 2015; Opfer & Pedder, 2011a) and this research has substantiated this. This study utilised the tripartite theories of socio-culturalism, constructivism and complexity theory as a conceptual framing and the collaborative practices which the participants described demonstrated them actively constructing their own knowledge and understanding through an interactive, collaborative process (Duncombe & Armour, 2004), while the complex, dynamic system within which their learning was embedded further influenced the extent to which collaborative practices were impactful (Strom & Viesca, 2021; Mason, 2008). This study established that collaborative practices have the potential to support impactful TPL as teachers in a trusting, safe space, share, learn from and challenge each other to further their professional practices while supporting and encouraging each other to engage in these transformative practices to make it sustainable. This study recognised it is imperative to create a culture and synergy within the school, based on collaborative inquiry within which constituent elements, such as the factors specified in the previous section, converge to create new knowledge or practices which otherwise would never have emerged, as Mason (2008) contends. This was illustrated by many participants who attested to the capacity of collaborative practices to support innovative professional practices, as

previously recognised by Stoll et al. (2006). This study, as explicated in both chapter 4 and in section 8.1.1 of this chapter, also recognised the significance of both formal and informal collaborative practices and school-based, external or online communities of practice, the suitability of which is dependent on the bespoke needs of the individual teachers. Teachers who self-determine which approach best meets their professional need are not only more motivated to engage in the elected TPL, they are also demonstrating an achievement of agency. Collaborative practices have many strengths, which this study identified. Nevertheless, this study further contended a necessity to foster a culture that nurtures collaboration and this takes time, trust, strong collegial relationships and needs a structure to support its establishment. Interestingly, this study also noted that the size of a school staff may have an impact on the promotion of collaborative practices within schools. This study determined a school staff of 4-13 teachers to be the optimum member which may support whole school collaboration. On the other hand, this study also ascertains that good collaboration may not be wholly dependent on the size of the school but on the culture, trust and relationships within it, which is why the participants noted effective collaborative practices to occur within specific cohorts in schools where trusting, collegial relationships have been established.

For collaborative practices to be successful, teachers need time and space to reflect on them (OECD, 2012a; Fraser et al., 2007) and this study further established the necessity for reflection to be to the fore of teachers' practices, if TPL is to be transformative, as established in the literature (King et al., 2023; Keay et al., 2019; Liu, 2015). Reflective practices support teachers in constructing their own knowledge (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Sercu et al., 2005) and through these iterative, reflective cycles over time and within the dynamic settings their practices are situated within, teachers revisit and further their professional practices (Keay et al., 2019). Reflection on one's professional practices culminates in not only enriched professional practices and empowering teachers but it also augments consideration of one's professional identity and how these align with beliefs, values and outlooks (Korthagen, 2017, 2014). This research also queried what motivated the participants to engage in reflective practices. This motivation could be deemed to be for extrinsic purposes, such as an imminent school inspection or the school principal expecting a reflective piece as part of the monthly summary report of

teaching and learning received from members of the teaching staff. On the other hand, for some participants, the motivation could be intrinsic and proactive as the teacher may want to have a deeper understanding of their professional practices, to question the rationales and motivations for why and how their practices are transacted and how they could improve these. This study uncovered that only a small portion of the participants engaged in regular critical, meaning-making reflective practices, even though they all recognised reflection as being an intrinsic part of being an effective teacher, as per the literature (King et al., 2023; Keay et al., 2019; Šarić & Šteh, 2017; Liu, 2015; Eraut, 1995; Schon, 1983). The reasons determined for this were varied such as, there is insufficient time to engage in reflection at more than a cursory level; focusing on the negative aspects of professional practices when reflecting; and not following up on the reflections with actions to change professional practices. However, the most significant constraint which this study identified was that many of the participants had never been explicitly taught to reflect, instead, they were exhorted to reflect, which led to it being either under-utilised or used superficially and this builds on research by Šarić & Šteh (2017), Korthagen (2014), Lewis (2013) and Çimer et al. (2013). As a result, this study suggests the development of reflective prompts, as illustrated in the recommendations section later in this chapter.

As advocated for by *Cosán* and within the literature, collaborative critical reflection is deemed essential to transform best practices into whole school cultural change as through this critical dialogic process, assumptions can be challenged and innovative, transformative practices established and sustained (King, 2019; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018; Kennedy, 2011) and this study concurs with this perspective. However, this research also concedes this is difficult to attain, as Brodie (2019) and Šarić & Šteh (2017) affirm, as this professional learning approach is a complex endeavour necessitating various intricate and unpredictable dynamic parts to confluence and engender the culture necessary to its cultivation (Keay et al., 2019). Furthermore, this study demonstrated that the participants' understanding of what collaborative reflection entails varied and may lead to it not being promoted appropriately. Nevertheless, this research study suggests utilising the school self-evaluation process, in conjunction with *Cosán*, as a framework to foster the development of collaborative reflection, along with enabling outside support, which

will be elucidated further in the recommendations section. This study also portrayed how transformative practices may arise out of authentic collaborative reflection which allows for the *status quo* to be agitated and questioned in a safe space, leading to complexity theory's "edge of chaos" phenomenon (Strom & Viesca, 2021; Cochran-Smith et al., 2014) from which novel, innovative practices may occur.

This study has established that collaborative reflection can lead to transformative professional learning in a school, but for this to occur, the individual teacher must evolve. This evolvement occurs effectively through collaborative, dialogical, critical reflections in a safe place with relational capacity and a culture of support, respect and trust, which is facilitated by a leader who harnesses the staff to work together towards a shared vision, and this motivates the teachers to engage and transform and further assists in the teachers achieving their agency. Collaborative reflection incorporates the tripartite of theoretical frameworks which this doctoral study utilised as through reflective practices, teachers can construct their own knowledge and practices, and this can be augmented through collaborative practices. The success of this is contingent on the interplay of various, competing, dynamic factors and contexts.

8.2.4 Conclusions: Theme IV: The potential ability of *Cosán* to be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning, thus, promoting teacher agency

The fourth and final research question posed in this research study was *Can* Cosán *be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency?* Across the literature, teachers as agentic actors is considered to be significant for TPL to lead to transformative practices (King et al., 2023; Kauppinen et al., 2020; Imants & van der Wal, 2020; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Lai et al., 2016; Vähäsantanen, 2015) and this study contributes to this body of work by elucidating the constituent enabling elements that can converge to give rise to the emergence of agency, as Figure 7.2 portrays. Consistent with the ecological perspective of agency (Biesta et al., 2017; Priestley et al., 2015a; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), this doctoral study ascertained elements

and dimensions which support teachers' capacity to achieve agency. One finding was the necessity to engage in TPL throughout teachers' careers as teachers need to have a robust professional knowledge and skillset to critically make decisions about their professional practices through which teacher agency can emerge, as the participants observed and as supported by *Cosán*. The evidence of this study also demonstrated that the more teachers engage in professional learning which they are motivated by, the more their self-efficacy is nurtured as they further their professional knowledge and skills, as also noted by Caena (2011). Consequently, the achievement of agency is supported, as this research recognised and previously concluded by Lin et al. (2022) and Heikonen et al. (2020). According to this study, teachers' motivation was another acknowledged factor which supports teacher agency as teachers who are intrinsically motivated, with a flexible, growth mindset who are willing to engage in innovative professional practices are more likely to achieve agency and the *Cosán* framework promotes this, which is paradoxical given that agency is not explicitly mentioned within the framework. This reflects the views established by Boeskens et al. (2020), McMillan et al. (2016) and Timperley et al. (2007). This research has already ascertained that when teachers autonomously choose a TPL activity to meet an identified professional need, they are inherently motivated to engage in TPL, and this can lead to the emergence of agency, as Boylan et al. (2023) asserted. *Cosán* supports the concept that teachers afforded autonomy over their professional practices further promotes the achievement of agency, as teachers have control over the trajectory of their professional development and this study provided instances when the teacher participants described such experiences. Reflective practices were another factor which this study deemed as necessary for achieving agency, and this is also advocated for in *Cosán*. This viewpoint builds further on the research of Boylan et al. (2023), Kramer (2018) and Biesta & Tedder (2007) by elucidating how, through reflection, refinements to professional practices evolve in response to challenges as teachers practice their agency and, furthermore, teacher identity unfolds through these introspective actions. Reflective practices also support a constructivist perspective to learning, as Flaherty & Sagas (2021) and Sercu et al. (2005) stated, as teachers engaged in reflection, construct and re-construct knowledge to suit dynamic contexts, and this viewpoint was further supported by the data collected within this study.

Time was another element which the participants noted can facilitate or even inhibit agency, as the participants discussed, and this is supportive of Brodie's (2019) and Bartell et al.'s (2019) research. Agency has a temporal dimension (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) and is neither situated in the past or future but between them and influenced by them as agency is achieved, according to Biesta & Tedder (2007). This research's teacher participants noted instances in their past professional development which led to them achieving agency, such as engaging in communities of practice or undertaking further formal qualifications. Emirbayer & Mische (1998), Priestley et al. (2015a) and Bellibaş et al. (2020) also contend that teacher agency is being achieved when teachers engage in and possess a sense of ownership regarding school development and change, in collaboration with colleagues, as *Cosán* promotes. This viewpoint was also discernible in this doctoral study when the participants discussed how collaborative practices support the manifestation of agency, both individually and collectively, within a conducive, supportive culture. The participants also contend that this culture is shaped by school leadership who can augment the social-relational contexts within which agency can be achieved. This viewpoint is also supported by the socio-cultural theory of learning, as there is a correlation between the social aspect and collective agency (Leijin et al., 2022; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Eteläpelto et al., 2013). This research noted that creating the conditions that would contribute to collaborative practices from which collective agency can emerge is challenging to attain, nevertheless, the few participants who had experienced it observed it to be transformative to not only their professional practices but also augments the capacity of the school.

In discussing agency with the study's participants, I deliberated on whether they were afforded many opportunities to engage in discussions on teacher agency, as it was the one topic on which some participants were not as forthcoming. Furthermore, this research contended it is questionable whether teachers can achieve agency if their previous professional experiences have not fostered their agentic capabilities, as research maintains that the previous iteration of the curriculum (Department of Education and Science, 1999) emphasised content rather than focusing on key curriculum principles which can be renegotiated according to contexts (Walsh, 2018). A reflective inquiry process is necessary for

teachers to adapt and commit to professional changes and teachers need guidance to engage in this critically reflective role, from which agentic practices can emerge, as noted by Keay et al. (2019). Additionally, these inquiry and reflection processes can be viewed as key self-orgnaising processes which can support teachers to make sense of and reorientate their professional practices, in line with their professional identity, in a context of disequilibrium, such as the instigation of a new curriculum, as complexity theory maintains (Strom & Viesca, 2021; Keay et al., 2019). This doctoral study further acknowledges that being keenly aware of a teacher's own evolving identiy is key to the achievement of agency. Furthermore, engaging in TPL and reflecting on one's professional practices to adapt them in line with new skills or knowledge is essential to foster this understanding of a professional self. This is commensurate with literature on this area (Suarez et al., 2022; Keay et al., 2019; Hökkä et al., 2017a).

A significant outcome of this research study is that many of the factors which enable transformative TPL, which Chapter 5 described in detail, also support teachers in their achievement of agency, according to the evidence of this study. This study recognises leadership, school culture, collaborative practices, reflective practices, autonomy and a holistic view of the teacher as key considerations to establish, recognise and nurture teacher identity. These findings are commensurate with those of Leijin et al. (2022), Imants and Wal (2020) Vähäsantanen (2015) and Kennedy (2014). Furthermore, consistent with the ecological views of Biesta and Tedder (2007) on agency, the manifestation of agency is within the unique contexts of individual teachers' experiences and this signifies that teacher agency is always in flux, dependent on how the factors converge.

The principles of *Cosán* support the evolution of teachers through TPL and states that teachers should have flexibility, autonomy and responsibility in identifying and undertaking relevant TPL which meets an identified need and that reflective practices, especially in collaboration with colleagues, support this. These principles also support the achievement of agency, hence, it may be surmised that through adopting the principles of *Cosán*, teachers' agency can potentially be promoted. However, and surprisingly, as already elucidated in Chapter 7, teacher agency is not mentioned in the *Cosán* framework.

8.3 Limitations of this Research

Limitations are an inherent part of research studies (Creswell, 2012) and this study is no different. The limitations of this study were previously discussed in section 3.12 of this research and will be further expanded here, with due consideration to the conducted research project.

The study size was one limitation pertaining to this study, however, this number needed to be feasible and manageable for me, the one researcher, hence the sample size was fourteen. This sample size is small, and thus, the conclusions drawn tend not to be generalisable to the larger population (Creswell, 2012). Nevertheless, as argued by Priya (2020), Yin (2014) and Cohen et al. (2011), a multiple case study is utilised to build hypotheses, not to provide statistical data. Through illustrating the contexts of each teacher participant with rich, thick descriptions, as recommended by Cohen et al. (2011), I detailed complex situations in which readers could recognise themselves and this lends to the "naturalistic generalisability" of this research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) and this generalisability can also be viewed as transferability (Braun & Clarke, 2013). To further promote the transferability of the conclusions of this research, Vähäsantanen (2015) contended that engagement with TPL is a familiar experience for all teachers, and thus, the findings are applicable to many teachers.

To ensure this research project's validity, rigour and efficacy, I ensured that the research design was as meticulous as possible, as recommended by Priya (2020) and Yin (2014). At the outset of the project, I clarified the purpose of the research, refined the research questions and elucidated the utilisation of the data collection instruments adopted, as well as how the data was to be analysed and adhered to these considerations for the duration of the project. As expected (Priya, 2020), I did encounter two conundrums, as illustrated in Chapter 3. One was the initial recruitment of participants, which proved to be more difficult than anticipated but this was eventually overcome. Furthermore, as noted in section 3.7.1, this sample was not random but self-selecting, and thus purposeful, as the participants volunteered to engage in the research in response to the survey invitation and demonstrated a motivation and predisposition to TPL. Nevertheless, as advised by Creswell (2012) and Cohen et al. (2011), I deemed this purposeful sampling to be

necessary to collect the rich data and gain in depth insights on the participants' experiences of TPL. The second conundrum was my initial expectation for the focus groups to become a small-scale community of practice did not come to fruition due to various constraints, mainly time, on the participants' parts. While I was initially concerned this would lead to data not being as rich as I hoped, as the participants had not developed relationships amongst themselves, I believe the relationships I had formed with the participants countered this and the participants were open, candid and authentic in their focus group engagements which led to the focus groups becoming a conduit for further information as they provided a fertile ground for discussion, leading to productive data.

