An investigation of the impact that engaging teachers in research activity has for teacher voice, identity and empowerment

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the engagement in research development activity of teachers from two multi-school groups, with particular regard to the impacts that this had for teacher voice, their reflective capacities and their sense of empowerment. Moreover, where such impacts were noted, this also had implications for teacher identity and teachers developing a sense of themselves as 'teacher researchers'. The thesis is the product of a two-year ethnographic study where I attended the facilitated research development activities alongside the teachers. I was researching, acting as observer, holding focus groups, undertaking interviews, holding formal and informal conversations with teachers and gathering field notes (Madden, 2010). One research site was a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) made up of twelve schools, ten of which were primary schools and two high schools, and that stretched across a 200 mile range from the South to the Midlands of England. The other site was a Teaching School Alliance (TSA) of nine schools including eight primary schools and one high school in the North of England. In addition, while both groups were involved in an informal yet academically led research development programme, the MAT was also engaged with additional Master's accredited programmes.

This research outlines the contexts in which these school groupings were operating, tracing the increasing measures used to control and scrutinise the work of teachers (Ball, 2013; Evans, 2011). The thesis considers the development of teacher researchers drawing from the ideas of Lewin and Stenhouse. It utilises Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, drawing on issues around communities of practice, figured worlds and understandings of teacher identity (Holland et al, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991). In this way, a case is developed that increasing innovation and creative thinking in teaching can be facilitated where teachers engage with research activity. As Lave (1991) argued, situated learning happens as a consequence of the activity, the culture and context where this takes place.

Undertaking ethnographic study facilitates the researcher in considering a range of cultural artefacts together with taking into consideration the thoughts and feelings of the actors involved and unpacking the connections between these elements (O'Reilly, 2012). This thesis provides the reader with a unique insight into the journey of the teachers undertaking research, illustrating their constructs of research and of teacher researchers including the emotional and ethical investments in their roles. Its novelty lies both in relation to its examination of teachers' responses to this programme of activity and with regard to the insights that this offers around new organisational forms in respect of the MAT and TSA involved. Using an inductive rationale, data were categorised using a thematic approach, data were clustered, and then linked back to the literature to enrich and extend understandings of the data (Lingard et al, 2008).

The thesis demonstrated how teacher researcher communities of practice formed organically and how these communities had a significant impact on

developing critical thinking and in sustaining teachers' engagement with research. Moreover, as the research journey progressed, there was evidence that teacher identity, agency and their sense of power were shifting, moving teachers towards 'refiguring' their world where they embodied deeper understandings of what it was to be teacher researchers. As teacher morale and confidence grew, teachers were feeling empowered to make decisions and offer advice demonstrating the process of figuring a new identity as 'teacher researcher'. Nonetheless, the demands of assessment were high, and indeed led to some withdrawals from the programme in the MAT, whilst the TSA enjoyed the freedoms offered by a programme devoid of such constraints. Indeed, one teacher in each setting reported their intention of leaving the profession because they became uncomfortable with the status quo in their schools, which they felt was hampering their ability to grow as a practitioner. Nonetheless, all of the teachers, without exception, valued their research journey as something that had made a considerable impact on them, both as teachers and at a more personal level.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis reports on an ethnographic study of teachers undertaking research activity under the guidance of university based academic facilitators. Two distinct groups of teachers were investigated. The first was a group of 17 teachers drawn from a cohort of 12 schools within one multi-academy Trust (MAT). This group were engaged in both formal Master's development and in addition a five day per year, academically driven, 'wrap around' research programme. I joined the group as they began this work and worked alongside them for a period of two years. The second group was drawn from a cohort of nine schools that were part of a Teaching School Alliance (TSA) and whilst 19 staff were involved, this study focuses specifically on eight staff over the period of one year. This group attended five academically driven annual research engagement sessions with no accreditation associated with it. The TSA group had already been working on this agenda for seven years prior to this study and so had a wide range of research experience, although different staff had been given this opportunity over time. A range of data were collected, including from focus groups, semi-structured interviews, observations and field notes.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the project followed by an overview of the thesis as a whole. Thus, this chapter begins with a discussion of the educational context within which this work was set and suggests that heavy accountability agendas have set parameters around teaching in England today. Then the chapter discusses the ways in which teacher research may be helpful in addressing such constraints and briefly introduces the contexts for the schools under consideration. The chapter then outlines the research question and the aims. Next, it gives a very brief overview of the research design and approach adopted before moving to the

final section where it outlines how the thesis is structured and what will be covered in each chapter.

1.1 CONTEXT

Stenhouse (1988) asserted that teaching should open venues for students to be encouraged to think freely and come up with unpredictable answers and outcomes. In order to facilitate this, authors such as Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) argued that it is the duty of teachers to challenge and develop the thinking of those who they teach. Alongside this duty, authors such as Beattie (2009), Hargreaves (2009), Mockler (2011) and Kostogriz (2012) add that the quality of caring, knowledge seeking and production is also part of the teachers' role. For Butler (2017), this focus on care and support prevents teachers from wishing to compromise learning and achievement. However, teaching should also be understood against a background of ever-increasing constraints through assessment and accountability regimes (Sahlberg, 2015).

Whilst teachers can be expected to apply professional skills and knowledge appropriately (Turnbull, 2005), they have experienced a reduction in public respect, with their expertise being subject to greater questioning (Hargreaves et al, 2007). Teachers have been blamed for the poor quality of education and the resultant rhetoric around teachers' works to de-professionalise their roles and bring them under greater control through increased measures of accountability (Ball, 2008). Teachers feel responsible for outcomes which encouraged them to self-regulate (Van Lier, 2008). Hence, teachers' jobs have become increasingly determined by regulations and governmental authority, which have moreover prescribed curriculum content (Alexander, 2008). As Connell (2009) argued, teachers are under considerable pressure to produce good performance data, not aided by particular interpretations of the benefits that could be gained from data shared between schools (in Kirkup et al, 2005). On the grounds of set standards and accountability, coupled with calls for increased educational quality and value for money,

schools and teachers have relinquished their grip over teaching to the extent that teaching could be described as what Taubman (2009) referred to as ‘painting by numbers’. The teacher has thus been placed at the heart of improving standards in education and the educational achievement of the students (DfE, 2010; Pollard, 2010) and yet also could be argued to be working within highly constrained boundaries set beyond the school. The prevailing message is that teachers need to improve their practice (William, 2012).

Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) and Loh and Hu (2014) believed that the culture that had been created championed compliance and eroded professional independence. Working in communities can facilitate conformity to such aims (Ingleby, 2012). Moreover, school reputation became founded primarily on government assessment and inspection regimes that track and comment upon students' progress and achievement (Ball, 2013). Consequently, these measures continued to challenge freedoms that teachers had previously enjoyed (Perryman et al, 2011). In other words, the educational approaches where teachers were placed under constant pressures and scrutiny, to achieve results and to meet targets, led to the creation of a culture that colonised professional practice (Gunter, 2011). As Berlant (2011) argued, people often try to make unworkable systems work as they find it hard to turn their back on accepted practice. In her book *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant (2011) described the human subject and the social world they inhabit, and how people attach themselves to hopes and aspirations. She argued that our personal lives affect our working lives. Thus, in order to enhance the quality of our lives, we resort to fantasy about our present, to achieve our aims.

Thus, teachers’ desire to focus on the education of ‘the whole child’ (Bullough, 2015) led to the enactment of legislation and assessment regulation that claimed to enhance school improvement and offer the best chance for children. This led De Lissovoy (2015) to characterise education as strongly focused on compliance. Biesta et al (2015) referred to the tension created between those who seek to reduce teacher autonomy and control

over their own work and those who see evidence driven approaches as important in facilitating teachers to create meaningful educative practice. Moreover, as governments put improving education at the top of their agendas (Sigurthardottir and Sigthorsson, 2015), particularly in the context of international comparison, this posed a complex issue related to the ways in which excitement, initiative and innovation could be facilitated within a constrained set of parameters for teachers. Thus, schools are implicated in supporting teachers to manage and support teacher professional identity in ways that free them to innovate and create new practices (Buchanan, 2015; Smylie, 1994). This, for Kirby (2016), is a lot of pressure to put on teachers.

1.1.1 Teacher Researchers

It can be argued that the idea of teacher researchers can be traced to Kurt Lewin (1946) whose research in American factories in 1930s and 1940s led to the realisation that democratic consultations are ethically superior to authoritarian coercion when it comes to efficiency and increased productivity (Adelman, 1993). Authors such as Rogoff (1984) noted that much of human learning took place as a result of observation or participation in activity. Research activity helps teachers to generate ideas facilitating them to develop a collective power that should not be underestimated (Freire, 1985). Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Atweh, Kemmis and Weeks (1998) thought that the research teachers did was a vehicle for the social and political transformation of education. Stenhouse (1981) was an advocate of teachers engaging in self-criticism to question practices and experiences. Through engaging in research, teachers could develop their educational practices and, as Giroux (1988) stated, be facilitated with opportunities and space to allow them to undertake critically reflective professional development. Giroux added that the ability to share ideas and experiences was invaluable to enhancing educational practice. In this way teachers build their knowledge to support students' learning progress (Goodlad et al, 1990). Such ideas directly addressed prevalent notions that teachers felt threatened by theory (Elliott, 1991) and that teachers gave preference to their own experiences while ignoring literature (Somekh, 1994).