Time in itself was a limitation as this study was time-bound, due to it being a PhD research study; however, this could be an area for further research. This study would have been more robust if it followed the participants for a more extended period of time to observe if their further engagement with the principles of *Cosán* would promote their teaching practices and augment their teacher agency. The vicissitudes of life also meant that three participants could not engage with the project for the duration of the data collecting period and once I ascertained they were not in a position to engage further, I accepted their wishes and adapted. Similarly, not all available participants could engage in the focus groups as suitable convenient times could not be found within the time period I had allotted to these stages of the data collection. I attempted to overcome this by being as flexible as possible, while being fair to all participants, to obtain the views of all available participants through this forum in at least one focus group.

Another potential limitation of this research study was that all engagement with the teacher participants was online. As examined in section 3.8.2 of this project, I was aware of the drawbacks this platform could have on my research, however, I opted for online interviews and focus groups as I believed the benefits were compelling and I could mitigate for the shortcomings of this platform. I did this by ensuring the participants were proficient with the technology needed and comfortable online before the first phase of interviews commenced, as advised by Saarijärvi & Bratt (2021). I also anticipated there may be technology or connection difficulties at times. As a result, I was more flexible in the time I allocated to the online interviews and focus groups by including an additional five minutes to the time allocated to

these as a buffer. As the researcher and interviewer, I was also aware that I had to engage intently and purposefully in the online world to develop a rapport with the participants, as I was intent on keeping as many of them as possible engaged throughout this research process through email updates and by ensuring the interview schedules had a natural, conversational flow to them (Kallio et al., 2016; Knox & Burkard, 2009).

A core quality of qualitative study is for the researcher to engage in reflexive and reflective practices (Creswell, 2012). I was aware that my research bias could present a difficulty to this research unless I was cognisant of my position and any bias I may have and acknowledged it (Braun & Clarke, 2013). To ensure I was as impartial as possible throughout this study, I kept a reflexive journal, as I presented in section 3.6.2. This proved to be a very enlightening experience as it challenged my thought processes at times and made me consider different perspectives, which I do not think would have occurred without my "scribbles" in the journal.

The following section considers recommendations emanating from this study.

8.4 Research Recommendations

As noted in the previous section, it is possible to make generalisations from this qualitative, multiple case study, as the profiles and contexts of the participants may resonate with readers, especially if the reader is a teacher, as they invariably have considerable experience of TPL. This naturalistic generalisation leads to the potential transferability of findings (Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Mertens, 2010) and allows me to make recommendations in this study. The following sections will present recommendations for policy, practice and future research.

8.4.1 Recommendations for policy

- *Cosán* was published in 2016 and this study has noted some adaptations that should be made to promote TPL in the Republic of Ireland further. These should include:

- the embedding of the concepts of teacher agency and teacher identity in any future edition.
- delineating further how individual TPL can also support school-wide professional practices and develop school capacity
- the SSE process (Department of Education, 2022a) and the LAOS (Department of Education, 2022b) evaluation refer to *Cosán* as a compatible policy. This viewpoint needs to be reciprocated within an updated edition of *Cosán* and expanded on to illustrate how *Cosán* can be employed to support the school self-evaluation processes.

- The SSE process (Department of Education, 2022a) and LAOS (Department of Education, 2022b) should be modified to place more significance on collaborative reflection, since it is deemed a transformative TPL approach. Processes should also be implemented to further encourage schools to prioritise TPL and allow time for TPL to be engaged with.
- The SSE process (Department of Education, 2022a) does include statements of effective and highly effective practices with a focus on teachers; however, as suggested within this study, a separate, individual teacher self-evaluation should be created to provide a scaffold to support teachers' professional learning, in line with the principles of *Cosán*. This self-evaluation should include menus of guiding questions to support teachers in reflecting on and identifying professional needs and should include examples of levels of reflection. This should be further augmented with a choice of approaches which may meet identified needs. This self-evaluation should not be prescriptive, but rather supportive in nature.
- *Cosán* encourages teachers to engage in ongoing cycles of reflection to identify gaps in their professional practices and remedy these as they determine. If this is to occur, it will be necessary to reward sustained, transformative TPL rather than one-off courses. This study has determined that the summer courses primary teachers undertake do not substantially meet their professional learning needs, resulting in a need to review and overhaul the system of individual TPL and end the link between awarding EPV days for summer courses undertaken. As an alternative, a more flexible system should be put in place so any TPL engaged with at any point during the academic year which leads to transformative practices should qualify for EPV days.

- There is currently a provision for primary teachers undertaking a recognised third-level educational course to take study leave for exams and this should be widened to support teachers who undertake a Master's or a PhD for study leave to write their dissertation or thesis.
- Financial support towards the substantial cost of some of the TPL undertaken should be expanded and the qualification allowance for teachers who undertake a master's or doctorate, subsequent to their initial teaching education, should be reinstated since its termination due to the worldwide financial crisis (Department of Education and Skills, 2012b).

8.4.2 Recommendations for practice

- *Cosán* needs to be promoted, communicated and supported more effectively. It is an indictment that only three out of the fourteen participants who believe themselves engaged and interested in TPL had a proficient understanding of *Cosán*.
- The finding that reflective practices need to be explicitly taught and supported is significant and it is one that the Department of Education, the Teaching Council, and possibly trade unions in Ireland need to remedy through supportive, ongoing professional learning rather than exhorting teachers to engage in reflective practices.
- Teachers' registration numbers with the Teaching Council could be used to create individual portfolios of TPL where any courses approved by the education centres or the Teaching Council that the teachers successfully engaged in could be recorded. This would provide teachers with an accessible overview of formal TPL undertaken.
- Notwithstanding the inherent pressures and workload of principals, they nonetheless need to be prepared and supported to promote a culture of professional learning across their schools and nurture each teacher's professional growth within their school. Through the development of this capacity, principals will be supporting a bottom-up approach to nurturing TPL by enacting the principles of the *Cosán* framework. This research has demonstrated that school leaders who engage in a transformational leadership

style are more likely to motivate teachers to develop a culture where changes in attitudes and practices occur and sustainable, impactful TPL is more likely to ensue when collaborative practices are encouraged. It thus may be deemed necessary to spotlight this style of leadership in both initial and continuing leadership courses for principals and to encourage and support principals to adopt the ideologies of this approach in their professional practices to further encourage the fostering of a positive school culture towards TPL.

- National TPL support services, such as Oide and the NCSE, should expand the use of facilitators **to** support schools' needs sustainably and in the long-term**.** This should also incorporate a provision for school leaders to have more autonomy and flexibility over which TPL is necessary and to access selected professional learning to meet schools' identified needs.
- This study identified a need for established teachers to have access to a coaching-style mentoring support system to assist them in recognising their evolving teacher identity and to connect this to a possible career trajectory or set professional goals. As this blueprint is in place in the majority of schools in Ireland, as a result of the *Droichead* programme for NQTs, it is feasible to expand it for middle-stage teachers, albeit in a different form. This may be supported by trained education coaches from within a school network or working out of local education centres.
- This research has identified a research-to-practice gap as current educational research and literature is sometimes believed to be inaccessible to teachers. There may be a role for the Teaching Council or INTO to mediate academic research into relevant, practical teacher practices.

8.4.3 Recommendations for future research

- As a result of my study, further research should be carried out to ascertain the extent to which teachers in the Republic of Ireland engage in reflective practices. I believe this is an area that needs further investigation, for if teachers are not engaging in reflective practices as fully as they should, then the Teaching Council and other interested bodies need to address this, as it underpins teachers' teaching, learning and professional development.

- According to my study, there is also a need to establish a baseline of teachers' abilities to identify agentic practices. Teacher agency is being promoted across the education system, consequently, teachers need to understand and discuss this concept and its link to teacher identity so they can be more engaged and agentic in achieving it.
- This study identified a lack of research on middle-career teachers' experiences of teaching in different roles and/ or in various settings. This is an area which should be explored further to understand fully:
    - how this may shape teachers' evolving professional identities
    - if these experiences can reinvigorate teachers professionally
    - if these experiences foster teacher agency
    - if these experiences broaden attitudes and skills similar to what research has demonstrated occurs in initial teacher education settings.
- This research raised a question regarding how well primary teachers understand the concept of teacher agency and whether they have the language and opportunities to discuss agentic practices. This is an area which should be explored further in the context of the Republic of Ireland.
- This study identified social media platforms as creating a space for teachers to engage in potentially transformative TPL by sharing programmes, lessons, resources, experiences and knowledge. The extent to which teachers utilise this space to engage in TPL and how effective an approach it may be should be explored further.
- The data was collected via focus groups and interviews all of which were conducted online. This platform for data collection is relatively novel and how it affects the validity, rigour and robustness of the qualitative research undertaken has not been studied in depth in an Irish context; hence, there is a gap for further research on this area.
- This study was time-bound as it was a fulfilment for a PhD. It would be of interest to further follow the professional development and learning of the participants as they further engage with the principles of the *Cosán* framework to determine if it further enhances their professional practices and if their teacher agency is further augmented.

8.5 Final Reflections

I undertook this research journey as I was curious about how and why teachers, and especially primary teachers, engage in TPL. I also wondered if there was a resulting change in professional practices through engaging in TPL and which TPL approaches support and foster this impact significantly. Teacher agency and its link with TPL was another dimension I was interested in, and so, the broad strokes to my PhD project began to materialise as I eagerly sought answers to these questions.

The research questions posed at the start of this research endeavour have been comprehensively answered with interesting findings, conclusions and recommendations and while closing a gap in research on TPL in the Republic of Ireland, this study has also provided avenues for further research. Interestingly, complexity theory offers another reframing of research by positing that this research study is not a final product but can continue to develop and contribute to the possibilities of continuous, evolving, emerging realities within teachers' professional learning as this doctoral study is interacted with (Davis & Sumara, 2014). This research has contributed to the literature on TPL and is significant to the teaching profession, particularly that of primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland. It addressed a gap in research as, since its publication in 2016, there is currently no published research on *Cosán's* impact on the professional practices of teachers. This research study not only bridged this gap but may also contribute to public policy on the continuum of teacher education in the Republic of Ireland. Approaches to TPL which support teachers in engaging with transformative TPL, in line with the progressive principles of *Cosán,* were identified and this provides an opportunity for both teachers, and those responsible for national policy on TPL, to plan for more impactful, sustainable and effective professional learning. Collaborative reflective practices have been further recognised as a significant approach to transformative TPL at both an individual and school level, as the capacity for peer learning is augmented and harnessed to develop teachers professionally and agentically, using a centre-out approach. This research further demonstrated that through effective, authentic reflective practices, as advocated by *Cosán*, teachers can become critically aware of not only their professional practices but also of their teacher identity which can foster teacher agency and

support teachers to further themselves professionally, while remaining motivated within the profession.

My doctoral journey has provided me with a challenging and inspiring experience, as I engaged in my own invigorating professional journey through this research project. I became much more aware of my teacher identity and its evolvement to incorporate the identities of a researcher and teacher educator, which, in turn, fostered my progressive achievement of agency within my professional practices. I am grateful for this experience and I hope this research will benefit the professional learning practices of teachers and further contribute to literature on the continuum of teacher education.

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Appendix 1

Ethics Approval Form

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Social Research
Ethics Committee (SREC)

SREC ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

Introduction

UCC academic staff and postgraduate research students who are seeking ethical approval should complete this approval form. Ethical review by the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) is required where the methodology is not clinical or therapeutic in nature and proposes to involve:

- direct interaction with human participants for the purpose of data collection using research methods such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, focus groups etc.;
- indirect observation with human participants for example using observation, web surveys etc.;
- access to, or utilisation of, anonymised datasets;
- access to, or utilisation of, data or case files/records concerning identifiable individuals;
- conducting Internet Research or research online.

SREC considers itself an enabling committee, promoting strong research ethics amongst UCC's community of staff and student researchers. We are open to all types of research in the social research domain. If your research approach does not readily fit into this application form, do not be discouraged: please add additional relevant notes to convey what you think is pertinent about the ethical aspects of your study.

Contact us: srec@ucc.ie

Further information about research ethics is available on the UCC Research Ethics website.

Further information on training videos, and sample informed consent/information sheet/assent forms are on the SREC website.

Notes

1. Digital inclusivity notice: text set to left-aligned, alternative text added to images, no italics, and plain English web links are used.
2. SREC is a committee of the University Ethics Committee. If you are unsure which University ethics committee you should apply to, please consult this resource. Acknowledgement: An early version of this form was adapted from pp. 13-14 of the Guidelines for Minimum Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research (British Psychological Society, 2004).
3. Please submit a **signed** copy of this form and all relevant attachments **as one PDF file** to srec@ucc.ie. No hard copies of this application are required.
4. SREC is not primarily concerned with methodological issues, but we may comment on such issues in so far as they have ethical implications.
5. Your SREC application form should be concise: please **do not** copy and paste a research proposal. Applications typically range between 10-20 pages (including appendices) with some longer applications at 25-30 pages. Overly long applications will be returned without a review.
6. Your SREC application form should be written so that researchers outside of your profession / discipline can understand how you plan to undertake your study.
7. If your study requires a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA), you **do not** need to include a copy of the DPIA with your SREC application form.
8. To access training on research ethics, please visit the SREC video training series here.

SECTION 1: APPLICATION CHECKLIST

This checklist includes all of the items that are required for an application to be deemed complete. In the event that any of these are not present, the application will be returned to the applicant **without** having been sent for review. Please ensure that your application includes all of these items prior to submission. Thank you and best of luck with your research!