Teachers need to be afforded intellectual space and the ability to define their own boundaries. This would facilitate self-knowledge and the ability to make judgements (Danaher et al, 2000). However, teachers need to see the rationale to undertake change otherwise they are unlikely to engage with it (Greenberg and Baron, 2000). Leitch and Day (2000), Benson (2001), and Black et al (2002) also argued that teacher capacity grew as they became more adept at researching their own practices and through working together, they can add to a common understanding and sense of purpose (Wells, 2002). Further, Kincheloe (2003) suggested that in undertaking research teachers gain confidence in challenging 'top down' approaches in education. Thus, teachers enact freedoms because they are thinking more critically and have the confidence to unpick assumed links between approaches, quality and testing (Hooks, 2003). This, for Fielding and Bragg (2003), brings many advantages to the school as an organisation.

Teacher dedication is orientated around their desire to do their best for their students (Liston and Garrison, 2004). Together, as a community of practice, teachers can share organisational and professional understandings through their use of language (MacLure, 2003) and engage with learning and experimenting (Eraut, 2004). Learners acquire more knowledge when they are undertaking their own enquiries and this gives them a sense of accomplishment (McLaughlin et al, 2004). Moreover, as Mouffe (2005) indicated, under neoliberalism, the ideological fantasy of education as an inevitable societal 'good' irrespective of its formation is more likely to come under question. Kirkwood and Christie (2006) claimed that when teachers are allowed to be involved in research as part of their work, teacher engagement in research activities becomes the norm, as teachers feel that they have time to devote to research. In addition, it facilitates the passion for teaching that Stemler et al (2006) argued is so important for successful teaching.

Craig and Fieschi (2007) posited that teacher professionalism had become very personal. Teachers learn by reflection and continued learning can be

seen as achieving a balance between setting challenges for teachers to grapple with, alongside providing support structures (Bubb and Earley, 2007). Research activity among teachers can be used as a means of bringing them together to work in a way that enables them to filter and to make strategic choices about what they do in education (Zeichner, 2008; Mandernach et al, 2009) that would closely connect with a values-based sense of what education should be doing for children. In other words, undertaking research facilitates a shift in identity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009) that is enhanced where leaders in schools allow others to take a lead related to their expertise (Crowther et al, 2009; Fullan et al, 2009). Empowerment through research is an option that supports resisting educational constraints (Brindley and Crocco, 2010). Bevins et al (2011) argued that professional development will flourish in an environment where innovative practice is celebrated and becomes part of discussion and reflection.

In order to benefit from undertaking research, teachers need to be open to engage with it (Lingard and Renshaw, 2010). Bovill et al (2011) stated that when teachers become consumers of research and the co-creators of their own new knowledge, they feel both empowered and inspired. Further, doing this in professional learning communities made knowledge creation more powerful (Day and Sammons, 2016; Elmore 2006). This would also encourage more autonomy, motivation and satisfaction (Eyal and Roth, 2011) and an orientation around what makes things better for children (Hoekstra and Korthagen, 2011). Moreover, it helps shape practice and influences career progression (Caldwell and Simkins, 2011). However, to do this it is important that teachers see the relevance of reflecting on and reforming practices as without this nothing will change (Webster et al, 2012). Teachers who engaged in research were those who followed enquiry models in their development (Dagenais et al (2012) that went beyond simple reflective practices (Rushton and Suter, 2012). However, schools found this challenging in terms of facilitating time and in developing an understanding of the benefits of such work (McRoy et al, 2012). Tarrant (2013) felt that it was nevertheless important for schools to facilitate reflective practice.

Frost et al (2013) pointed out that developed in the right way, research can facilitate teachers in constructing and making good use of theory as they become more confident and reflect on their learning needs (Heyler, 2015). Dudley (2015) warned that teachers should not jump into action before they have fully understood what they have discovered. Research needs time for reflection and to be undertaken in ways that address the critiques of people such as Ellis and Loughland (2016) who asserted that teachers focus on the practical rather than the critical aspects of their work and thus need support to digest literature and theory. Burns (2015) argued that academic and teacher partnerships were essential to enhance critique and enrich new thinking. Moreover, authors such as Rose et al (2017), Campbell et al (2016), Cordingley et al (2015), and Day and Gu (2007) argued that professional cooperation is key to changing teacher classroom practices and that professional enquiry, based on research, is a prerequisite for changing teachers' practices, improving learning outcomes and raising teacher awareness. Indeed, for Caldwell (2018) some teachers see research as an important route through which they can progress in their careers. Meaningful research activity may therefore be promoted as a potential way forward in terms of teachers finding a professional response to government initiatives and in exploring educational ideas that they initiate themselves.

1.1.2 School Landscape

The landscape of education has massively changed in UK particularly in the last ten years, due to legislative changes that took place post 2010. Chitty (2014) argued that free schools and academies expanded alongside stressing the importance of exams rather than classwork. These have created an ostensibly "self-improving school-led system" (Outwaite, 2019). As a result of these changes a more mixed economy of school organisational types has arisen. The focus in this study is on one teaching school alliance (TSA) and one multi-academy trust (MAT). A TSA is a loose alliance between state and/or academy schools who orientate staff development around a lead 'teaching school', this school must necessarily be rated at

outstanding through inspection. A MAT is a grouping of academy schools who are led by a central team, sometimes located in and/or originating from one of the schools and which are independent of Local Government, but still subject to state inspection processes. There are a series of standards and expectations to meet in order to form a Trust and this frees it from Local Government control. In this case, the Trust was set up by two founders with extensive experience of working in schools and their headquarters is located separately from the schools. Outhwaite (2019) characterised the rise of the MATs (also free schools, academies, faith schools and others) and the subsequent decline of local authorities, as a consequence of the marketisation of education leading to a depletion of resources within the state sector schools. Thus, these schools are located in educational organisations subject to considerable critique.

1.2 TAKING ACCOUNT OF THE PERSONAL

On leaving education I worked as a teacher within higher education in Syria and also experienced teaching in the schools' sector. Moreover, I established and ran a private institute for teaching languages (English language and literature being my particular skill). Since settling in the UK my interest in education has been driven by my belief that the ongoing education and development of teachers is key to developing practices in classrooms. Practices change and improve only when teachers are facilitated in reflecting upon their work as educators. Recent government initiatives have suggested that evidence-based research is one way to develop a more reflective and problem-solving approach to teaching. Whilst I recognised that this agenda is subject to constant change and shifts in emphasis, I was nonetheless interested to explore the ways in which research activity was a factor in engaging teaching staff in shifting mind sets and in developing deeper understandings of the educational process in ways that support children on their learning journeys. For example, whilst running the institute for languages and information technology I was engaging with a range of people from students to established professionals and those who had retired. In

introducing them to technology and its uses for developing language skills, I witnessed the ways in which they developed and practiced these skills, which in turn shifted their attitudes towards, and acceptance of, new technologies and their discovery of varied and personalised ways of adopting this learning into their daily activities. This also involved me in having to think carefully and creatively about how I engaged this variety of students in shifting their practices. At the same time this had implications for my own practices in shifting my teaching approaches and gaining a greater clarity around purpose and rationales for these approaches. Needless to say, like many teachers, this was a case of trial and error to establish what worked most successfully and under what circumstances.

In terms of my positionality within this research investigation, I therefore came with a teaching background but with an experience of teaching in a very different context and mostly involved in higher education. Teacher research was not something that, in my time in Syria, was conceived of as a possibility within a teaching role. This can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. The disadvantage is that for this research, I had entered the English schools' system, which was unfamiliar in terms of approach and in relation to the physical appearance of schools. However, this was also an advantage as I brought an ability to question the taken-for-granted, without too many prior assumptions about what I was seeing. Clearly, there were challenges for me to face in terms of interpretation and understanding of teacher rituals and practices. Taking an ethnographic stance thus enabled me to sit alongside the teachers and to seek clarification and explanations. It thus proved an important aspect to the data gathering and enabled me to look at teacher research activity with open eyes, taking a fresh stance in this consideration. Nonetheless, I was conscious that this history was important to keep in mind whilst conducting and presenting my work and for the reader to understand.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS

This ethnographic study investigates teachers positions and perspectives about professional development through the medium of engaging in research designed to develop their critical thinking. Thus, this work considers the tension in education between marketised control and teacher freedoms in developing and delivering the curriculum through the engagement of teachers in research. Teachers' work on this programme was authentic, as they were in charge of their own learning (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Through working alongside teachers on the programme, I was able to better understand their professional development journey in ways that privileged teacher voice and opinions and gained a deeper knowledge of whether such activity facilitated teachers to think differently about their educational approaches. The aim of the study was to examine the ways in which teachers are conceptualising their journey through research engagement, to consider whether this was indeed developing their levels of critical reflection, empowerment and the confidence to use their own voice.

In order to explore these aspects of teacher experiences I asked the following research question:

- How might engaging school teachers in research activity enhance their levels of critical thinking and what do they perceive as its impact on their practices?

In order to address this research question, the following aims were identified:

1. To examine the ways in which teachers regard the nature and role of research in education.
2. To consider the influences on practice that teachers identify as a result of engagement in research activity.
3. To identify whether the involvement of teachers in research activity enhances their critical perceptions of their daily working practices.

4. To investigate the extent to which research activity might lead teachers to argue that they have experienced sustainable shifts in their educational approaches.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

For Walford (2009a), research is designed to enable the discovery of knowledge that can be shared with others. Caldwell and Simkins (2011) argued that professional development activity is hard to capture through conventional level models which measure particular outcomes or learning points achieved as a result of particular inputs. Instead, they argued that evaluations such as rich case studies are a much better way to capture professional and emergent learning as part of a social and personal process. This is also an approach to learning which engages the learners as partners in the evaluation process and therefore facilitates the richness and complexity of the world to be exposed (Alexakos, 2015). Ethnography generates rich material which explores a broad landscape that enables the researcher and others to understand, form and describe the wider picture with regard to the issue investigated.

Focusing on the situated nature of professional development through research, the purpose of this study was to improve understandings of professional development learning practices. I wanted to know what teachers would tell me about their engagement in research, their professionalism, and their voice. Through the experiences of teachers, the study unpacked how engaging in research was influencing them, whether it was deepening their critical stance and what effects it had on their sense of professionalism and agency. Through this work, the study gave credit to the teachers involved, as Wall and Hall (2016) recommended.

1.4.1 Research Approach

Educational research involves a collection and analysis of information on the world of education so as to understand and explain it better. There are many

layers involved in researching the ‘truth’ (Schostak, 2002). In other words, truth varies and is constructed in particular ways by the researcher and as something the researcher is attempting to uncover (O’Leary, 2007). Therefore, truths are always a construction. Consequently, critical researchers must make known their constructions of the ‘truth’ within their work. Newby (2010) is of the opinion that educational research provides benefits to searchers after the truth, including practitioners, and policy makers.

Educational research is thus carried out to explore issues and find answers to specific questions, problems or issues, or to shape polices or improve the impact of a particular policy or practice. Educational researchers need to be flexible, to plan, reason, analyse, synthesis, compare, evaluate, contract, and examine (Newby, 2010; Gray, 2009). It can be argued that teachers need in-school and external support in order to develop their research skills and fulfil their potentials (Godfrey, 2014).

This study focusses on exploring activity designed to enhance the potential of teacher research, the possibilities for practices across a school trust and a school alliance and the potential benefits of working alongside academic research active staff over time. Data collection involved taking part in taught and research-based sessions alongside the teachers during two academic years and tracking the developing understandings of the cohort through a variety of data capture approaches. These have included semi-structured interviews with teachers about their experiences of engaging in this research journey, and as part of the cohort I have taken notes throughout all facilitated delivery. I have taken part in activities and discussed issues, challenges and enthusiasms with staff as these have arisen through the use of recorded focus group activities. I have also kept contextual field notes throughout the data collection period. Using an inductive rationale, data were categorised using a thematic approach, and clustered then linked back to the literature to enrich and extend understandings of the data (Lingard et al, 2008).

1.5 OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

Having given a brief outline of the topic of this thesis, I now explore what can be expected in each of the chapters following.

Chapter Two is a review of literature in which I present perspectives about how engaging teachers in research enables them to develop their professional practice and research identity. The literature develops discussions around how education has been subjected to increased regulation and control which have curtailed teachers' freedoms. It also extends the exploration of how engagement in research activity has facilitated teachers to adopt a more critical and questioning stance in relation to their practice. The chapter debates how teachers can work together to co-create knowledge and increase their sense of engagement leading to changes in practice. Chapter Two sets out a framework to facilitate understandings of teacher identity, teacher emotions and teacher agency, discussing these in terms of communities of practice and figured worlds. The literature explains how teachers identify as actors in a figured world and how research helps teachers to develop their agency with implications for changing identity and for shifts in their practices.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology adopted in this study. It explains and justifies the research basis for this project, which was designed as a two-year ethnographic study of two research sites. The chapter also reiterates the research question and aims, and discusses the detail of the methodological approach and methods that have been utilised to address these aims. Chapter Three also explains the data collection period, the research sample and the research context, together with the approach taken in regard to data analysis. The chapter also explores the ethics around undertaking such work and the processes used to ensure the study followed ethical guidelines. Research validity is discussed in relation to undertaking ethnographic study.

Chapter Four presents the findings from the interviews with research and programme leads from the higher education establishment, who worked with teachers to develop their research capacities, together with the research coordinators situated within the Pisces Trust and the Aquarius Alliance. These data are used to contextualise and explain the programme being undertaken, its purposes and the expectations that each of these actors have in relation to it. Chapter Four presents the perspectives of each of the research leaders around the purposes and intentions in engaging teachers in research activity. I argue that teachers hold a collective responsibility for the students they teach and that schools were consequently working together to share knowledge and practice, keeping momentum going through this collective enterprise. In this chapter there is also an explanation related to schools looking for a facilitative and provocative programme to disrupt thinking and to be creative and innovative in their approaches and practices. This was also connected to improved standards of teaching and learning.

Chapter Five details the findings from the data collected in relation to the two-year engagement of teachers in the programme of the MAT, henceforth the Pisces Trust. Drawing from the interviews, focus groups, observations, and formal and informal discussions with teachers I have explained how and why teachers engaged with this programme. I look at teachers' personal development through outlining what being a teacher meant for them. In addition, they discuss their perspectives on the impact that working in the research group has had on them. Teachers also discuss professional development and the role accreditation has played in their engagement with research. Further, the chapter outlines some of the challenges teachers encountered and the sustainability of their engagement in research, including the aspects of the work that led to apprehension or excitement. I also give consideration to those teachers who withdrew from the programme at the end of year one. Overall, Chapter Five demonstrates the enthusiasm that all the teachers interviewed had for undertaking research as a part of their teaching lives and expresses what it added to their lived experiences.

Chapter Six presents the views of teachers from the TSA, henceforth the Aquarius Alliance, who were engaged with the research programme. I start by investigating why teachers here engaged in unaccredited research and explore the partnership between the academic research lead and the teachers. Investigating the same issues outlined in Chapter Five, I highlight the similarities and differences between responses. The chapter opens with questions around the purposes of research for teachers, then explores aspects of teachers' personal and professional development, the challenges teachers encountered in engaging with research, the sustainability of their engagement in research and finally how they celebrate and embed their engagement in research into the schools' cultures. Teachers demonstrated how collaborative research partnerships affirmed shared beliefs about the value of research activity. In this group, however, their more extended experience with research is highlighted and I argue that their identity as teacher researchers is more clearly embedded.

Chapter Seven reflects on my research questions and the data presented in relation to several perspectives on socio-cultural theory. I argue that these data sets give us messages about how marketisation plays a role in teachers' thinking and how working in teacher researcher groups provides a support mechanism for teachers. I also discuss the value of communities of practice as a way of understanding the teacher researcher community that has been built up across these schools and the tensions that this exposes as teachers are also party to alternative communities, which in some cases are less supportive of research activity. In developing this argument, I suggest that communities of practice may not be enough to give teachers the agency needed for them to reconfigure their identity in ways that help them move beyond externally driven requirements around performance and constraint. Instead, I argue that research induces teachers to enter a figured world where they can conceptually hold the mirror up to themselves, see what they have become and thus facilitate themselves in activating agency over their practices. I discuss how concepts of figured worlds better explain sustainable shifts in teacher identity where they become critically reflective agents of innovation and new initiatives. The chapter then presents the key

contribution of the thesis to the body of knowledge in terms of the sustainable shifts in teacher identity, teacher professional identity and agency, and teacher researchers figuring their world. The final part of the chapter presents my research recommendations, personal reflections, limitations, and suggestions for further work.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the literature concerning the potential that engaging teachers in research may have for their professional practices and identities. BERA-RSA (2014: 6) explained that "research-rich school and college environments are the hallmark of high performing education systems and if teachers are to be most effective in their practice they need to engage with research and enquiry." Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) argued that it is the moral duty of teachers to work with and to challenge and develop the thinking of those that they teach. This involves opening-up new possibilities and assisting others in their explorations of the world. It also implies the need for teachers to view themselves as learners (Guskey, 2002), who work to expand their own thinking alongside that of those they teach. School improvement literature has placed a focus on the development of teacher quality as a means of improving student performance. For example, Pollard (2010) argued that good teaching is the most important factor in improving education. Moreover, successive governments have attempted to focus on teacher professional development in order to improve teachers' skills and the quality of teaching (DfE, 2010), whether that be a broad or narrow view of what it is to teach.

It is argued that the idea of teacher researchers can be traced to Kurt Lewin (1946) whose research in American factories in the 1930s and 1950s led to the realisation that democratic consultations are ethically superior to authoritarian coercion when it comes to efficiency and increased productivity (Adelman, 1993). In the 1970s such ideas were adopted by educators, like

Lawrence Stenhouse and applied to teachers' work. Moreover, Stenhouse was an advocate of teachers engaging in self-criticism to question practices and experiences. He asserted that teaching should create opportunities for students to be encouraged to think freely and come up with unpredictable answers and outcomes. Thus, Stenhouse (1988) opposed an instrumental orientation in schools because if education targets are orientated towards making people search for the truth, the state cannot confine 'truth' to that which only exists in the curricula. Such discussion led researchers such as Carr and Kemmis (1986) to argue that the research teachers undertake is a vehicle for the social and political transformation of education.

Transformation of this kind is enhanced when teachers work in a group to:

> … review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives (Day and Sachs, 2004: 34).

Knapp and Copland (2006) agreed that when working in groups, participants can work collectively and act to extend and develop the thinking and practices of each other and the whole group. Hence, by sharing their practices and experiences, teachers can communicate effectively and develop professionally. Moreover, research helps teachers to develop confidence to:

> assume intellectual leadership by asking questions and eliciting and engaging plural perspectives in relation to these questions; engagement in the cut and thrust of research without the expectation of finding any final or perfect solutions; and an acceptance of difference and disagreement as constitutive and constructive elements in rethinking areas of policy and practice (Hammersley-Fletcher et al, 2018: 591).