Please complete prior to submission	Yes/No	N/A
a) a) All relevant files are combined into one PDF file (SREC application form, consent/assent forms, information sheets, data collection instruments, permission letters, etc.)	**Yes**	
b) b) Completed SREC Application Form	**Yes**	
c) c) Information Sheet(s) / Information Statement (i.e. at the beginning of an electronic survey) included	**Yes**	
d) d) Consent / Assent Form(s) / Consent Statement (i.e. at the beginning of an electronic survey) included	**Yes**	
e) e) Data Collection Instrument: Psychometric Instruments / Interview Guide / Focus Group Schedule / Survey Questionnaire / etc. included f) **If this is a participatory / Public & Patient Involvement (PPI) project,** it is possible that your data collection instrument will be co-constructed during the research and there is nothing to submit at this point to SREC. By ticking confirm here, you agree to submit the instrument to SREC, once finalised.	**Yes**	
g) f) Copy of permission letters / external ethical approvals to undertake research from relevant agencies/services included (if available)		**N/A**
h) g) Have you applied for ethical approval for this project from another UCC ethics committee?	**No**	
i) h) If you are under academic supervision, your supervisor(s) have approved the wording of and co-signed this application prior to submission	**Yes**	
j) i) If this is a resubmission, all the revised and new text is highlighted in yellow		**N/A**

Resources and services

UCC Code of Research Conduct and Research Policies

UCC Child Safeguarding Statement

Guidance Document for Conducting Internet Research

Garda Vetting of UCC Staff

UCC Student Garda Vetting Policy

UCC Data Protection Policy and Procedures

EU Commission, Responsible Research and Innovation

RRI Tools Website

Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA)

Irish Social Science Data Archive (quantitative datasets)

Health Service Executive National Consent Policy

UCC IT Service Catalogue

UCC GDPR website

UCC Library Research Data Service

UCC Supplied Survey Platforms

UCC Device Encryption Service

Qualtrics SharePoint Site

Qualtrics - UCC login

UCC Guidance for Researchers Conducting Research with Vulnerable People

SREC FAQs and Amendment Process

SREC Video Training Series

UCC student population survey approval process

SECTION 2: APPLICANT(S) DETAILS

Name of UCC applicant(s)	Kathleen Foley Murphy	**Date**	10/11/2022
Name of Department / School / College / Research Institute / Centre / Unit	College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, School of Education, UCC	**Contact Number**	0872881277
Correspondence Address	'Ashgate' Boherard Carraig na bhFear Co Cork	**UCC Email Address**	120104010@umail.ucc.ie
Course Code/Name and year of course (students only)	PhD January 2022	**Name of supervisor(s)** (students only)	Dr Dan O'Sullivan Dr Kevin Cahill
Is this a resubmission?	~~Yes~~ / **No**	**SREC Log No.** (if a resubmission):	
Is this research funded?	~~Yes~~ / No	**If Yes, please provide name/s of Funding Agencies**	

Obtaining ethical approval from SREC does not free you from securing permissions and approvals from other institutional decision-makers and agency ethical review bodies. These bodies may accept the SREC approval, but researchers are responsible for ensuring they are compliant in advance of collecting data.

Project working title	Approaches to incorporate the principles of *Cosán*, the Irish national framework for teachers' learning, into the professional practices of primary teachers

If this is a collaborative project / community-based participatory / PPI research project / joint application with another agency, please complete this additional section:

Names of research partners / civil society organisations collaborating on this project	N/A
Agency contact person and position	
Agency address	
Details of the partnership (Please clearly identify the roles and responsibilities held by each party in the partnership in relation to the different aspects of the research).	

SECTION 3: ETHICAL APPROVAL SELF-EVALUATION

If your answer falls into any of the shaded boxes below, please address each point later in the application form		YES Use X or NA	NO
1	Do you consider that this project has significant ethical implications?		X
2	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	X	
3	Will participation in this project be voluntary?	X	
4	Will you obtain informed consent in writing from participants?	X	
5	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason, and (where relevant) omit questionnaire items / questions to which they do not wish to respond?	X	
6a	Will data be treated with full confidentiality / anonymity (as appropriate)?	X	
6b	Does your project require you to carry out a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) in compliance with UCC Data Protection Policy?		X
7	Will data be securely held for a minimum period of ten years after the completion of a research project, in line with the University's Code of Research Conduct (2021)?	X	
8	If results are published, will anonymity be maintained, and participants not identified? (see Q. 30 below regarding open data considerations, if relevant)	X	
9	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?	X	
10	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?		X
11	Will your participants include children / young persons (under 18 years of age)?		X
12	If yes to question 11, is your research in compliance with the UCC Child Safeguarding Statement which sets out the legal requirements under the Children First Act 2015?		N/A
13	Will your project require you to carry out "relevant work" as defined in the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016? (Relevant work constitutes any work or activity which is carried out by a person, a necessary and regular part of which consists mainly of the person having access to, or contact with, children or vulnerable adults.)		X
14	Do you require official Garda Vetting through UCC before collecting data from children or vulnerable adults? (Please note that having a Garda Vetting through another body is not sufficient; a separate UCC Garda Vetting is always required for UCC researchers)		X
15	Will project participants include people with learning or communication difficulties?		X
16	Will project participants include patients / service users / clients? A service user or client is a person who is served by or uses the services under consideration as part of this research.		X
17	Will project participants include people in custody?		X
18	Will project participants include people engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug taking, illegal Internet behaviour, crime, etc.)?		X
19a	Is there a realistic risk of participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress?		X

19b	Is there a realistic risk of the researcher experiencing either physical or psychological distress?		X
20	If yes to question 19a, has a proposed procedure for linking the participants to an appropriate support, including the name of a contact person, been given? (see Q. 33)	N/A	
21	If yes to question 19b, has a proposed procedure/support structure been identified?	N/A	
22	Are the research participants students with whom you have some current/previous connection (module coordinator, research supervisor, professional tutor, etc.)?		X
23	Will the research participants receive payment / gifts / voucher / or other incentives for participating in this study?		X
24	If your research is conducted on the internet, does it involve human participants? (e.g. through web surveys, social media, accessing or utilising data (information) generated by or about the participant/s; or involve observing human participants in their online interactions/behaviour). If yes, please review and utilise the UCC policy for conducting Internet Research.	x	

SECTION 4: DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Ethical review requires that you **reflect** and seek to **anticipate** ethical issues that may arise,

rather than reproduce copious text from existing research proposals into these boxes.

Entries should be **concise** and relevant to the point/question.

25. Very brief description of your study (15-25 words max.)

[e.g. This is a qualitative study of primary school teachers' attitudes towards religious teaching using focus groups to collect original data]

This is a qualitative study to investigate approaches to incorporate the principles of *Cosán*, the Irish national framework for teachers' learning [TPL], into the professional practices of primary teachers.

26. What is your study about? (100-200 words max.)

This study aims to discover what approaches can be utilised to best incorporate the principles of the *Cosán* framework (the Irish national framework for TPL) into the professional practices of primary teachers in Ireland. These need to be practical and sustainable for *Cosán* to become a path teachers follow when they are reflecting on and seeking to enhance their professional abilities, so the TPL they undertake has meaningful impact on their teaching practices and students' learning. This project will investigate if reflective, collaborative approaches to TPL, have the potential to work best for primary teachers, as advocated for by the Teaching Council to support *Cosán*. I will also seek to uncover what factors may enhance or inhibit teacher engagement with the framework. It will draw upon current national and international literature on the topic and seek paradigms of best practice in TPL that may be applicable to this research project. A qualitative, multiple case study, based on the experiences of ten primary school teachers in Ireland, is the primary methodology being employed. Over a fourteen-month period, the views of the participants will be collected using data collection instruments such as surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups.

27. What are your research questions? / If your study approach is participatory / PPI, which does not normally involve research questions that are set in advance, please include a broad outline of your research focus / key themes.
[**Do not** include your interview/survey questions in Q27].

1. How can *Cosán* be harnessed to empower teachers to make informed, reflective decisions about their professional learning and thus, promote teacher agency?
2. What approaches can be employed by teachers in primary schools to make the core principles of the *Cosán* framework a practical and sustainable reality in their professional practices?

3. What factors help to embed the principles of the *Cosán* framework in the professional practices of primary teachers?

28. Who are the participants in your study? Recruitment methods including details of how you will engage with participants, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria, detail permissions to be sought / secured already, and how will you recruit participants? / **If your study approach is participatory/PPI,** please indicate a proposed cohort which will be refined once the study progresses.

The participants will all be primary school teachers based in Ireland. They will initially be recruited via an online survey, the link to which will be advertised in the Irish National Teacher Organisation's monthly InTouch magazine, via NEARI (network for educational action research Ireland) and on professional group fora on Facebook (Teacher CPD Ireland; Primary Teachers Ireland). From the initial online survey, 10-12 interested primary teachers who have shown a willingness to engage in the research, through freely giving their email address at the end of the online survey, will be identified to be part of the research project.

Purposeful sampling will be used to select interested primary teachers, from a variety of contexts and backgrounds, to gain in-depth insights from their experiences through their engagement with *Cosán*. These teachers will be selected via a variety of criteria to reflect a broad representation of primary teachers in Ireland and to maximise transferability of the results and findings. The criteria will include:

- teachers of at least three years' teaching experience
- their gender
- their seniority within the primary school workplace
- the enrolment size of the primary school they work in
- the profile of the primary school they work in, e.g., rural/urban/disadvantaged/patronage
- their willingness to participate in the research over the 14 months of data collection.

Once 10-12 willing primary teachers have been identified, they will be contacted via their given email address and fully informed about the research project and their part within. They will be given the opportunity to seek clarification or ask questions about their role within the project. Assurances will be given regarding confidentiality and anonymity of their information at all stages of the research. Once I gain each participant's informed consent I can begin data collection though interviews and focus groups.

29. Concise statement of anticipated ethical issues raised by your project. How do you intend to deal with them? Please address all items where your answers fell into a shaded box in the self-evaluation above. (350 words max.)

The ethical considerations pertaining to this research would be towards the 10-12 participants, informed consent and anonymising the data gathered. At all stages of the research endeavour, ethical considerations are informed by the necessity to safeguard the interests of the research participants, particularly in relation to assurances of anonymity and confidentiality.

I will address these issues by:

1. Following UCC's Social Research Ethics Committee's guidelines on ethics as I will be directly interacting with human participants. I will apply and obtain their approval before I begin gathering data.
2. The participants will be 10-12 adult primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland.
3. Participants of the research project will have the choice to participate in the anonymous initial online survey and the teachers who may wish to further engage in the project will be given the opportunity to provide their email address on this survey, through which I can contact them.
4. All participants will be informed of the nature and purpose of the research, and their part within it, in writing. After this consultation, their permission will be sought and obtained prior to instigating any data collection.
5. In keeping with ethical protocols, the respondents' survey responses, interview transcripts and part within focus groups will be coded to retain their anonymity. Throughout this research project, this researcher will endeavour to ensure all participants and their viewpoints will remain anonymous.
6. The participants will be treated with the utmost professional respect.
7. In line with the concept of informed consent, if a participant wishes to withdraw from the research at any point for whatever reason, I will acquiesce to and accept their decision.
8. If, during an interview or through participation in the focus group, a participant is upset or distressed by the experience, the interview will be discontinued. I will comfort the person and direct them towards the appropriate professional and personal supports for wellbeing.
9. Finally, all results will be conveyed truthfully and impartially without altering any findings to satisfy the bias of any party, including this researcher.

What apps and platforms can I use to collect, securely store, transcribe, and share research data? Please read before completing Q. 30

As researchers, it is imperative that we can assure participants in our study that their data will be collected, transported, stored, and archived securely; this is particularly important where sensitive personal details are involved. Exact details are required as to the use (and location) of locked cabinets, management of audio files, encryption of laptops, electronic data collection/storage/sharing, and so on. We have prepared this 1-page summary guidance to support you in articulating your plan; however, in the case of conflicting advice, official UCC policies will take precedence over this guidance.

I/we would like to undertake an online survey/interviews/focus groups

All data, both anonymised and non-anonymised, including sensitive personal data, can be collected, and stored on the following cloud platforms; **UCC-Supplied** Microsoft Products (OneDrive, Teams, SharePoint, Microsoft Forms, etc.) and **UCC-Supplied** Google Workspace Products (formerly Google G-Suite; Google Forms, Meet, Sheets, Drive etc.) **subject to logging in to these services with your UCC credentials**. **Personal versions** of Microsoft and Google Workspace apps **should not** be used to collect and/or store research data. Google Meet no longer has a record function available to UCC staff and students. UCC also has a site licence for Qualtrics for online survey data collection for academic research and research adjacent projects.

Only apps/platforms that have been approved through the central UCC procurement system (Agresso) should be used for data collection, data sharing and data storage. If you would like to use an app/platform that is not covered here, please seek approval *prior* to applying to SREC. The first step to getting an app approved for use in research is to complete the "IT System Request Form". Please note that SREC has **no role** in approving apps/platforms for collecting, storing, transcribing, or sharing research data.

I/we have audio to be transcribed by a person/software

If transcription is being outsourced, the transcription service used needs to be trustworthy, reliable, and confidential. It is essential that data transferred outside of UCC is done securely (see HEAnet FileSender). Please note that the only software and cloud-based transcription services approved by UCC for use in research for transcribing audio data are the tools embedded in Microsoft's products: use the dictate tool in newer versions of Microsoft Word, and the dictate and transcribe audio file upload tool through the online Office 365 Microsoft Word when using your UCC credentials, and Microsoft Stream/Microsoft Teams when using your UCC credentials.