Nurturing these capacities, the writers take account of Dewey's argument in *Democracy and Education* (1916) that it is important to maintain a strong link between education and democratic practices. However, teachers face a number of challenges. For example, in the report of the Australian Congressional Committee on Employment, Education and Training on 4th April 2019, the Committee published a document online summarising the status of education and issues arising from public hearing outlining factors affecting teachers' morale and performance:

> The factors undermining teacher morale, performance and status at the school level are largely imposed from beyond the school gate, but they have a very negative impact within schools generally and on teachers in particular. The demands imposed from outside, such as those related to resourcing and curriculum, serve to divert teachers from a focus upon those aspects of their work from which they derive their greatest satisfaction, student achievement, positive interactions with students and collegial support. Since these demands originate from beyond the school, it is difficult for teachers to change them. They have to rely upon those who have the authority to introduce such changes - politicians, bureaucrats, principals and, to a lesser extent, parent and community groups as represented on school councils.

In England, school and teacher reputation are also founded primarily on meeting government set assessment and inspection regimes that track and judge students' progress and achievement (Ball, 2013). For example, the introduction of a national curriculum in 1988, Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) in 1991 and school league tables in 1992 were amongst the measures used to control and scrutinise the work of teachers (Ball, 2013; Evans, 2011). The test-based merit system described by Ball (2003), alienates teachers as it can estrange them from the fundamental values of the teaching profession. These measures continue to challenge some of the freedoms that teachers had enjoyed prior to these policy shifts (Perryman et

al, 2011) and raise tensions around moral duty. Hence, teachers' jobs have become increasingly determined by regulation and governmental authority, which has moreover, prescribed curriculum content (Alexander, 2008). Such a view characterises teachers as "a technical workforce to be managed and controlled rather than a profession to be respected" (Tomlinson, 2001: 36). This is a very particular perspective where educational quality is judged in relation to attainment which in turn is measured through very particular lenses (Looney, 2009). De Lissovoy (2015) agrees that the teaching that is taking place in schools in England is characterised by the monitoring and surveillance of teachers in all that they do.

This political context raises questions about whether, in an assessment and standards driven education system, research might act to facilitate teachers in developing a more critical stance towards teaching and learning practices. This ethnographic study of teachers engaging in research, considers the ways in which teachers develop a changing sense of the 'work' of teaching over a period of two years. Having very briefly outlined the context and purposes of this study in the introduction to this chapter, the next section explores what is meant by research, its political nature and introduces the notion of socio-cultural theory. Section three moves on to examine teacher professional learning and how this might be enhanced through working in communities. It also moves from developing notions of communities of practice to the notions of figured worlds and the importance of emotions to the practice of teaching. Section four discusses the importance of research for teachers and section five outlines the context and what is meant by multi-academy trusts and teaching school alliances that are related directly to the data presented later in this thesis. Section six concludes the chapter by outlining the key influences taken from the literature that inform this research and which lead to the research questions that were pursued.

2.1 WHAT IS MEANT BY TEACHER RESEARCH?

Research is defined as the orderly investigation of a subject to find out more about it or add something to the knowledge that already exists. The word research meaning to “re-search”, indicates that there is something knowable to us, but we want to re-visit and investigate to find out more about it (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2008). Research can also be used in the investigation of a new point, issue, or problem. Research is therefore a collection and analysis of information that enables us to understand and explain the object of the study better. The rationale behind much research in education has been explicitly orientated towards improving students’ learning (Kosnik and Beck, 2000). Moreover, Newby (2010) argued that research in education provides benefits to practitioners and policy makers in their quest for better understandings of the interplay between practice and intentions. This may be understood in terms of teachers acting to improve teaching and learning practices or in terms of policy makers understanding how best to influence the activities of schools. Educational researchers need to be flexible, to plan, reason, analyse, synthesis, compare, evaluate, and examine their activities (Newby, 2010; Gray, 2009).

In a lecture entitled “Teaching as a research-based profession: possibilities and prospects”, delivered by David Hargreaves (1996), the speaker, claimed that a lot was being spent on educational research, but it failed to improve the quality of school education. Hargreaves (1996:1) suggested that if the quality of research in education was improved, then

> research would play a more effective role in advancing the professional quality and standing of teachers. Left to ourselves, we educational researchers, will not choose the necessary radical reforms. It needs others, including practicing teachers, to give the firm push to get researchers on the move.

In 1981 Stenhouse was arguing for teachers to undertake research at a deep enough level that they could find genuine answers to problems that could

alter practice and extend children’s learning. He wanted to see teachers who were self-critical, self-reflective and able to conceive of new ways to improve education. Stenhouse (1979a) was of the opinion that teachers feel secure when they are research-minded with inquiring habits of thought to support their capacities to manage inquiries. Teachers should move beyond presenting themselves as ‘all-knowing’, in order to see that knowledge is reinforced and validated where research has taken place. “Only by keeping teaching in touch with inquiry can we do justice to this element in the knowledge we represent” (Stenhouse, 1979a: 13) This is because “the act of teaching as a representation of knowledge is inherently problematic” (Stenhouse, 1979a:17). Furthermore, research can be politically empowering. Stenhouse (1981) wanted teachers to do research at a deep enough level that they could find genuine answers to problems that could alter practice and extend children’s learning. He wanted to see teachers who were self-critical, self-reflective and able to conceive of new ways to improve education. Research therefore allows teachers to develop new approaches that enable them to be critically involved in the theoretical bases of knowledge and understanding. However, there are also criticisms of teacher research based on the assumption that teachers do little more than confirm their own pre-dispositions and bad practices (King and Newman, 2000; Wright et al, 1997).

According to Toom et al (2010), the Finnish approach to teacher education sets an interesting example as it necessitates high qualification for teachers and engagement in research as a basic requirement for teachers, and this is a prerequisite in teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD). Therefore, teachers have the task of contributing to research while teaching (Toom et al, 2010). Whitty (2012) explains that in the case of teacher education, although the connection between educational research and teachers’ professional learning and development is widely recognised, the precise nature of the relationship is not yet fully understood. Hence, teacher education is undergoing development particularly in relation to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Educational researchers are aiming at boosting the use of research to inform the educational practices and

teachers' needs. The quality of teaching is thus raised through research-based skills and knowledge and this leads to improving student outcomes (BERA-RSA, 2014). This, it is hoped, will make teachers more able to design their professional learning materials and practices aided by both research activity and learning about other teachers' experiences (Ellis and McNicholl, 2015). Importantly, for Godfrey, (2016) the engagement of teachers in research should be supported within the school environment and cater for teachers' access to resources and facilities that target the continuous engagement of teachers with research.

Teacher research can take many forms. For example, it can take the form of action research, the research that is done by teachers in their classrooms. Teachers reflect on classroom problems collecting and analysing the data that help them solve the problems that they encounter. They then implement changes based on the results of their research. Taber (2013) pointed out that where teachers identify an area of research, they may address this themselves or work in a joint endeavour with academic researchers. Discussing with other teachers what works better for each of them can also open up a whole new set of ideas about improving their teaching (Mincu (2013). This type of research offers collective ways of seeing things and potentially increases the impact of the findings (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009).

> A focus on the social nature of learning is integral to a vision of a democratic society and an actively engaged citizenry. … Across all learning sectors, research is emphasising the importance of developing new approaches that involve deep theoretical knowledge and understanding (education.vic.gov., 2017).

For teachers to do research, it means that they undertake to analyse, plan and re-plan their research (Coe et al, 2014). Kirkwood and Christie (2006) argued, where teachers are allowed to be involved in research as part of their teaching load, teacher engagement in research activities will soon become the norm, as teachers will feel that they have the time to devote to

research. However, if teachers lack support to undertake research activities, then the likelihood of teachers being involved in this is minimal. Nonetheless, teachers' professional learning has been singled out as an important factor for improving the quality of education (Darling-Hammond et al, 2009). Moreover, the engagement of teachers in a continual quest to improve has been clearly stated in OECD recommendations (2013). Creating a research-led culture in schools will enhance the engagement of teachers in research and make research part and parcel of school policies and their implementation (Godfrey, 2014). Currently however, competition and stringent accountability measures have reduced teachers' capacity to object to or alter government driven educational initiatives and moreover, a lack of compliance risks the imposition of penalties on those who fail. This leads to a teaching workforce who are more likely to conform to government agendas without necessarily being convinced of their viability (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2013; Grace, 1995).

When teachers become engaged in and with research and are the co-creators of their own new knowledge, they can feel both empowered and inspired. The self-efficacy of teachers corresponds with teacher autonomy; as more autonomous teachers show a high level of self-efficacy (De Neve, et al, 2015). Research based activities conducted by teachers can therefore be a powerful means of improving teachers' practices and in turn improving the standards of teaching and learning. Hammersley (2004: 165) stated that:

> the core feature of action research seems to be that there should be an intimate relationship between research and some form of practical or political activity-- such that the real focus of inquiry arises out of, and its results feed back into, the activity concerned.

Thus, in any developmental practice, it is important to move from surface learning to deep learning, as discussed by Marton et al (1984), who described surface learning as a passive experience involving gaining information and techniques and deep learning as developing understandings, meanings and the rationales underpinning the surface

learning. In other words, as teachers learn to become teachers they could be argued to move from imitating what they see as the performance of a teacher, which they emulate, into a more embedded understanding of what being a teacher involves. Such learning can be argued to develop and change over time as surface learning skills become easier to perform, freeing the teacher to think more deeply about their role. Thus, reflection could be argued to be an essential component of being a teacher (James et al, 2007). The implications for this in terms of teachers continued learning can be seen as establishing a balance between setting challenges for teachers to grapple with, alongside providing support structures (Bubb and Earley, 2007). These authors go on to argue that teachers also need time for consolidation of both the learning provided and how they might apply this learning in practice.

Evans (2011) argued that through engaging in research and interacting with other colleagues, teachers come to digest new concepts and build upon them as they form a deeper understanding of the issues that they are considering and adopt fresh practices. Bovill et al, (2011) stated that when teachers become consumers of research and the co-creators of their own new knowledge, they feel both empowered and inspired. Moreover, engaging in research may help teachers to develop a more critical lens in relation to their working practices, which arguably becomes more important at times where constraints over teaching are increasing. Boud et al, (1985: 19) define reflection as “an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning”. We learn through reflecting on our activities and draw lessons from this process. Reflection can involve changing old practices and replacing them with what we deem as better ones, based on developing a new way of seeing our activities or ideas, trying to reprocess them based on the knowledge we have obtained (Moon, 2005). Thus, reflection in research initiates a more deeply critically reflective state of learning. Hence, the teachers who are engaged in research reflect on their practices and think about how they can do things differently, leading to shifts in practices (Moon, 2005). It follows therefore that

teacher researchers need to be curious, keep an open mind and suspend their judgement, gather evidence, analyse it, and then make a decision and begin the whole process again. Teachers need also to abandon any preconceptions they hold about students' knowledge and capability in order to open up possibilities (Coe et al, 2014). Nevertheless, there are constraints placed upon teachers and as we shall see in the next section, these are in part due to the neo-liberal agenda that schools are made to follow and the marketisation of education.

2.1.1 Research as political

Research activities in schools are political activities in the sense that they revolve around raising teachers' awareness of education agendas which are political by nature. For some, engaging teachers in political agendas can be perceived to be dangerous, as they may not only challenge various policies and initiatives, but this might also influence children. The argument here is that children should be free to make their own decisions (Kellett, 2011). To counter this position, theorists like Freire (1985) have argued that everything one does in education is political. The choice of the syllabus is political, the way in which it is delivered is political, the way the school is structured is political, and the choice about what teachers teach in schools is political. Freire (1985) asserted that one should educate students to understand the political nature of everything around them, giving them the opportunity to make their own, informed, decisions.

McShane (2016), Brown et al (2015), and Fairclough (2013) argued that reforms to education policy relied heavily on the consideration that children are good learners when they have good practitioners. However, Vygotsky (1978) viewed learning as a "a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society or culture" (Vygotsky, 1978: 57). The theoretical framework behind this assertion is that social interaction has a significant role to play in the developing of human cognition. There are two levels of learning suggested by Vygotsky:

> First, through interaction with others, and then integrated into the individual's mental structure. Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level …. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978: 57)

However, Vygotsky's development of this 'socio-cultural' theory asserted that cognitive development is reliant upon a 'zone of proximal development' where learners are prepared to develop cognitively through the influence of a 'more knowledgeable other' in order to function well and develop. Vygotsky's theory is therefore based on the notion that social interaction is fundamental to the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky stressed the role of culture and social interaction in the growth of our learning and thinking skills expressing the relationship between the individual and the social processes in knowledge construction. Vygotsky (1978: 90) argued that:

> learning is not development; however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus, learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions.

For Vygotsky, learning focuses on the process rather than the product of the process. The zone of proximal development is thus a more genuine indicator of cognitive development as it relates to the learners' process of learning not what they have learned. Hence 'instructional scaffolding' is a term used by Vygotsky to describe the tools that help learners in accomplishing the tasks related to their development.

Vygotsky (1978) believed that social structure is responsible for determining the working conditions of people and their interactions with others in their environment. This will ultimately shape their perceptions and attitudes and these function in accordance with the language and knowledge that are

socially and individualistically used. When thinking about education, Vygotsky argued that teachers internalise what it is to be a teacher just as students internalise what it is to be a student. Vygotsky considered it important that teachers focus more on their interactions with students where concepts and ideas can be explored between and amongst students and their teachers, rather than on a transmission notion of teaching when teachers ‘deliver’ knowledge to students. In Vygotsky’s model, everyone (teachers included) should consider themselves to be learning from one another, an approach referred to as reciprocal teaching. Socio-cultural theory directs teachers to conduct student-centred teachings, suggesting that teachers take account of their students’ backgrounds as well as their identities and the context within which they are teaching (Wertsch, 1991).

Learning is a continuing process of making sense of world and our everyday experiences, but Jarvis (1983: 67) believed that “the reason for participation does not always lie within the learner, but in the dynamic tension that exists between the learner and the socio-cultural world”. Collaborative forms of learning provide learners with the means to support their development and learning (Briner, 1999). Socio-cultural theory emphasises the impact of culture and social interaction on shaping the identity of people with peer interaction being fundamental to learning. Social and cultural factors shape our identities and emotions and these can influence and shape the identities of teachers (Zembylas, 2003). The school and its structure dictate how people feel about themselves and about their students as well and to some degree influence the emotional conduct of teachers and their learning approaches (Rawolle, 2013).

With regard to teacher research, the deeper level of learning is what makes learning have a transformative impact on the teachers engaging in research. Transformative learning indicates transforming the way in which teachers see themselves (Mezirow 2000; Taylor, 2000). This means that transformative learning can help teachers to integrate new frames of reference into their knowledge and provide a lens that can help them

understand how research might transform individual learning. Mezirow (2000: 7-8) explained:

> Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken for- granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight.

This means that in any particular culture, people act and interact in line with the social dimensions of that culture. Sharing ideas with others outside this way of understanding the world transforms these perspectives (Erichsen, 2009).

When contemplating working with teachers for this study it was important to think about the political climate within which they work. If it is the case that culture and societal factors influence individuals approaches to learning and opening up to the possibilities of transformational learning, then the political climate within which schools are placed is important to consider. Current neo-liberal policies are having a marked effect on the school sector in England. The neo-liberal agenda was established on the premise that the market can be the replacement for the state in as far as producing value for education. As such, the market was given a bigger role to play at the expense of the state. Nevertheless, in all cases, the market continued to abide by the rules and regulations that protected its commercial interests and practices (Apple, 2001).

Thus, neo-liberalism has provided a market logic to education that in essence goes against the rights of people for education, as much as for health care, that in essence should be guaranteed by the state (Tooley,

2000). People become economic maximisers of their interests and those of the markets; thus, they have their own choices and it is them rather than the state that should look after themselves, hence taking the burden off the state (Rutherford, 2005). It is Hobbes' philosophy that citizens are individualised and led to think predominantly for themselves and their interests. Thus, neo-liberalism founded its appeal on the premise of giving individual freedom. Olssen (2000: 482) argued that:

> neo-liberalism …reinforces the view of the self as a rational utility maximiser, the view of the distinction between public and private spheres as separate, and the rejection of any conception of a public good over and above the aggregate sum of individual ends.

Such a crucial change in education had serious effects and consequences (Giroux, 2002). Amongst these were the consideration that education was a service on the market provided to those who can afford to obtain it, based on their choice and competition, and people were free to obtain it from wherever they like. This is what a neoliberal agenda considers to be fair and an efficient delivery of the service (Apple, 2001). The neo-liberal model of education has created a culture of uncertainty and insecurity fuelled by competition, anxiety as well as indifference to others, namely those who are less established, or more vulnerable (Lynch, 2006). Ball and Youdell (2007) attributed neoliberal agendas in schools to the fact that competition was rife in the market economy worldwide and to the willingness of English schools to establish such a market, engaging with the arguments that this would raise education results in England. Gunter and Rayner (2007) believed that such changes meant that there developed in education a situation in which teachers and schools were solely blamed for failure. Moreover, as Robertson (2007:15) puts it,

> Neo-liberalism might have caused us to think what we do and how, especially in education (perhaps teachers are more responsive to parents than they were; perhaps teachers have better resources to think about what works for which child and why), despite that, the

> working class have paid a huge price ….. education has been rapidly commercialised, and is becoming big big business, protected by global regulations.

The result is that since wealth is unequally distributed, the people who can afford to go to the schools of their choice are the ones who have the means to do so, while others do not have a choice (Ball, 2013). This, for Ball, privileges individual accomplishment over wider public benefit and has led to factors that enhance divisions among schools, such as providing parental choice, publicising test results and placing schools in competition with one another.

Underlying this notion of markets is that competition will enhance the quality of education for all. However, market demand is dependent upon the financial wherewithal and knowledge to make choices about which schools to send your children too, which in turn has led to the middle-classes being able to access better schools whilst the working-classes, who have less financial security, may be unable to make such choices. Schools with poor results are consequently located in predominantly working-class areas as the middle-classes hurried to protect their interests by moving to areas with 'better' schools (Robertson, 2007). Far from delivering on a promise that markets would enhance choice and quality of schooling, it has led to a reduction in spending on education and a predominance of schools in areas of deprivation with poor inspection results (Apple, 2001). Van Zanten (2005: 159) argued that such a situation has made the schools that cater for economically deprived children and their teachers, "schools of the urban periphery which in turn leads to the kind of socialisation inside and outside of schools that can be characterised as 'peripheral' in more than a geographic sense".

Vidovich (2009) observes that since 1980s, neoliberal reform policy has exposed the education process, schools and teachers to the policy epidemic of neoliberal reform. Thus, on grounds of set standards and accountability coupled with calls for educational quality and value for money, schools and

teachers relinquished their grip over teaching to an extent that teaching has become delineation, or painting by numbers (Taubman, 2009). As such, the education curricula and the required teacher professional standards have become subject to punitive measures and close control of the state through inspection agencies (Clarke and Moore, 2013). This would ultimately lead to the emergence of a culture that is policed and characterised by auditing and risk management. Furthermore, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) and Loh and Hu (2014) believe that the culture that has been created, championed compliance and eroded professional independence. This has led to extensive bureaucracy and technocracy at the expense of a culture of democracy and relational accountability (Ball, 2016; Cribb, 2009). Schools and teachers are pressurised to meet the standards that are externally set. Teachers felt accountable for meeting targets and this has been tied into a sense of responsibility for the nation, as Larsen (2010) put it, at the expense of their professionalism. This shift has led to pressure to make teachers perform and show evidence for their performance. The educational practices in which teachers are placed under constant pressures and scrutiny to achieve results and meet targets has led to the creation of a culture that colonizes professional practice (Gunter, 2011). This could ultimately lead to teachers becoming resigned to accepting the dictates of the so-called ‘colonizers’ when they find themselves working under constant pressure and constraint of the neoliberal market driven society (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2013).