We are a team and would like to collaborate online (UCC colleagues only and/or UCC and external team members)

UCC-supplied collaboration and storage services like Microsoft Teams and the equivalent Google Workspace apps, can facilitate you to safely collaborate and communicate on research studies with UCC staff and students, and to collaborate with partners outside of the university. Data saved in Microsoft Teams / Google Workspace apps when you login with your UCC credentials are stored on the UCC's tenancies on Microsoft and Google's servers. Data is encrypted in transit and at rest. Features such as version control, external sharing and audit logging are available. Microsoft Teams sites can also be archived after the research is completed. If you have questions about these services, please contact the UCC IT Helpdesk. For collaborative projects, research data should only be stored on approved storage and collaboration services (Microsoft Teams and Google Workspace apps using your UCC credentials). If applying for ethical approval through SREC for collaborative, multi-agency projects and the data will not be stored in UCC / EU, please include comprehensive details on how these external services meet the relevant standards.

Although UCC students currently have access to institutional cloud storage, access to Microsoft Office 365 does not extend beyond their period of being a UCC student. Relying on one person's access to online data storage is not best practice. To ensure that the minimum data storage period of 10 years is adhered to, data should be stored in a shared Google Drive or Microsoft SharePoint site using your UCC credentials (UCC email address & password) to login.

What I need to know about Research Data Storage

1. If data does not need to be identifiable, it should be converted to anonymous form as soon as is possible.
2. Do not use free versions of services and platforms for data collection, sharing data, and/or data storage.
3. All laptops and PCs used to access data must be encrypted and password protected. Applicants should never store research data on a USB and only use an encrypted portable hard drive or an encrypted and password protected laptop for short-term storage until data has been anonymised.

4. Research data should only be stored on approved storage and collaboration services (see above). The personal versions of apps and services like OneDrive and Google Workspace **should not** be used to store research data. Further information on research data storage available on this UCC library website.
5. Where possible, **physical data** such as survey and consent forms etc. should be converted to electronic format as soon as possible and the originals shredded; however, if you need to retain physical data then it should be safely stored on premises at UCC in a locked cabinet/office.
6. In the exceptional case where there is a requirement for on premise storage (e.g. a requirement of a data-sharing agreement with a third party), Research Data Store can be accessed by researchers for storing research data. UCC Network File Store (NAS) can be used for secure storage if the researcher has access to it (UCC staff).
7. The HEAnet's FileSender is a way to share large files with strong encryption to any email address in a safe manner, which is useful for sending encrypted files to a transcriber or between team members outside of UCC if not using Microsoft Teams / Google Workspace using your UCC credentials.
8. Microsoft Azure Information Protection - AIP - enables you to protect documents on your computer before sharing them, and also enables you to protect emails in Outlook before sending them (PCs only). Click here for the Azure how to guide. To download the Azure software visit the Microsoft Azure website.
9. Further details on IT Services Storage Options are available on the UCC IT Service Storage Website.

30. Data. (Please provide your answers to these questions in the white area below; see advice on data collection and data storage on the previous page)
(a) How will you collect your data? Provide a brief description and justification of methods and data collection measures to be used.

i. If conducting an online survey/questionnaire, what survey platform do you plan to use?
ii. If you plan to use a virtual meeting platform (such as Microsoft Teams or Google Meet using your UCC credentials to login, or another UCC-approved app/platform for research), please outline the steps you will take in the event of a security breach or an interruption during a virtual call.

A qualitative, multiple case study will be utilised to inform this research to gain in-depth insights from the teachers' experiences through their engagement with *Cosán*. Data collection will be through surveys and individual semi-structured interviews, as well as focus groups. It will be an iterative process, as I evaluate the views of the various participants as they continually reshape effective, practical and sustainable approaches to best engage with the principles of *Cosán*. The complementary theoretical frameworks of sociocultural and constructivist perspectives on learning will further inform this study.

The first phase of data collection will be via an online survey using Google Forms via my UCC credentials and access to Microsoft drive from which, through purposeful sampling, 10-12 participants will be chosen and asked to participate in the PhD project (see Question 28 above for more details on the purposeful sampling).

There will be two interviews with each of the participants via Microsoft Teams, using my UCC credentials, and the interviews will be video recorded and transcribed via Teams. Once the interview is transcribed correctly the recordings will be deleted by me.

There will be six focus group meetings which will be held on Microsoft Teams, using my UCC credentials. The discussions will be video-recorded and transcribed via Teams. Once these discussions are transcribed correctly the recordings will be deleted by me.

To protect the security of the remote online meetings, I will ensure the meeting is set to private and that the 'lobby room' is used so no one can access the live meeting without my permission. I will also turn off my notifications during the meeting so there are no interruptions to the online meetings.

(b) If you are creating audio/video recordings, who will perform the transcription? (If transcription is being outsourced the transcription service needs to be trustworthy, reliable, and confidential. Ensure that data transfer is done securely. Recorded data must be deleted from a mobile recording device.

There will be video recordings of the interviews and focus groups via Microsoft Teams. By using this platform, I will use the option to transcribe the recording and I will edit this transcription so it reflects the meeting correctly. Once this process is complete the video recordings will be deleted.

(c) When will the data recordings be deleted from the recording device and who will be assigned responsibility for this?)

All recordings will be deleted from the Teams platform on my encrypted laptop once they have been transcribed correctly. I will assume responsibility for this.

(d) What type of data will you be storing? (Briefly describe the type of data you plan to collect).

Initially, I will be collecting and storing data for a survey via Microsoft Forms. Once this data is collated, anonymised and stored on my UCC One Drive, the surveys will be deleted.

The video recordings of the interviews and focus groups will be done via Microsoft Teams. Using this same platform the recordings will be transcribed and the recordings then deleted. The transcriptions of the recordings will be stored on my UCC One Drive.

(e) How and where will you store your data?[1] (Provide details about both physical and electronic documents).

There are no hard, physical documents to store.

The signed consent forms, collated surveys, and transcripts of the interviews and focus groups will be stored on my UCC One Drive.

(f) Who will you share the data with? Sample prompts: If you plan to make your raw research dataset available publicly as part of the open data movement, or if you are required to do so as part of funding/journal requirements, please address your protocol here (make explicit links to Q. 32 below and show that you have addressed this in your consent form and information sheet). For collaborative/community-based

[1] Data management should follow the FAIR guiding principles (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability & Reusability). See, for example, Wilkinson, M. D. et al. (2016) The FAIR Guiding Principles for Scientific Data Management and Stewardship. It is required that all staff and student researchers store those data which are required to replicate research findings, and the information required to enable re-use of data. Details of the UCC policy on research data storage can be found in section 8 of the UCC Code of Research Conduct. SREC advises against storing research data on non UCC approved cloud-based storage services. Physical data must be stored in a locked cabinet, and you must specify who has permission to access this data.

participatory research/PPI, please address issues such as shared ownership of data, will data be transferred (how?), publication of findings, etc. If your funder contractually requires you to give them access to the 'raw' dataset, examine relevant implications, including appropriate anonymisation, protocols for secure access to the dataset, etc.

Initially, I will be sharing the data collected with my supervisors.

I intend to share my completed project with the Teaching Council of Ireland and, if it is requested, will share the data with them.

I also hope to publish my work in a reputable journal and, if required by the publishers, I will share the data with them as per their publishing guidelines.

(g) If you are planning to analyse an existing dataset, please outline how the original consent process allows for your data analysis.

N/A

(h) If you are planning to request access to health/case files/personal records that were not created for research purposes, please address Data Protection considerations, provide a strong rationale, and comprehensively address associated ethical issues.

N/A

(i) If you ticked yes to Q.6b in the SREC Checklist (above), have you submitted your DPIA? (You do not need to submit your DPIA with this SREC form)

N/A

31. Arrangements for informing participants about the nature of the study and withdrawal from the study (e.g. information sheets, letters of invitation, social media information, participant recruitment, focus group welcome/schedule, withdrawal, etc.).

- The first part of data collection is via an online survey to gather participants for the research project. See attached Appendix 1 for the information sheet for the online survey.

- 10-12 participants, who have shown an interest in participating in the project further by providing their email address, will be chosen from the survey via purposeful sampling. They will be contacted via their email and informed about the full nature of the research project and their part within and they will be asked to give their consent to participate within the project via interviews and focus groups. They will also be informed of their ability to withdraw from the project at any point. See attached Appendices 2 and 3.

32. How you will ensure that participants provide informed consent (or assent if relevant)? cf. Question 4 - attach relevant form(s); address special considerations in terms of children / young people / vulnerable persons / adults who have difficulty in making decisions unaided. **If your study approach is participatory/PPI**, indicative forms are fine, but if there are substantial changes made with research partners, you will have to submit an SREC amendment request form)

The participants of this research project will all be capable adults who have the ability to make an informed decision. They will be provided upfront with the relevant information sheets (See Appendices 1, 2 & 3) and given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions if needs be before their consent is received.

33. Outline of debriefing process at the end of the data collection process (cf. Question 9)**. If you answered Yes to Questions 19a or 19b, give details here. State what you will advise participants to do if they should experience problems (e.g. who to contact for help – provide name and contact details where required.)**

I do not expect the interviews or focus groups to unearth sensitive information which may upset the participants but if, through participation in these, a participant does become upset, I will stop the interview or focus group discussion and refer them to the following free service:

Teaching Council Confidential Employee Assistance Service & Counselling 1800 411 057 or Text 'Hi' to 087 3960010

34. Estimated start date and duration of project (by months)

- Start date: April 3, 2023
- Duration of project: 14 months to May 31, 2024.

35. Additional information of relevance to your application

N/A

36. Declarations (clickable links to policies and codes quoted here are on the next page)	**Yes**	**No**	**N/A**
a) I/we agree that should there be unexpected ethical issues arising during the course of this study, that I/we will utilise my/our professional/disciplinary code of ethics, and/or notify UCC SREC, where appropriate.	X		
b) I/we have consulted the UCC Code of Research Conduct and believe my/our proposal is in line with its requirements.	X		

c) I/we have consulted the UCC Child Protection Policy and believe my/our proposal is in line with its requirements.	X		
d) I/we have consulted the UCC GDPR guidelines and declare that our project is GDPR compliant.	X		
e) Where required under the UCC GDPR Guidelines, I have submitted a DPIA to the UCC Information Compliance Department			N/A
f) I/we have consulted the UCC Garda Vetting Guidelines, and where appropriate, researchers on this project have valid Garda vetting through UCC (having a valid Garda Vetting through another body is insufficient).			N/A
g) In the event that my research data collection extends beyond the notified period outlined in my original SREC approval form, I agree to notify srec@ucc.ie via email.	X		
h) I/we have consulted UCC Research Business Continuity Guidance and will follow this guidance to ensure the safe conduct of my/our project during COVID-19.	X		

37. Signatures

UCC Applicant(s)

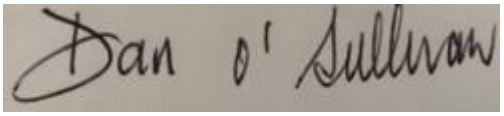
A picture of signatures pasted here is acceptable once the application is emailed to srec@ucc.ie from your **UCC email** address. However, if you cannot paste a picture of your signature, please type your name here and email this form to SREC using your **UCC email account**.

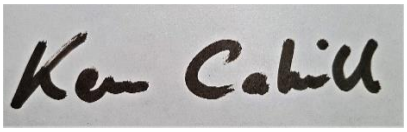
Academic Supervisor(s) / Principal Investigator(s) / Tutor(s)

All academic supervisors (where applicable) must approve the contents of this application and sign this form.

A picture of signatures pasted here is acceptable.

Kathleen Foley Murphy





Date: November 17, 2022

Date: 17/11/2022

Appendix 2
Ethics Form Clarifications and Changes

The clarifications below sought by SREC were addressed by me in the red font and accepted by them. I made the subsequent changes to my research.

1. Application shows careful attention to the parameters of the purposive sampling. However, they should make clear in the information sheet / end of the survey that not all may be selected and why some may and some may not. Ensure e-mail goes out to thank all for willingness to participate. I will include a sentence at the end of the survey, with question 10 where I ask for their email if they wish to further participate, and inform the potential participants that not all who provide me with an email may be potentially selected as this will be a small-scale research project. Out of respect to those who showed an interest to participate, I will email each of them and thank them for their willingness to participate.
2. Participants may withdraw data after the specified period for the individual interviews. However, this will not be possible for the focus group, given nature of a focus group and interdependent nature of the data elicited. This should be made clear in data withdrawal sections. In the section regarding withdrawal I will strengthen the statement that withdrawal from the focus group, after participating, may not lead to withdrawal of their data given the amalgamation of voices and the interdependent nature of the data gathered.
3. Related, whilst confidentiality may be guaranteed by the researcher (subject to the limits noted), you cannot guarantee same of other members of the focus group. You can, however, note that all participants who opt into the focus group do so on the understanding that they will also respect the confidentiality of other group members. On the information sheet, I will include a sentence asking all participants to demonstrate respect towards all in the focus groups and to be mindful of confidentially so we can discuss freely and openly. At the onset of each focus group discussion I will begin by stating I want to note from the outset that we aim to demonstrate the values of respect, honesty, integrity and trust throughout these discussions. So, I encourage people to share honestly and openly, on the basis that we know that confidentiality will be respected.

4. I found the two information sheets for the interviews and the focus groups a little confusing. The former also mentioned the focus groups. Perhaps one information sheet could cover both eventualities? As the participants are agreeing at the outset to participate in both the interview and focus group, the two information sheets will be amalgamated into one for the participants' ease and to provide clarity.

Reviewer 2

Q30 (f): Please clarify the data that you will share with the Teaching Council of Ireland and journal publishers. Will you be sharing interview and focus group transcripts? I will not be sharing the transcripts of the interviews or focus groups with the Teaching Council of Ireland, as it is not a commissioned piece of research, nor with any journal publishers. The anonymised datasets will be in the appendix of my doctoral project.

Appendix 3

Advertising Poster to Recruit Research Participants



Appendix 4

Email to Primary Schools across the Republic of Ireland Seeking Participants

A dhuine uasail,

I am a primary teacher undertaking a PhD research project in UCC on primary teachers' engagement with CPD and how it can impact on teachers' professional practices and their agency. I am seeking primary teachers to participate with this research and would appreciate if you could share this email with your teaching staff.

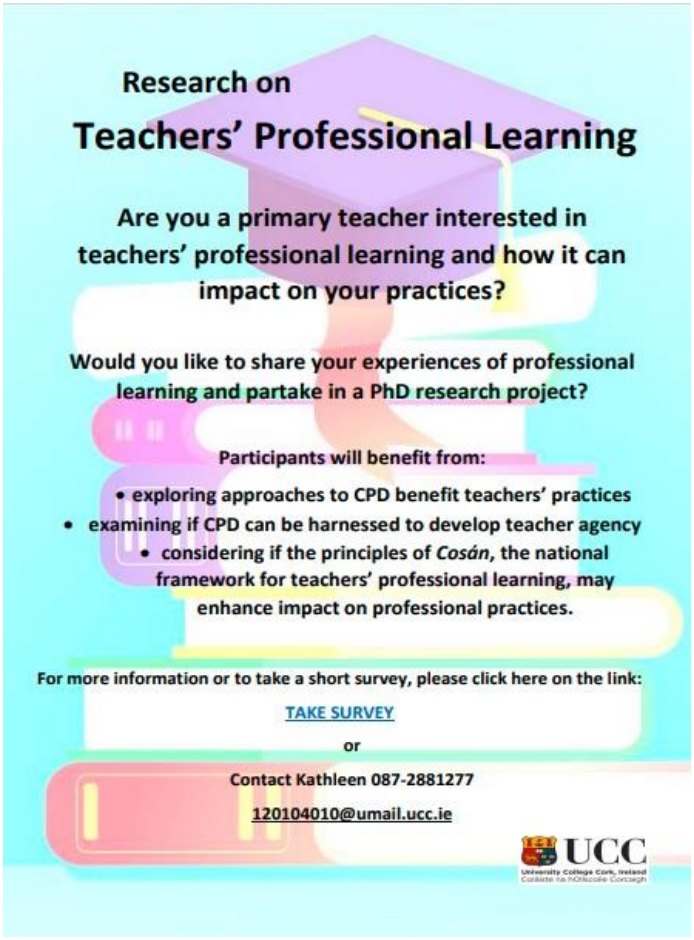
If anyone is interested in participating in this project please click on the link below.

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=pVz-Rm-GQk6S6e2HhiRVRU_l4XLDwbFOrUYeM7ZLdmRUMzJPWEdZUEtZRkdZQ1lCWFNNSVdJMElNRi4u

Go raibh míle maith agat as ucht do chabhrach 's do thacaíochta.

Le meas,

Kathleen Foley



Appendix 5
Initial Participant Survey

Practical and sustainable approaches to develop impactful teachers' professional learning

Information Sheet for Survey

Thank you for considering participating in this research project. The purpose of this document is to explain to you what the research is about and what your participation would involve, to enable you to make an informed choice.

The purpose of this study is to identify sustainable approaches to best incorporate the principles of the *Cosán* framework (the Irish national framework for Teachers' Professional Learning [TPL]) into the professional practices of primary teachers in Ireland so it has meaningful impact.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to firstly complete this short online survey to provide basic background information on you and the primary school you work in. There will then be an online interview (~30-40 minutes) at the beginning and end of the data collecting period (12 months) to discuss your experiences and perspectives of TPL. There will also be three online focus group meetings, each ~40 mins in length, over the 12 month period during which participants will share their TPL experiences with a small group and reflect collaboratively to support each other in their endeavours.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate, and should you choose to do so you can refuse to answer specific questions or decide to withdraw from the study prior to completing the survey. All information you provide will be confidential and your anonymity will be protected throughout the study. You maintain the right to withdraw from the study at any stage up to the point of data submission. At this point, your data will be collated with that of other participants and can no longer be retracted. The anonymous data will be stored on a University College Cork supported cloud storage platform, Microsoft Drive. The data will be stored for a minimum of ten years. The information you provide will contribute to a PhD thesis and may contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations. We do not anticipate any negative outcomes from participating in this study.

This study has obtained ethical approval from the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any queries about this research, you can contact me, Kathleen, at 120104010@umail.ucc.ie or my supervisors at Dan.OSullivan@ucc.ie or K.Cahill@ucc.ie

If you agree to take part in this study, please demonstrate consent in question 1 of the following survey.

* Required

1. Do you consent to participate in this study? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

2. Are you male or female? *

- ◯ male
- ◯ female
- ◯ prefer not to say

3. How many years' teaching experience have you? *

- ◯ 0-3 years'
- ◯ 4-8 years'
- ◯ 9-13 years'
- ◯ 14-20 years'
- ◯ 21+ years'

4. What size school are you teaching in?
* 

- ◯ 1-3 teacher school
- ◯ 4-7 teacher school
- ◯ 8-13 teacher school
- ◯ 14-19 teacher school
- ◯ 20+ teacher school

5. What type of primary school do you work in? Please tick as many boxes as applicable. * 

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Suburban
- ☐ Special school
- ☐ DEIS Band 1 or 2

6. What class to you teach? *

- ◯ infants - 2nd class
- ◯ 3rd- 6th class
- ◯ special education (learning support or resource teaching)
- ◯ administrative principal or deputy principal
- ◯ special class teacher, either in mainstream or in a special school

7. Please choose from below the most applicable level of leadership you hold in your school.

*

- ◯ principal
- ◯ deputy principal
- ◯ AP1 or AP2
- ◯ teacher leader
- ◯ none of the above

8. I am looking forward to working with primary teachers who are interested in engaging with the Cosán framework and to identify approaches for meaningful TPL. Please briefly describe what drew your interest to this research project below (1- 3 sentences).

*

Enter your answer

9. If you are interested in partaking further in this research project please provide your email address so I may contact you.

*

Enter your answer

Appendix 6

Participants' Information Sheet & Consent Form



Participants' Information Sheet and Consent Form

Thank you for considering participating in this research project. The purpose of this document is to explain to you what the work is about and what your participation would involve, to enable you to make an informed choice.

The purpose of this study is to identify what practical and sustainable approaches can be utilised to best incorporate the principles of the *Cosán* framework (the Irish national framework for Teachers' Professional Learning [TPL]) into the professional practices of primary teachers in Ireland.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in a one-to-one interview with the researcher at the at the beginning and end of the data gathering period of 14 months and engage in three focus group sessions with other participants. The interview will be video recorded and is expected to take 30-40 minutes to complete. This focus groups will also be video recorded, and are expected to take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate, and should you choose to do so, you can refuse to answer specific questions, or decide to withdraw from the interview or focus group. Once the interview or focus group has been concluded, you can choose to withdraw at any time in the subsequent two weeks. However, as the focus group transcript will be an amalgam of voices generated from the focus group audio file, it may not be possible to delete your data.

All of the information you provide will be kept confidential and anonymous, and will be available only to the researcher and my two supervisors. The only exception to confidentiality and anonymity is where information is disclosed which indicates that there is a serious risk to you or to others. Please be aware, however, that while we can guarantee that we will maintain confidentiality, we cannot guarantee that group members will do the same, although they will be asked to do so. Once the each interview and focus group is completed, the video-recording will immediately be transferred to a safe UCC data storage platform and transcribed by the researcher, with all identifying information removed. Once this is completed, the recording will be deleted and only the anonymised transcript will remain. This will be stored on a University College Cork supported cloud storage platform, my UCC OneDrive account. The data will be stored for minimum of ten years.

The information you provide will be part of a PhD research project. I also intend to share the completed research with the Teaching Council of Ireland and may share the data with them, if it is requested. The information you provide may also contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations.

We do not anticipate any negative outcomes from participating in this study. At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. Should you experience distress arising from the interview, the contact details for support services provided below may be of assistance.

Teaching Council Confidential Employee Assistance Service & Counselling 1800 411 057 or Text 'Hi' to 087 3960010

This study has obtained ethical approval from the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee, Log number 2022-223.

If you have any queries about this research, you can contact me at 120104010@umail.ucc.ie or my supervisors at Dan.OSullivan@ucc.ie or K.Cahill@ucc.ie

If you agree to take part in this study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Consent Form for Partaking in Research Study

I……agree to participate in Kathleen Foley's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interviews and focus group discussions with Kathleen Foley to be video-recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview or focus group, in which case the material will be deleted. This may be more difficult to do completely with the focus group transcript as it is an amalgamation of voices and the interdependent nature of the data.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview or part in (e.g. my name / location/ school won't be used) may be quoted in presentations and publications (e.g. article, book chapter, student thesis, social media publicity of the study's findings, etc.), if I give permission below (please tick one box):

I agree to participate in this study ☐

I do not agree to participate in this study ☐

Signed: …… Date: ……..

Appendix 7
Semi-Structured Interview 1 Schedule of Questions

Schedule of Interview 1 Questions

Interview Procedure-

Reminders and procedures with interviewees

- Just a reminder, this research is about discussing approaches which may best support CPD or teachers' professional learning and may enhance teacher agency.
- Your participation is voluntary and I am reassuring you that you will remain anonymous throughout the research and I will do my utmost to ensure confidentially is maintained.
- I have your permission to record so the interview can be transcribed afterwards. Once this is complete I will delete the recording.
- For the purposes of this interview CPD and teachers' professional learning/ TPL, refer to the same thing.

	Interview Questions & Prompts
Teacher's experience of TPL	• To start, can you tell me about your experience with CPD to date? ○ Has any of this changed your professional practices? ○ Could you describe further? How did this occur? ○ How did it impact on your teaching practices or students' learning? ○ In what way was it powerful? ○ What has helped you to engage in and try out this new learning? • Have you a course or professional development area in mind for the coming months? ○ Why did you chose it? • What were your reasons/ motivation for undertaking CPD? • How much autonomy or choice do you believe you have in undertaking CPD activities that interest you and are valuable for your teaching role? • How much autonomy do you believe you have in making your TPL transformative to your practices? ○ What may support this? ○ What might inhibit this? • What is your knowledge of the *Cosán* framework? ○ Could you elaborate?

Reflective Practices	• Do you reflect on your teaching practices regularly? ○ In what ways do you do this? / Explain that to me. / What does it look like? / Could you give me an example? ○ When would you normally reflect? • The reflection you engage in, would it be more cursory, like, how did that go/ what worked? Or more in-depth/ critical, with searching questions like: What could I have done to help them learn better/ faster? What did I learn about my teaching in this lesson? • By engaging in reflective practices and evaluating your teaching, can your teaching improve and how?
Collaborative Practices	• Are collaborative practices common in your school? • Could you describe what they look like? • What enables this in your school, in your opinion? • Is there anything that may inhibit this in your context? • Do you discuss your TPL/ exchange ideas with your colleagues or school leaders? • How does this occur? • Do these professional conversations or activities lead to any changes in your school? Give an example, please/could you tell me about it please?
Effective approaches to TPL for teachers	• What do you think TPL should look like for teachers? ○ How can this be done? ○ Why do you think this would work? • What other approaches may work? ○ What could help enable/ embed this idea? ○ What might impede it the most? • Besides, Droichead, are you aware of any structures for teacher development in your school? ○ Tell me about it/ How does that work? • Could you tell me the extent to which you engage in the following TPL approaches, if at all: action research; coaching; communities of practice; collaborative reflection; reading of articles or research; peer observation? ○ Describe this to me.

Teacher Agency	• Do you believe you have the skill set or ability to evaluate your professional practices? • If you recognise a gap in your teaching knowledge or practices, what do you do to remedy this? • Have you ever been encouraged to develop as a teacher or do you ever encourage your colleagues to develop? ○ What did this look like? • Do you ever consider your professional journey, like, how you have developed as a teacher and where your career might be going? ○ How will you get there/ plan for it? ○ Who is responsible for this/ or may support it? • How much control do you feel you have over your development as a teacher? • Are you currently enthusiastic or motivated or engaged with your career as a teacher? Describe the stage you believe you are at.

Appendix 8

Schedule of Questions for Focus Group I (~40- 50 mins)

Focus Group Reminders and Procedures
• Just a reminder, this research is about discussing approaches which may best support CPD or teachers' professional learning and may enhance teacher agency. • Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any point and I am again reassuring you that I will keep your identity anonymous throughout this process. • I have your permission to record so the interview can be transcribed afterwards. Once this is complete I will delete the recording. • I would encourage each of you to demonstrate the core teaching profession values of respect, honesty, integrity, confidentiality and trust throughout these discussions. I hope that everyone will be honest and I expect that confidentiality will be maintained regarding this focus groups and that it will be a respectful, safe space where people can discuss in an open fashion. • Please try to keep your cameras on (I know Wi-Fi etc. can be a problem!) and if you have a point you would like to make, but don't want to interrupt someone, just raise your hand and I will come to you. • For the purposes of this interview CPD and teachers' professional learning/ TPL, refer to the same thing. • I will throw out a few questions, and try to take a back seat to let you all chat amongst yourselves.

	Questions & Prompts
***Cosán* Framework Background**	➢ *Cosán* infographic shared and the framework and its principles explained by me. Inform participants on Department of Education proposals to link *Cosán* with SSE & LAOS and the new Primary Language Curriculum and Primary Maths Curriculum. (~5-7 mins) ➢ Having had this whirlwind tour, any initial thoughts? What part of this would you like to explore more?

	How might you begin to explore this aspect of *Cosán* in your context? Would anyone here have ideas to support this?
Reflective Practices	➢ Does anyone want to share their approaches to reflecting on your teaching practices on what works best for you? ➢ I often think we are exhorted to reflect, but, I know in my time, never taught how to. Any thoughts on this? ➢ Is there anyone who would like to delve into reflection further, and in what way? Does anyone have a difficulty with or reservations about this? Does anyone have any tips for this?
Collaborative Practices	➢ Do collaborative practices or communities of practice occur within your school? What does this look like? How impactful is it? How open is the school staff to it? Can/ should it be enhanced? ➢ In your position within school, do you think you can begin to establish a community of practice? How? Why not? Why should you?
Teacher Agency	➢ Do you think, by engaging in the principles of *Cosán*, it may help you to make more informed decisions about your professional journey and thus, enhance your teacher agency? Why is that? Is there potential for this? How could it occur?