2.2 TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH RESEARCH

If schools are to resist becoming merely institutional agents of adherence to government policies then it is important that teachers are able to critically reflect on the activities in which they engage (Bush and Glover, 2014). However, teachers have been asked to engage in gathering and utilising research evidence (DfE, 2015-2016) so that research informs their practices. However, education research has been criticised as being too theoretical, lacking in methods of research that facilitate school research, and hence not

effective (DfE, 2016; Tooley and Darby, 1998). Further, there has been doubt as to the extent to which teachers were able to be grounded in research evidence, as they do not have the resources, the knowhow, or the willingness to engage in such research effectively (Cain, 2017; Williams and Coles, 2007). Brown and Flood (2018) argued that teachers become more responsive to considering new approaches through self-critique and experimentation. Hammersley-Fletcher et.al. (2018) reported that school community-based activity, where research activity is undertaken alongside academic staff engages all those involved in deeper understandings of educational purposes and practice. They go on to argue that such practices are a source of enlivenment, that they are infectious and build dynamism.

Cain (2015) believed that the engagement of teachers with research, unpacking research through discussions amongst colleagues, leads to developing teaching practices. In this way, as Cain (2015: 478) asserts, “research influenced what teachers think about, and how they thought”. It is the intention therefore of this study to examine the ways in which teachers are conceptualising their learning through research engagement to consider whether this is indeed developing their levels of critical reflection and what perceived effects this is then having for them in their approaches to practice.

Teachers’ professional learning has been singled out as one factor for improving the quality of education (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2009). According to Caldwell (2018), there have been many studies looking at teacher development that might be characterised in three different ways:

1. Heavily theorised critical theory and critical policy psychology that has looked at the challenges and inconsistencies between government policies and practitioner practice. These studies typically involve qualitative or mixed method approaches. For instance, Perryman et al (2011) objected to policy measures that were introduced and challenged some of the freedoms previously enjoyed by teachers. This work was developed through critical theory.

2. Quantitative testing of theory undertaken by the school effectiveness and school improvement movement. For example, Muijs and Reynolds (2000) used quantitative data to characterise teacher effectiveness research as providing the material needed to indicate that effective teachers are those who involve students in class discussion and that classroom climate is a significant factor.

3. There is also the pragmatic strand of work, which is that commissioned by Governments and linked agencies around specific policy initiatives, teaching programmes and evaluations. These are designed to meet 'client needs' and also make use of consultancy organisations. For one example of such an approach, in an attempt at modernizing schools prompted by the New Labour Government, the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB), who were requested to investigate teacher workload and the conditions of their work (STRB, 2002), advised the Government to allow the Department for Education (DfE) to commission an independent body to review teacher workload. On the basis of that, PricewaterhouseCoopers was commissioned to do the review. The report found that in fact teachers were overloaded and the burden of their work had negative effect on them.

Therefore, there has been a focus on the work that identifies differences between policy and practice, work that measures whether or not policy is being implemented effectively and makes suggestions for 'improvement', and work with government quangos often related to training and development programmes for teachers or exploring ways to implement and modify policy to make it effective.

Gore and Gitlin (2004) argue that the engagement of teachers in research broadens their perspectives and experiences which in turn enriches their professional lives. For Appadurai (2006), teacher research is a way to promote capacity building, knowledge sharing and for generating commitment. Schools, with research at the forefront of how they improve classroom practice, foster an environment where teachers are able to pursue lines of enquiry freely, aggregating insightful thinking about what impacts positively on pupils. Brown and Zhang (2016) highlighted that most recent

thinking requires teachers to better engage with evidence and use this to investigate issues in their own practice. This generates a culture where both the teacher and pupil are learning symbiotically, and research informed pedagogy is at the heart of practice. Arguably, this is where innovative teaching happens.

Guskey (2002) outlines the effect of CPD for teachers as falling into five levels: each level builds on the outcome of the one that follows in the pyramid. As such, the completion of one level is crucial for the completion of the remaining levels.

Table 2.1 Five level evaluation of the impact of CPD – Adapted from Guskey's (2002)

Level	Impact
1	Participants' reactions about the course: relevant course, enjoyable and effective
2	Participants' learning: what participants have learned from it and what they recorded and shared with others.
3	Organisation and support, recommendations of the research and whether any of the feedback from the participants was implemented.
4	Participants' use of new knowledge/ skills, whether teachers are using the knowledge they have learned, this is clear from peer observation and staff feedback
5	Student learning outcomes: what impact the research teachers engaged in has had on students and their attainment, behaviour or issues addressed in the research.

This model demonstrates that CPD is essential for the success of the

learning experience. As it involves sharing knowledge, learning new skills, participation in learning activities and building up relationships, knowledge and skills. In this, teachers connect between what they learn and what they practice. CPD is also a means by which teachers satisfy their personal needs and self-esteem, and a means of empowering them psychologically as well as intellectually (Lydon and King, 2009).

Biesta (2007) recognised that the training that teachers get as part of their professional development tends to focus on not “what matters” but on “what works.” Stevenson et al, (2018) argued that rather than be transformational, professional learning is often reproductive of the status quo. At the 2019 BERA conference, Stevenson referred to teacher development as “professional learning development” (PLD). He went on to argue that the assumption of development programmes is that they are inherently a good thing and he argued that this assumption needed unpacking and critiquing. He also highlighted the tensions within PLD as not only do teachers have unequal access to learning development (OECD, 2019) but also it is of very varied quality. In addition, PLD has predominantly been aimed at issues around teacher compliance with government policy, rather than at developing teachers to become part of policy development. Professional learning and development should then be about targeting and opening up possibilities for teachers to use their imagination (Freire, 1970).

Cain (2019) argued that reading about research is a valuable tool in aiding teachers to reflect on their own experiences and interpret practices in new ways that then allow them to form new perspectives, facilitating changes of behaviour that support improvement in teaching and learning. Engaging with research can also facilitate organisational learning where school leaders and teachers communicate around areas of research and research findings, discuss the issues arising and critique each other constructively, debating ideas that reach beyond the confinement of the school.

2.2.1 Being the subject of, or partner in, research

Teacher research targets shifting education from the theoretical best practices into the actual practice that works well for teachers (MacLean and Mohr, 1999). Further, it is the systematic process in which teachers, either individually, in groups, or with the help of academic facilitators, work to pursue their research interests (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999). However, teacher research can be defined as the research that is done ‘by’ teachers, not the research that is done ‘to’ teachers (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990). Cain (2019) argued that universities provided academic rigor and were the perceived 'experts' in research and they explained that teachers can be caricatured as the 'appliers' of research rather than as active participants in research. There are nevertheless mutually beneficial elements in developing a partnership with higher education partners as ‘consumers’ as well as ‘providers.’ Cain (2019) reported on the value of working in partnership as an academic with schools when reporting on work with two groups of teachers over a year. They realised that teachers were linking their work with the research material that they were reading. They discovered through their roles as research facilitators that they were giving support to their practitioner enquiries in the monthly meetings they held with them, prompting discussions through the questions they asked about the work they were doing and how they were using research evidence. Cain realised that teachers were incorporating research into their own thinking. Teachers used the concepts they learned from research to improve their understandings of practice. Teachers were also able to relate the findings of the research they were doing to their previous experiences in teaching and learning; i.e. how they were doing something before and how they would do it now. They were able to make more considered judgements and tell what and how things should be done. Moreover, teachers were able to imagine some implications that were not envisaged in the original research they were undertaking and apply these to different contexts. The research sessions delivered by an academic had made teachers think ‘out of the box’ and gave them the impetus needed to explore their practice armed by the research they were undertaking. Both Cain (2017) and Berlin (2009) have argued that teachers report that the ways they saw things had changed as a result of research

engagement and that they had become more self-confident. Thus, peer endorsements sensitised the teachers to possibilities, prompting them to see problems which they did not see previously (Biesta, 2007).

Hammersley-Fletcher et al (2018) explored the vision and strategies enveloped as part of an active research partnership agenda in one Teaching Schools Alliance in the North of England. They saw this as a potential resource for consideration across schools and countries. The researchers noted that the partnership between schools and academics was significant and outlined the ways in which different groups of staff could be engaged in activity that compliments and strengthens a research agenda across a wide range of schools. Through exploring the voices of school staff and the academics working with them, Hammersley-Fletcher et al realised that research experiences across the Alliance of schools demonstrated how collaborative research partnerships reaffirmed shared beliefs about the value of research activity and how it the importance to staff of research grew. The study indicated how the schools had a clear vision on how to improve their educational provision and that they viewed education as an interactive process with adults and pupils having freedom to make choices allowing them to explore beyond policy constraints and achieve both individually and collaboratively. The researchers conclude that schools thrive on research partnerships where outcomes are not only driven by logic and reason, but include spaces for teachers to develop, reflect and move together.

2.3 CONCEPTS OF LEARNING IN COMMUNITIES

Teachers need to be self-aware in relation to how they perform, how they influence the educational settings within which they operate and how these settings may influence them. For example, teachers need to be aware of when they are operating within constraints such as those based around pressures to undertake testing of pupils. Thus, teachers realised the challenges that such an environment may cause for their practice and identity as an educator. For example, the fear of failure can act as a

counterproductive influence where it challenges their pre-existing beliefs about the purposes of education.