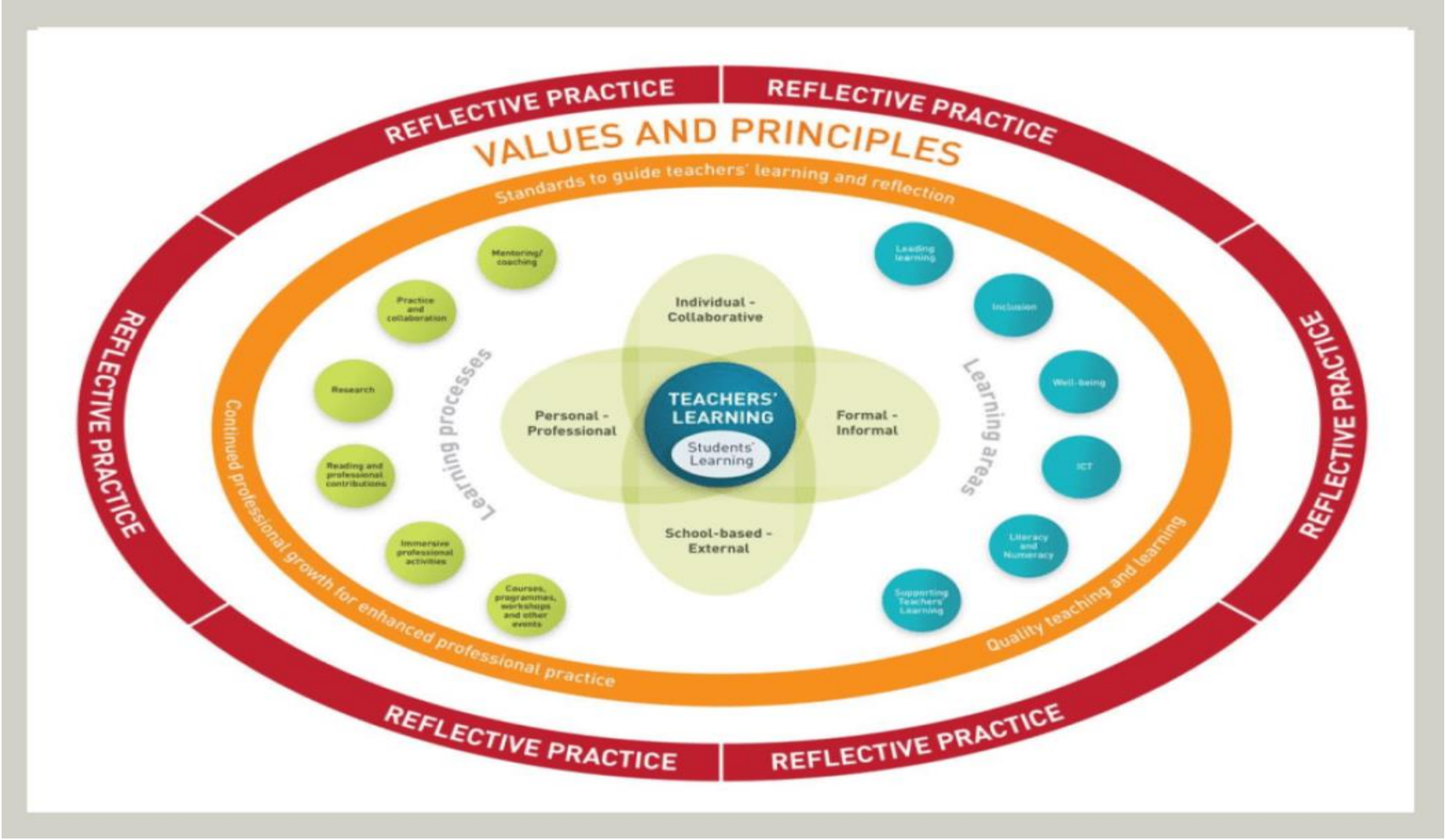
Thoughts for Next Interview

The next focus group will be held in February, and I will be in contact after Christmas to organise suitable times.

Before then, could you think about the *Cosán* framework and its principles and how it may enable you to reflect on and further engage in your TPL?
Also, if possible, could you take steps towards some reflective collaboration within your school to enable some area of professional development? This is not homework(!), but I'm hoping to see if reflective collaborative practices can be set up in schools of various contexts and what might enable or hinder this and if it can be a powerful tool for schools to utilise to engage in impactful, effective professional learning. So, if it is something you could begin to engage with, I would love to hear about your experiences.

Appendix 9

Participants' Post Focus Group 1 Discussion/ Information



LAOS, SSE and Cosán

Looking at Our Schools 2022

"It acknowledges the pedagogical skills required to enable high-quality learner experiences and outcomes. It also acknowledges the agency of teachers in making informed and reflective professional decisions about learning and teaching in line with the curriculum and in response to the abilities and needs of all children and young people in a variety of settings and contexts. It views career-long professional learning as central to the teacher's work and firmly situates reflection and collaboration at its heart. The framework holds that improving the quality of students' learning should be the main driver of teacher learning. Similarly, *Cosán*, the national framework for teachers' learning, positions students' learning as central." p. 9

"*Cosán*, the national framework for teachers' learning, complements the framework by providing a means through which teachers can plan, engage in, and reflect on their learning, so as to ensure impact both on their practice and on their professional growth." p. 22

Both LAOS and *Cosán*:

• are underpinned by a reflective approach that connects learning and practice;

• take a holistic view of learning and of the learner, drawing on a wide body of research indicating that excellence in teaching impacts most powerfully on student outcomes;

• recognise that schools are dynamic learning organisations and support teachers to work individually and collectively to build their professional capacity in order to support continuous improvement in teaching and learning;

• view professional learning as central to teachers' work and situate reflection and collaboration as key components of this;

• acknowledge that improving the quality of students' learning must be at the heart of teachers' learning.



Various ways different schools have realised they already engage with the principles of *Cosán*

For the next focus group in February, I would love for you to:

1. Begin to look at your own professional practices and your development as a teacher through the lens of *Cosán*. Use the above infographic to help support your reflections. Some prompts you may find useful: What resonates with you? What peaks your interest when you think of yourself growing your professional practices? In what way would you like to develop? How will you get there? Who or what can support you? See can you start to use *Cosán* as a scaffold against which you can develop your own professional practices and/ or meet the needs of your school.
2. If possible, could you begin to engage in collaborative reflection with your colleagues? This can be done with only 1 or 2 colleagues or it can be with a wider group- whatever is possible in your context! Choose an area to focus on- whether it is writing genres or the new maths curriculum or team teaching etc. Use prompts such as Rolfe et al.'s (2021) "What? So what? Now What?" or What went well? Even better if…. or Barnett & O'Mahony's (2006) levels of reflection (see below) or Brookfield's Lenses (see also below) - whichever suits you. At the next focus group in February, I would like to ask you what facilitated or inhibited your ability to begin to engage in collaborative reflection. Was it even possible to do this? Why/ why not? What approach to collaborative reflection do you think will suit your context, if at all?!

Table 1. Reflective questions and data gathering techniques for evaluating professional development (adapted from Guskey, 2000)

Evaluation level	Reflective questions	Ways to gather information
Level 1: Participants' reactions	Did the content make sense? Was your time well spent? Was the instructor prepared and knowledgeable? What are your reactions to the instructional activities? Was the room arrangement conducive to your learning?	Questionnaires Focus groups Interviews Journals
Level 2: Participants' learning	Were the learning objectives for the session(s) achieved? What did you learn today? What else do you need to learn about this topic? How do you intend to apply information? What facilitated or impeded your learning?	Simulations and demonstrations Participants' oral and written reflections Case studies Participant portfolios
Level 3: Organization support and change	What policies affect our implementation? Has adequate time been provided for implementing our goals? How are you supported when trying new ideas? Do central office administrators know about and support your efforts? Are results of new practices being shared with others?	District and school records Written policies Focus groups Interviews with participants and administrators Questionnaires
Level 4: Participants' use of new knowledge and skills	How will we know if new skills are being practiced? What will be observed if effective implementation is occurring? What new knowledge are you putting into practice? What problems are you having with the implementation? What insights are you sharing with teachers and administrators?	Questionnaires Oral and written reflections Teacher portfolios Direct observation Video and audiotapes Interviews with participants and supervisors
Level 5: Student learning outcomes	How has the implementation affected student achievement? How has the implementation affected student attitudes? Have all students acquired the desired learning outcomes? Are learning outcomes the same for students from different ethnic backgrounds or gender? How are students doing on standardized tests?	Standardized test results Questionnaires Interviews with students, teachers, parents Student portfolios

Barnett & O'Mahony (2006)

Brookfield's Lenses (1995)

Brookfield encourages teachers to critically reflect on their teaching by viewing their practices through four mutually connected, for different perspectives. They are: (1) the autobiographical, (2) the students' eyes, (3) our colleagues' experiences, and (4) theoretical literature. These lenses correlate to processes of self-reflection, student feedback, peer assessment, and engagements with scholarly literature. Reflecting through these lenses can provide a basis for sound teaching and the vehicle develop into an excellent teacher

Appendix 10

Schedule of Questions Focus Group II ~ 40-50 mins

Focus Group Reminders and Procedures
• Just a reminder, this research is about discussing approaches which may best support CPD or teachers' professional learning and may enhance teacher agency. • Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any point and I am again reassuring you that I will keep your identity anonymous throughout this process. • I have your permission to record so the interview can be transcribed afterwards. Once this is complete I will delete the recording. • I would encourage each of you to demonstrate the core teaching profession values of respect, honesty, integrity, confidentiality and trust throughout these discussions. I hope that everyone will be honest and I expect that confidentiality will be maintained regarding this focus groups and that it will be a respectful, safe space where people can discuss in an open fashion. • Please try to keep your cameras on (I know Wi-Fi etc. can be a problem!) and if you have a point you would like to make, but don't want to interrupt someone, just raise your hand and I will come to you. • For the purposes of this interview CPD and teachers' professional learning/ TPL, refer to the same thing. • I will throw out a few questions, and try to take a back seat to let you all chat amongst yourselves.

	Questions & Prompts
***Cosán* Framework**	➢ Having looked at *Cosán infographic*, do you think it can support you in your development as a teacher? Why is this? Do you envisage using *Cosán* in the future? How or why not? ➢ Could *Cosán* support your school's development? If so, how? Could it potentially link in with the SSE process/ LAOS, and if so, how?

	➢ What potential has a framework, such as *Cosán,* to support the achievement of teacher agency/ ability for you to become the best teacher you want to be? How?
Collaborative Practices	➢ Have you begun to use collaborative practices to support your own development & improve your professional practices? If so, what does this look like? If not, ➢ Or have you begun to use it to support the school's development? What does this look like?
Collaborative Reflection	➢ Has anyone begun to use collaborative reflection in their school context? What does this look like? Why are you using it? Can it lead to positive change? Is it practical/ sustainable?
TPL Approaches	➢ Does anyone have any initial thoughts (again I will delve into this further in the final interview) on what practical approaches can be adopted, and this could be for an individual teacher or for a school, to ensure that CPD undertaken leads to positive, transformative changes in teachers' practices?

Thoughts for Final Interview

The last individual interview will be after Easter and it will be about a half hour long. I'll be in contact before Easter to organise times that suit you. Before these interviews there are three things I would like you to think about:

a. Collaborative, reflective practices & can it support TPL in your school contexts, is it practical/ sustainable, how?
b. To think of practical approaches which may move *Cosán* from a framework on paper to practice, either for an individual or a school.
c. Can the principles of *Cosán* support you to reach your potential as a teacher and support your achievement of teacher agency? And how?

Appendix 11

Semi-Structured Interview II Schedule of Questions

Interview Procedure- Reminders and procedures with interviewees	
	• Just a reminder, this research is about discussing approaches which may best support CPD or teachers' professional learning and may enhance teacher agency. • Your participation is voluntary and I am reassuring you that you will remain anonymous throughout the research and I will do my utmost to ensure confidentially is maintained. • I have your permission to record so the interview can be transcribed afterwards. Once this is complete I will delete the recording. • For the purposes of this interview CPD and teachers' professional learning/ TPL, refer to the same thing.
Interview Questions & Prompts	
Reflective Practices	• Since the start of this project, are you reflecting further on your own practices? ➢ yes o In what form does this take? o Has it led to changes in your practices? ➢ No o Why not? / what has inhibited this, do you believe? • Have you begun to engage in reflective collaboration in your school, even on a small-scale? ➢ Yes o In what form does this take? o Has it led to changes in your practices? o Why did you decide to use this approach for this topic? ➢ No o Why not?/ what has inhibited this, do you believe?

Collaborative Practices

- Have collaborative approaches worked to bring about changes in practices in your school?
  - Yes
    - Could you describe this for me?
    - Why did you decide to use a collaborative approach to bring about this change?
  - No
    - Could you describe any project where there was collaboration in your school, recently?

Effective approaches to TPL for teachers

- What steps would you take to ensure the CPD you undertake can lead to changes in practices?
- What TPL approaches work best for you?
- In an ideal world, what TPL approaches might work best in your school?

Teacher Agency

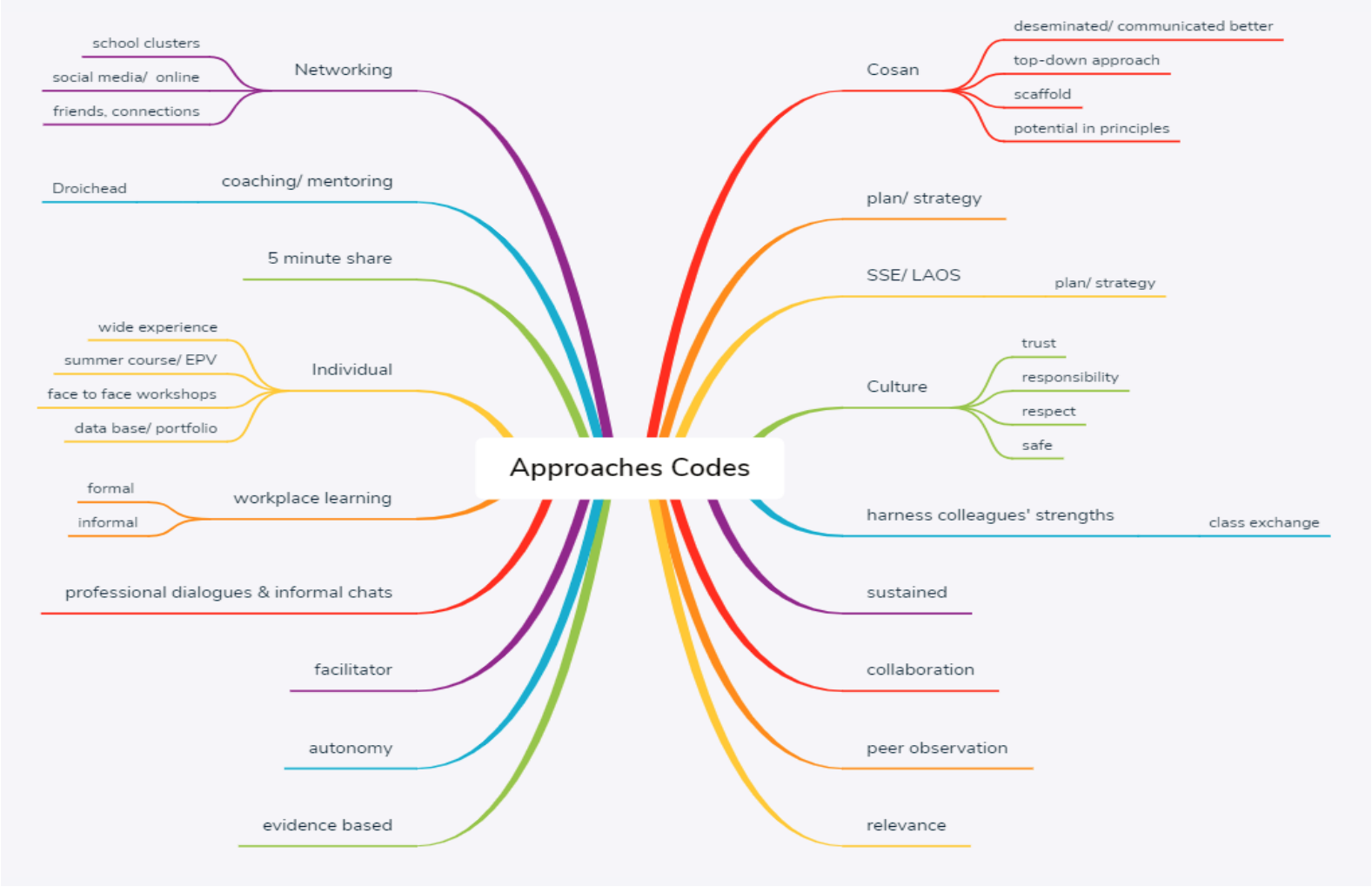
Teacher agency- the ability to make decisions and take action in their professional practices

- Why did you get into teaching? Has this aspiration been fulfilled? – How?
- Do you have more potential to develop as a teacher? How can this be reached?
- What conditions and/ or skills allow for teachers to achieve agency? (agency defined simply as using their experience, knowledge and reflective processes, while operating in a disciplined way, to make decisions and act to problem solve to strive to make teaching and learning better within their current context).
- Can you think of a time when the TPL you engaged in aligned with your beliefs and values? Did the TPL result in more transformative practices, as a result?
- Do you think the *Cosán* framework can promote teacher agency? How?/ Why not?
- Are you more aware of/ engaged with your professional journey/ development now?

Final expressions of gratitude for participating in this research study and for their rich, considered engagement.

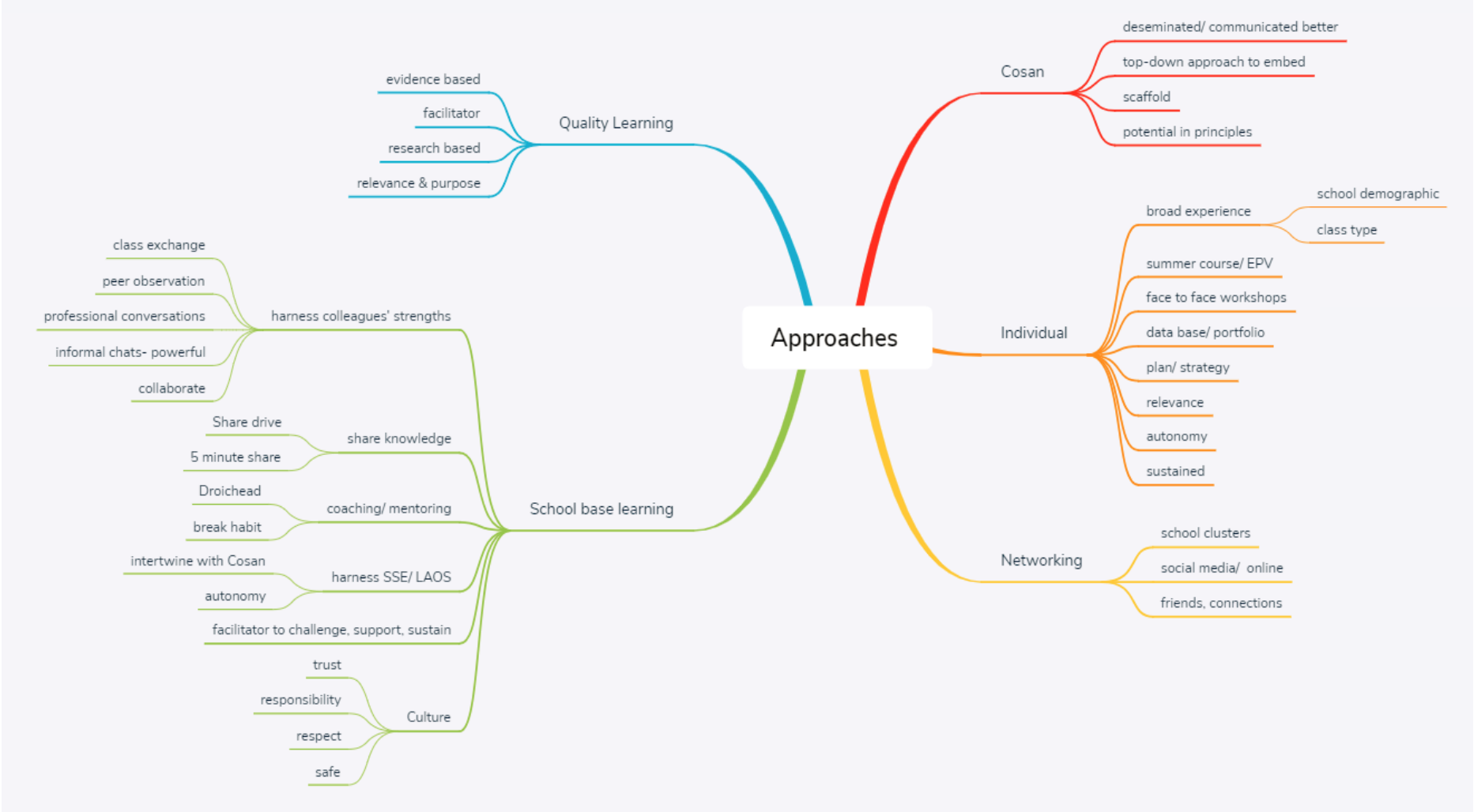
Appendix 12

Initial Analysis of Data Pertaining to Theme 1: Approaches



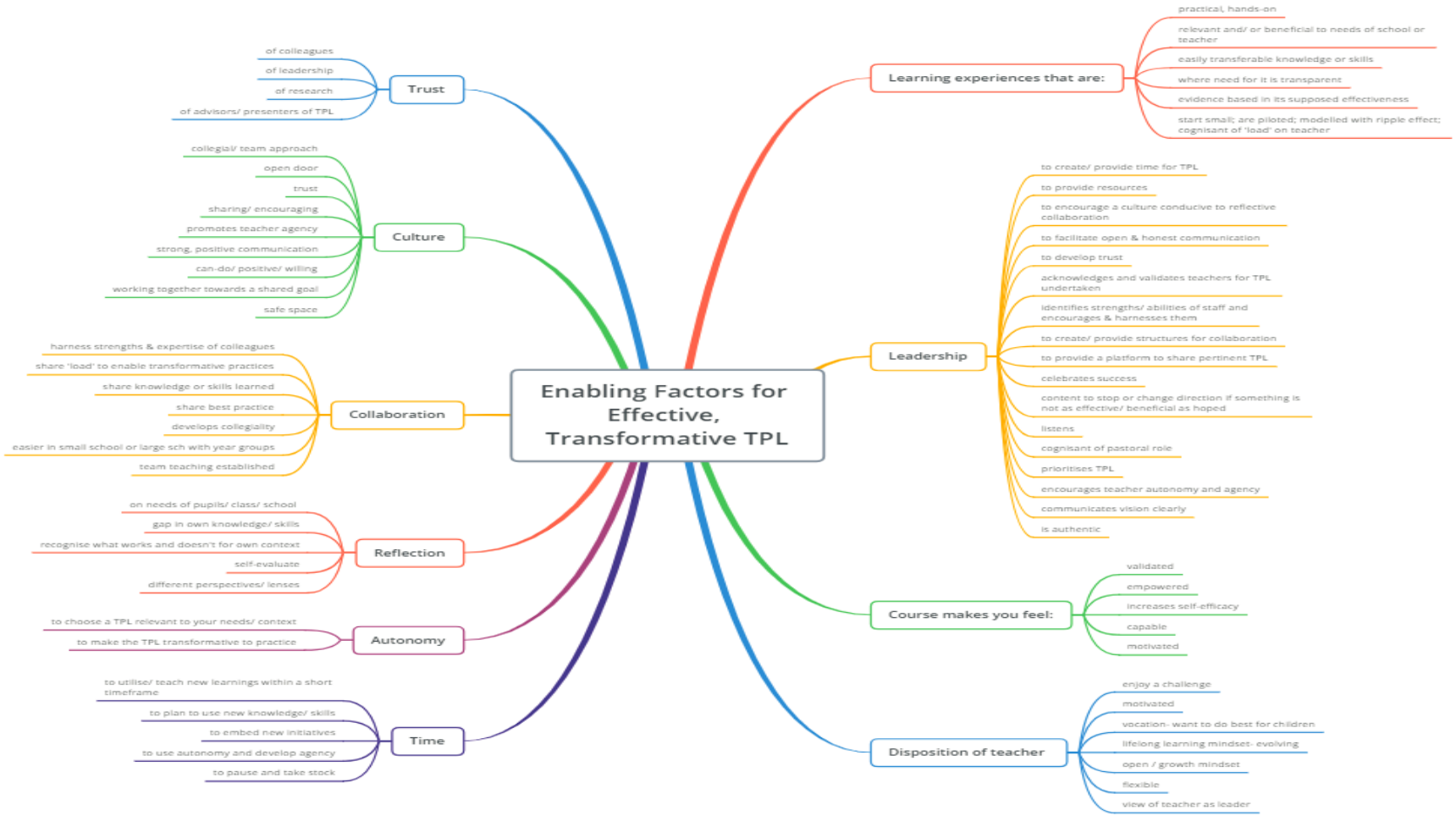
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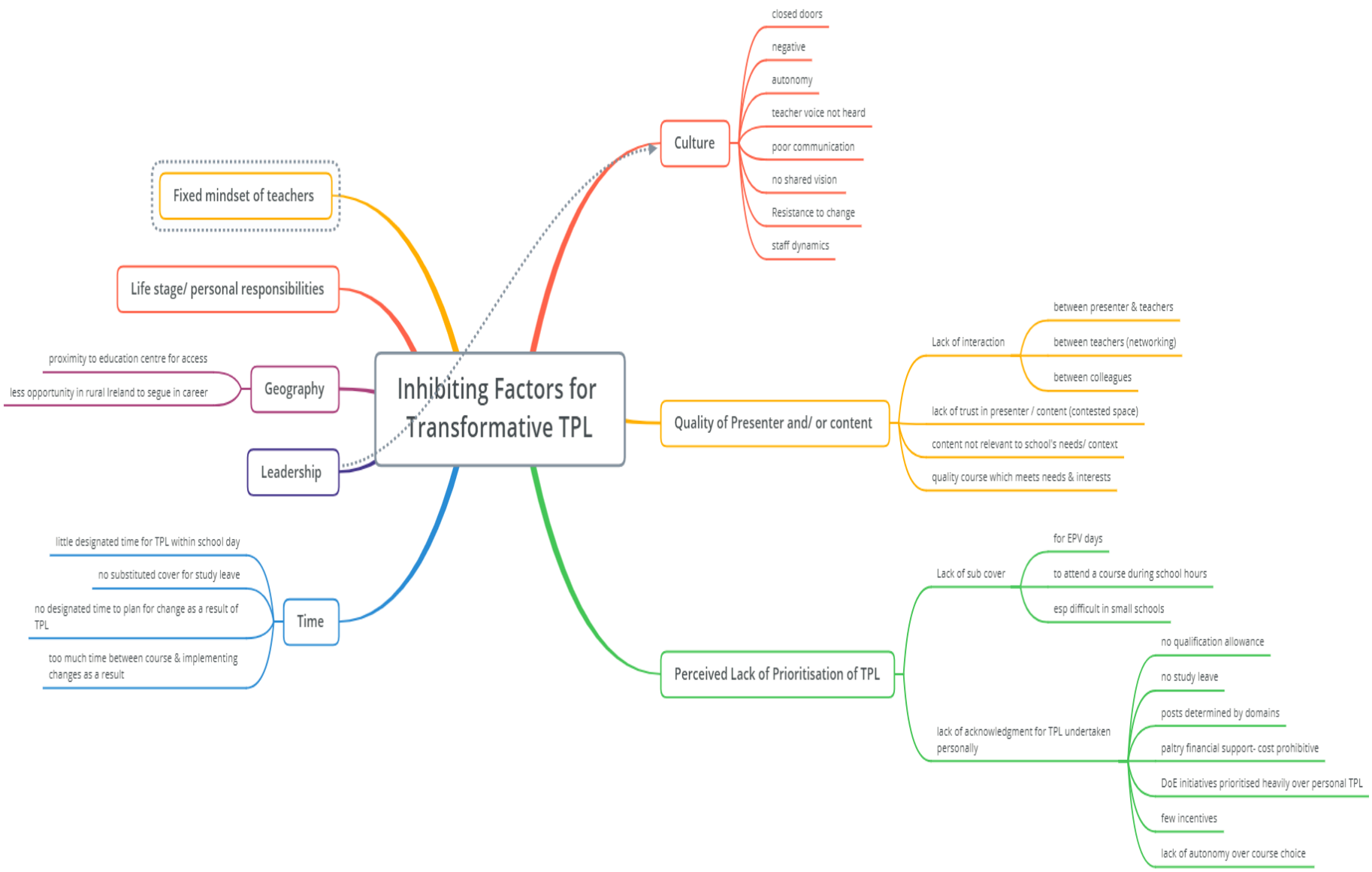
Final Analysis of Data Pertaining to Theme 1: Approaches