Teachers may struggle while trying to satisfy and manage “the contradictions of belief and expectation” (Dillabough, 1999: 382). In other words, teachers may feel that if they do not approach delivering the curriculum as advised by government, then any school inspection will find them wanting and also students test results could dip. On the other hand, they may feel that they are reneging on previously held notions of what a good education entails by following government guidelines. For instance, the teachers who do not believe that end-of-term tests are what determines their success or failure are obliged to consider such tests and achieving ‘agreed’ targets as a mark of their success or failure. This can only make teachers unhappy and dissatisfied with what they do (Clarke and Moore, 2013) and places teachers in an uncomfortable position, which can lead to a situation that Hammersley-Fletcher (2013) refers to as ‘double-think’. Here, in order to survive a conflicted state of mind the teacher focuses on the immediate problem and places the conflicted alternative perspective into the unconscious. The reason for doing this is the discomfort that is experienced when both positions are occupied at the same time. Therefore, there can be a clash between education policies from government and the educational practices that are preferred by teachers (McNess, Broadfoot and Osborn, 2003). Again, here the idea of critical reflection through research brings these tensions into consciousness, which whilst difficult to face, may allow potential solutions to be investigated.

In addition, there is a need for shifting attitudes about what might be effective teaching and learning practices to meet changing needs in a changing society. This implies that teachers need to be constantly challenging and re-thinking their approaches to education in ways that have implications for their identities as teachers. As Minckler (2014) points out, teacher training practices often reproduce long held views of what education is that are no longer in tune with the reality of school classrooms. It follows that teaching staff are in need of refreshing and rethinking their approaches to teaching

and learning continually. Hence, it is important that teachers continue to develop their thinking and practices. Consequently, it is important to consider what conceptual models may help develop understandings of teacher identity.

2.3.1 Communities of Practice

As has been argued above teacher research works well when conceived of as a partnership. One useful way of thinking about how teachers learn in school and research communities is to consider Lave and Wenger's (1991/1998) concept of Communities of Practice. The authors argue that this term encapsulates long practiced ways of collective learning and human endeavour. Lave and Wenger (1991; 1998) explain that Communities of Practice encompass groups who share the same concerns or have the same or similar passions for what they do and want to learn to do well, whilst being in a community and having regular interaction with each other. Moreover, there are certain characteristics that define a community of practice from anything we might otherwise call a community. First, communities of practice share a domain of practice and competence or expertise within this domain (such as teaching or indeed gang culture - where there is expertise exercised that would not be formally recognised). Second, the community will engage in joint discussion and activity even if they are not working in the same location (for example the teachers within this study are working together as researchers but are located in different schools). Third, these communities are practitioners developing shared repertoires of resources, stories, tools and approaches to dealing with problems, and this connection lasts over time.

Therefore, communities of practice develop particular practices, consciously or unconsciously, based on sharing their skills regarding problem solving, accessing information, exchanging experiences, using their joint assets and information, supporting each other and identifying gaps in knowledge. For Lave and Wenger (1991; 1998), applying the term 'communities of practice' to such groups enables us to identify such activities and to focus on them,

whether in small or large groups. They go on to explain that this enabled them to think about such groups in terms of learning theory. Consequently, they were able to understand learning as a complex set of interactions between many people rather than a process where one teaches another. It is therefore a dynamic understanding of learning where all learn at all levels of expertise. As a theory, it explains the wider connections across organisations and geographies, the ways in which tacit and explicit knowledge sharing takes place and the ways in which communities can take collective responsibility.

Wenger (1998) believed that learning is a fundamental part of human identity, thus social participation in which individuals learn in groups and participate in the practices of their social communities, help them construct their identities through this participation and these communities. From this perspective schools, as places of learning, are seen as one locus of many in developing educated pupils. The wider world and a range of communities of practice will also have an influence. In addition, the learning of teachers will be influenced through a range of communities of practice, for example through subject specialist groupings, the school, activities with other teachers who have differing experiences. Thus, Lave and Wenger (1991) asserted that through engaging in the practices of their communities, people contribute to the creation of shared identities. Moreover, as part of a community of practice, individuals are motivated to engage with and develop their skills, which further contribute to the community to which they belong. As their skills develop and they gain appreciation for their contributions, others become inspired to join the group (Wenger, 1998).

In *Situating learning in communities of practice*, Lave (1991) asked why learning was so problematic. She realised that:

> learning identities …. are embroiled in pervasive process of commoditization. To commoditize labor [sic], knowledge and participation in communities of practice is to diminish possibilities for sustained development of identities of mastery. But if formally

> mandated forms of mastery are circumscribed, people nonetheless, do learn and do come to have knowledgeably skilled identities of various sorts. Contemporary forms of learning often succeed in unmarked, unintended ways, and these forms of learning also require first recognition, then explanation. All these concerns indicate that we should not lose sight of the fact that institutional and individual successes and failures of learning are interdependent and are the product of the same historical processes (Lave, 1991: 65).

Lave (1991) argued that labour, when viewed as a commodity, becomes something you can buy and sell. One can then become master of a particular skill, or set of skills, that can be traded on the market. Skills are also, bounded by the established practices involved with particular types of work. Consequently, working practices may become constrained by the rules and regulations of the particular work undertaken which, in turn, discourages creativity and variances in practice. Nevertheless, variance is important as Lave also argues that despite this boundedness, individuals can and do discover new and improved ways of doing things. Individuals successes are then, overtime, commuted into new working practices. Lave continues to argue that successes, whether institutional or individual are intertwined and dependent on creative adaptations. A lack of success is therefore often attributable to the individual or the institution working in a restrictive way. For Wenger (1998: 59), “[a]ny community of practice produces abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms, and concepts that reify something of that practice in a congealed form”. In other words, people participate and produce something as a result of such participation. Wenger (2000) adds to his earlier work, explaining that in a community of practice people produce something together; they also construct an image of themselves as part of the community of practice to provide themselves with an orientation (i.e. who I am in this world). Additionally, they align their activities with others to become effective beyond the limit that one individual can have. It is also important to recognise that communities of practice emerge and cannot be manufactured into existence but they can be nurtured and connections can be made to other groups (Wenger, 2000).

Roberts (2006) rehearses some disadvantages within the theory of communities of practice. A lack of consideration of power within this model ignores how power plays into knowledge creation and dissemination. Those with more knowledge have full participation within the community of practice and thus more power to influence it. It is also possible that those at the periphery remain at the periphery. This may particularly be so in organisational settings where hierarchy is strong. Moreover, as meanings are negotiated within these communities, there is no account of how meanings are understood or the messiness of negotiation. Roberts then summarises issues around aspects of trust. Here, in order to contribute to a community of practice each person must have trust and clear expectations around how their contribution will be received and acted upon. Competitive environments may be problematic in this regard. Again, in this case the nature of the wider organisation within which each person works will impact upon the ways in which they trust their community of practice. Roberts then tackles issues around predispositions. Here, Roberts reports critiques relating to Bourdieu's (1990) notion of habitus where we develop predispositions to particular ways of thinking and being that are unconscious, resistant to change and transfer across different contexts. These predispositions are largely influenced by class and influence the ways in which we see and are open to see things differently. Not only will this influence understandings within communities of practice but, over time as communities of practice develop shared and embedded meanings, their openness to new ideas or approaches can diminish.

Roberts (2006) goes on to add her own challenges related to the reach of the community of practice, the problematics of the use of the word community, and fast and slow communities of practice. From this perspective notions of large communities of practice sharing knowledge and practice can mean that practices are applied inappropriately without fully taking account of the context. Moreover, people are engaged in multiple communities of practice and this can make it difficult to understand exactly how people are reacting and interacting within particular communities. In addition,

organisations with a strong hierarchy may not be well disposed to communities of practice where the autonomous use of tacit knowledge are not deemed appropriate. Finally, Roberts realises that the use of 'community' has lessened the focus on 'practice' and the importance of situated learning.

2.3.2 Figured Worlds

Holland et al (1998) were interested in how identities developed within communities of practice and this led to the development of the concept of 'figured worlds'. Within a socio-cultural framework, this concept considers the ways in which individuals 'figure' themselves, who they are and how they might act, through the worlds within which they participate. A 'figured world' encompasses our social and cultural construction of the world we see, our understandings of it and the ways in which it influences how we behave and react. We choose to 'perform' in particular ways in particular circumstances and our performance is part of our construction of our own identity and of our social learning. As Urrietta (2007: 110) explains, "[i]n figured worlds people learn new perspectives of the world and through them learn to ascribe artefacts and actions with new meaning, new passion or emotion. Figured worlds also provide people with capabilities to influence their own behaviour in these worlds". Thus, people are the creators and the creation of their world and there are always contradictions, challenges and tensions which influence the way in which people's identities are shaped (Solomon, 2012; Lave and Wenger, 1991/1998). In other words, there are tensions in how we exercise agency in making decisions about who we are in any particular community. There are also tensions in the extent to which we are able to influence the shape of the world we inhabit. Holland et al (1998: 49) present the essence of figured worlds in the assertion that: "figured worlds rest upon people's abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized 'as if' realms".

Studying figured worlds leads us to a consideration of identity and culture through examining "the way people make their social and cultural worlds at the same time these worlds make them" (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010: 173). Holland et al (1998) drew on Bakhtin's dialogical concept of identity and

Vygotsky's developmental concept of identity, seeing identity as part of a performance developed through social engagement. Identity is a construct combining personality, space, and the 'figured worlds' within which they operate. It also engages our social and cultural construction of the world we see, our understandings of it and the ways in which it influences how we behave and react. We therefore choose to 'perform' in particular ways in particular circumstances and our performance is a combination of our identity and our social learning. However, identities are not conceived of as constant, rather they are forever unfinished and in formation and indeed reformation.