Appendix 14

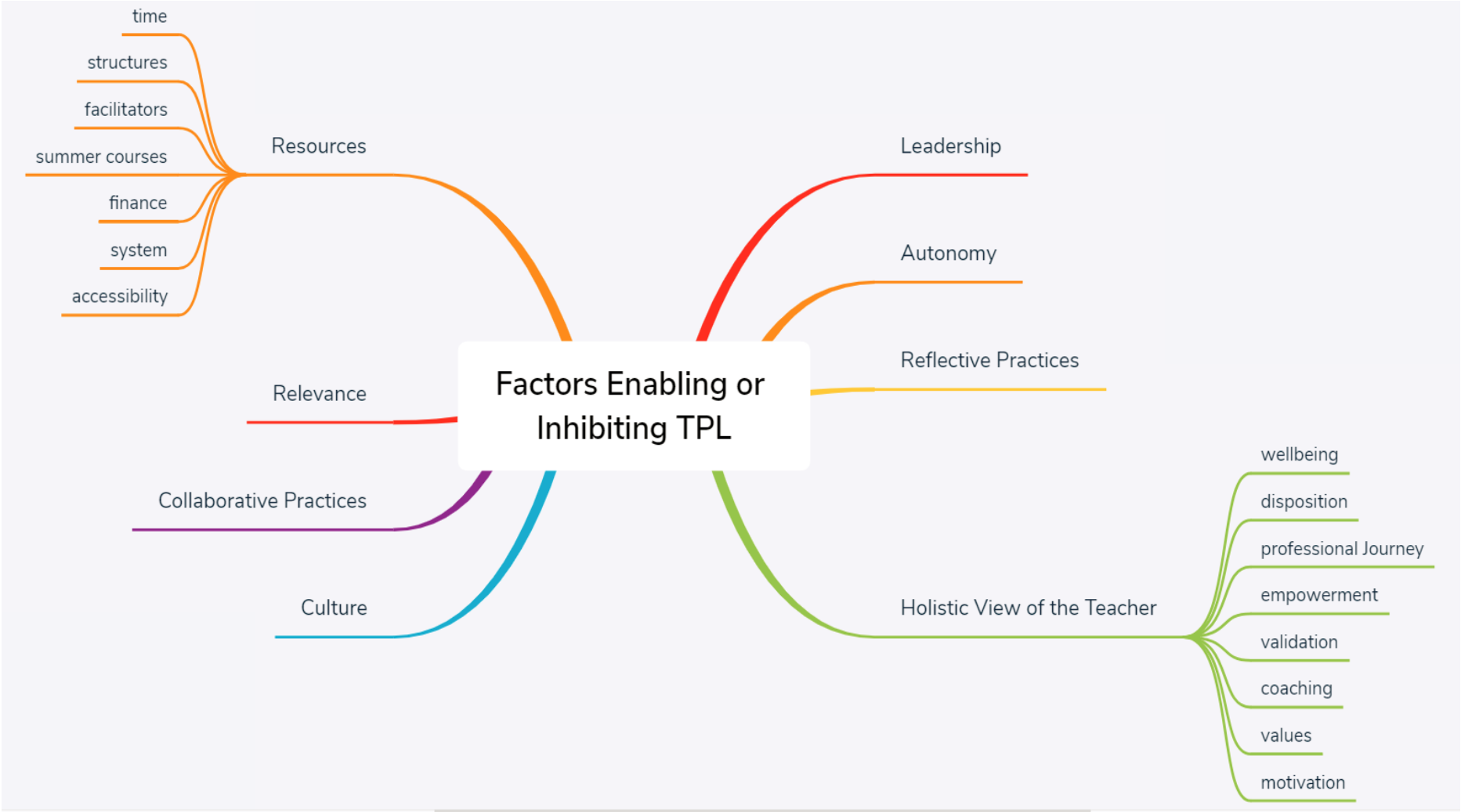
Initial Analysis of Data Pertaining to Theme 2: Factors Enabling or Inhibiting TPL




Inhibiting Factors for Transformative TPL
Culture
closed doors
negative
autonomy
teacher voice not heard
poor communication
no shared vision
Resistance to change
staff dynamics
Quality of Presenter and/ or content
Lack of interaction
between presenter & teachers
between teachers (networking)
between colleagues
lack of trust in presenter / content (contested space)
content not relevant to school's needs/ context
quality course which meets needs & interests
Perceived Lack of Prioritisation of TPL
Lack of sub cover
for EPV days
to attend a course during school hours
esp difficult in small schools
lack of acknowledgment for TPL undertaken personally
no qualification allowance
no study leave
posts determined by domains
paltry financial support- cost prohibitive
DoE initiatives prioritised heavily over personal TPL
few incentives
lack of autonomy over course choice
Time
little designated time for TPL within school day
no substituted cover for study leave
no designated time to plan for change as a result of TPL
too much time between course & implementing changes as a result
Leadership
Geography
proximity to education centre for access
less opportunity in rural Ireland to segue in career
Life stage/ personal responsibilities
Fixed mindset of teachers

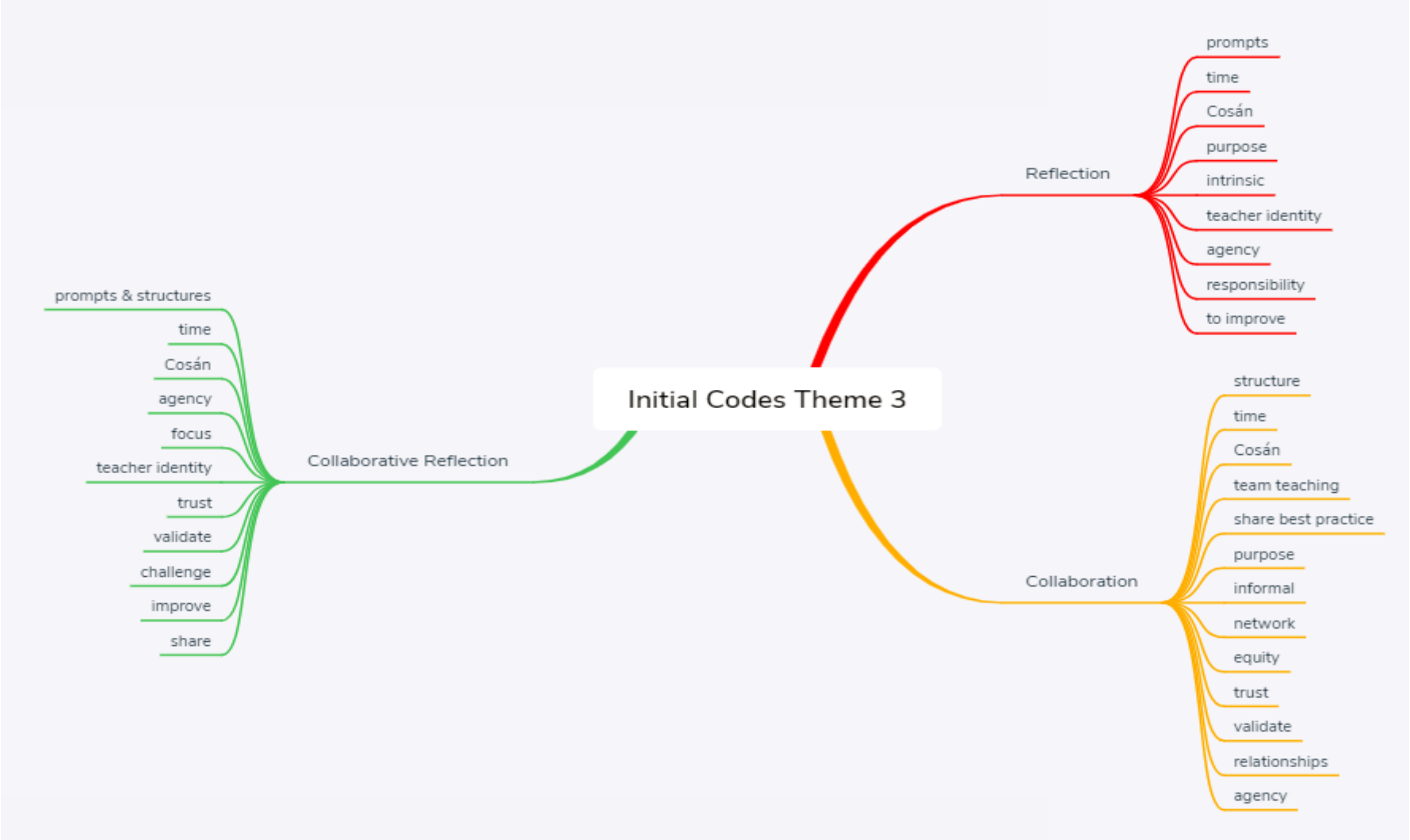
Appendix 15

Final Analysis of Data Pertaining to Theme 2: Factors Enabling & Inhibiting TPL



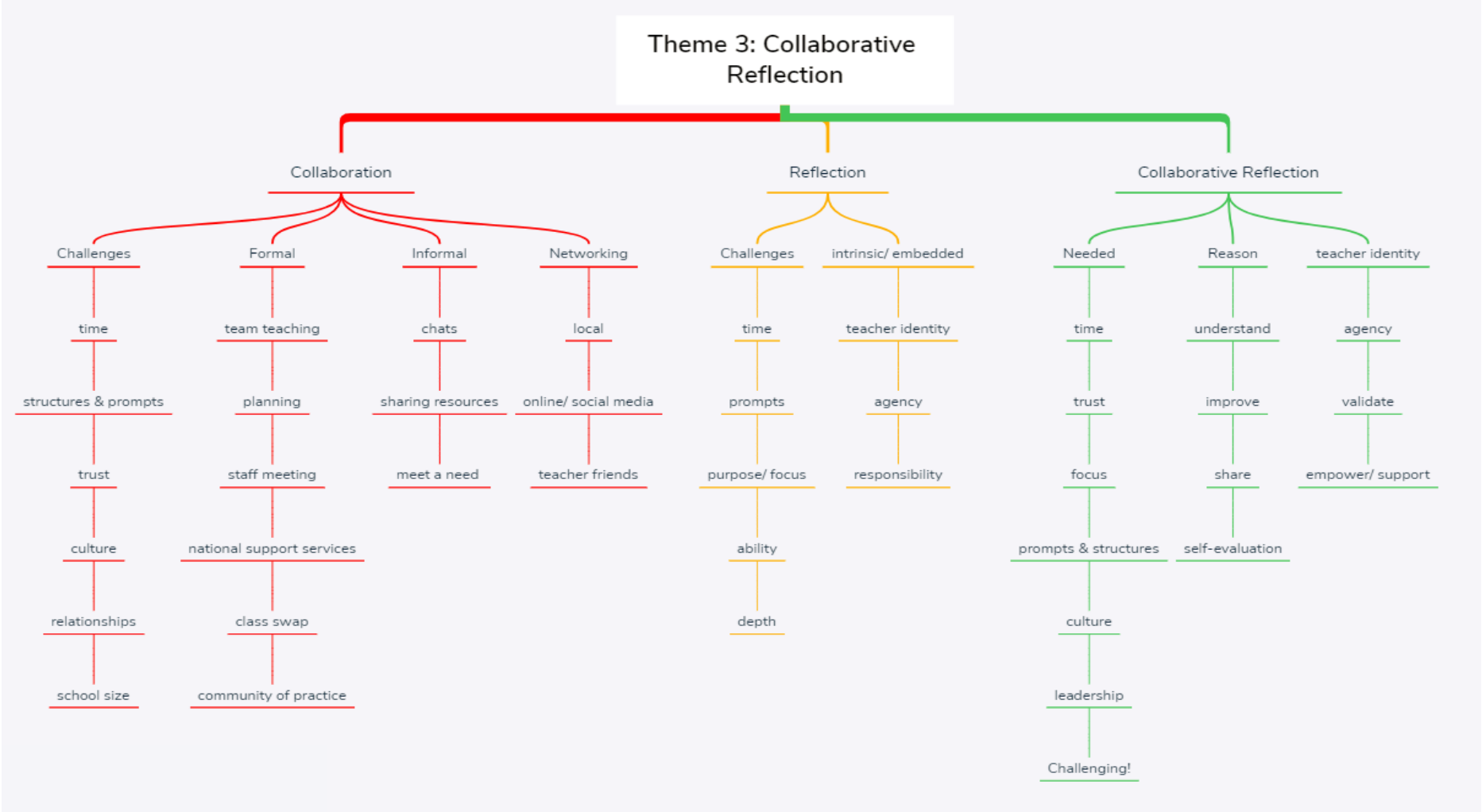
Appendix 16

Initial Analysis of Data Pertaining to Theme 3: Collaborative Reflective Practice



Appendix 17

Final Analysis of Data Pertaining to Theme 3: Collaborative Reflective Practice



Appendix 18

Initial Analysis of Data Pertaining to Theme 4: Agency & TPL



Appendix 19

Final Analysis of Data Pertaining to Theme 4: Agency & TPL