Figured worlds as a construct allows us to consider different social contexts, how these worlds were formed, how these contexts shape individual identity and how people come to understand themselves, their contexts and society. As a consequence, Urrieta (2007) explains that the notion of figured worlds helps to address issues around cultural determinism and think about identity allowing space for agency in the form of improvisation and innovation. Moreover, people are related to their landscapes of action, meeting with familiar types of people that support their sense of themselves. Urrieta (2007: 108) argues:

> In figured worlds people learn to recognize each other as a particular sort of actor, sometimes with strong emotional attachments, value certain outcomes over others, and recognize and attach significance to some acts and not others.

We also inhabit multiple worlds where in some we assume positional power and yet may be peripheral in others. Holland et al present figured worlds as spaces where we have possibilities of agency, but also acknowledge that these are mediated by the relations of power that exist within them. Therefore, figured worlds can operate to exclude some people (Holland et al, 1998). It is these notions of identity, power and agency that differentiate figured worlds from that of communities of practice.

Holland et al also place importance on artefacts that ascribe meaning to events, objects, histories and discourses. Such artefacts allow people to position themselves and mediate their thoughts and feelings. Urrieta (2007: 110) is of the opinion that:

> Holland et al focus specific attention on two processes of self-making (identity): conceptual and material. Conceptually, figured worlds provide the contexts of meanings for concepts of domains of action, for artefacts, and for action (behavior) and for people's understandings of themselves. In figured worlds, people learn new perspectives of the world and through them learn to ascribe artefacts and actions with new meaning, new passion or emotion. Figured worlds also provide people with capabilities to influence their own behavior in these worlds.

Urrieta (2007) goes on to explain that for Holland et al, social and personal identity is produced through negotiations of positionality, space of authoring and world making. For example, we may be offered identities (being an excellent teacher, being a teacher who has behaviour control issues) which leaves individuals with the choice to accept, reject or negotiate this identity. However, in response to such production of identity we have space to make choices about how we respond including offering no response at all. People can always live contradictions and assume characters that are not necessarily theirs, where meanings change, and identities are compromised (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). Additionally, we can make new figured worlds or adapt current ones through 'play' where we experiment, learn new skills, express ourselves more creatively which creates new spaces for considering identity. We are both producers and products and there are always contradictions, challenges and tensions which influence the way in which identities operate (Solomon, 2012; Lave and Wenger, 1991/1998).

2.3.3 Emotions and teacher identity

Campbell (1997) asserts that our emotions determine the ways in which we see the world and the way we know it, as well as determining our values and relationships with others in our community. For instance, teachers invest themselves in the work they do, so that their profession becomes part of their identity, sense of fulfilment, or even disappointment (Nias, 1996). Hence, teachers' interaction and the relationships they form in their schools shape their identities. Cornelius (1996: 188) argues that in the context of the social construction of emotions, "the experience and expression of emotions is dependent on learned conventions or rules and that, to the extent that cultures differ in the way they talk about and conceptualize emotions, how they are experienced and expressed will differ in different cultures as well".

In drawing upon the ideas of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, Holland et al (1998: viii) had "a thoroughly socio-centric view of human thought and feeling, and both saw speech, language, literature, and art as the pivotal media through which consciousness and subjectivity develop". According to Vygotsky (1978) human beings have unique qualities that make them change in accordance with the culture within which they find themselves: "an individual has the capacity to externalize and share with other members of her social group her understanding of their shared experience" (Vygotsky, 1978: 132). In line with the socio-cultural theory, identity can be looked at as the interaction between individual specificities and cultural tools. The identity of a person influences their relationship skills, emotions and abilities. Further, the action an individual performs, their relationships, profession and so on shape their identity (Vygotsky, 1978). Lasky (2005) and Zembylas (2003) considered how teachers' identities are constructed and re-constructed by virtue of their interactions and in line with their socio-cultural backgrounds. It was asserted that the identity of teachers is part and parcel of their emotions and self-knowledge. This means that emotions play a considerable role in forming and changing the identity of teachers. Vygotsky (1978) explained that emotions are intimately related to the actions and ideas that are part and parcel of the culture of a society, though emotions are socially and psychologically interrelated (Zembylas, 2003). Furthermore, the identity of

teachers is underpinned by emotions that surface at unexpected times (Lemke, 2002). Zembylas (2003: 13) stated that the relationship between emotion and identity “reflects an interest in how social constructs such as individual and group identity in teaching create and maintain certain ideas about teachers’ emotions”. With regard to the way teachers express their emotions in line with their identities, Day et al (2006) assert that teacher identity is influenced by a host of factors: these may have to do with teachers’ lives outside work, their health, their leadership credentials, their enthusiasm, alongside other factors.

Notions of power and culture and their role in emotion is discussed by Abu-Lughod and Lutz, (1990:14):

> power relations determine what can, cannot, or must be said about self and emotion, what is taken to be true or false about them, and what only some individuals can say about them … emotion discourses establish, assert, challenge, or reinforce power or status differences.

It follows that both emotion and reasoning depend on each other for expression. Emotions underpin the way we behave, whether or not these emotions are acknowledged. Socio-cultural theory presupposes that our social behaviour is influenced by feelings and emotions in the same way that our emotions determine the way in which we think about things. Consequently, our decisions are in part determined by our emotions (Damasio, 1994). The relationship between emotions and social construction relates to cultures and the way in which people express their emotions. Hargreaves (2000) explained that any change and reform in education is bound to influence teachers massively, not least emotionally. Zembylas (2003: 216-217) argues that:

> The emotions that teachers experience and express, for example, are not just matters of personal dispositions but are constructed in social relationships and systems of values in their families, cultures, and school situations. These relationships and values profoundly influence

> how and when particular emotions are constructed, expressed, and communicated. Feminist theories of emotion … focus on understanding emotions in relation to power and culture, and offer approaches in re-thinking emotions as collaboratively constructed and historically situated, rather than simply as personal, psychological and individual phenomena.

Lumby and English (2009) suggest that educators wear the mask of a teacher based on contextual and cultural expectations, but these do not always accord with other beliefs or identities that they hold. Illouz (2007: 2) explained:

> Emotion is not action per se, but it is the inner energy that propels us toward an act, what gives a particular "mood" or "coloration" to an act. Emotion can thus be defined as the "energy-laden" side of action, where that energy is understood to simultaneously implicate cognition, affect, evaluation, motivation, and the body.

Illouz elaborates that at times during the industrial revolution and the early twentieth century, people were easily able to transfer from the strategic (the economic) to the purely emotional. Now it is hard for people to do so. Illouz calls this state 'hyperrationality'. The hyperrationlised state is one where rationality and a valuing of rationality has overcome our ability to express who we are inwardly. It made us less able to be passionate, natural thinkers or even have the privilege of being able to fantasise. Thus the current market-oriented context has for Illouz, made us assume a mask that is not entirely ours.

> The standardization and scripting of intimacy and the ways we talk about it (using a vocabulary more and more dictated by the market), weakens our capacity for nearness, for passionate and intuitive thinking and, perhaps most of all, for fantasy. True enough: fantasies have never been as abundant and multiple in a culture which incessantly engineers them, yet they may have become entirely self-generated and sterile, as we are drifting afloat in a hyperrational world

> of endless choice and market logic, dominated by an overwhelming sense of tiredness and cynicism (sure, we are aware of the distance between mask and reality, but nonetheless still insist upon the mask). (Illouz, 2007: 2).

Indeed, Clarke (2020: 64) asserted that engagement in neoliberalism has been successful because it requires that we “accept our insertion into its machinery at the level of fantasy, enjoyment and desire, and our complicity in terms of actions”. Like Illouz, Clarke (2020) believed that the abundant fantasies available divert us from a necessary resistance to neoliberal logics. Illouz (2007: 2) argued that there is a need for a culture in which the strategic and the economic aspect of life intertwines with the emotional aspect, and she calls this ‘emotional capitalism’, which portrays:

> a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other, thus producing what I view as a broad, sweeping movement in which affect is made an essential aspect of economic behavior and in which emotional life – especially that of middle classes – follows the logic of economic relations and exchange...

Teachers interact daily with young people and colleagues in ways that are emotionally demanding. This ‘emotional labour’ often goes unrecognised in accounts of education (Colley, 2006). This is, however, an important part of the work of teaching.

2.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH ACTIVITY IN SCHOOLS

Research activity helps teachers to critically reflect upon how they might influence and develop pupils approaches to learning and thinking. Teachers can also influence their pupils through demonstrating critically reflective behaviours (Tichenor and Tichenor, 2004). The OECD (2013: 69) highlighted the need for a “recognised and explicitly stated norm that recognises the

complexity of good teaching, and insists on the professional obligation of every teacher to be engaged in a career-long quest for better practice". Recent studies (Campbell et al, 2016; Chapman et al 2016; Cordingley et al, 2015) have argued that professional cooperation is key to changing teacher classroom practices and that professional enquiry based on research is a prerequisite for changing teachers' practices, improving learning outcome and raising teacher awareness through research. In a report published by the Education Endowment Foundation (2018), there was an evaluation study conducted by the schools' Research Learning Community (RLC). It was realised that there was a significant relationship between teacher engagement in research and the attainment of their pupils. The schools that participated in the RLC involved teacher-researchers who then led research activity with teachers from other schools and also involved academic experts as advisors and supporters. The work indicated that the teachers who belonged to RLC had developed a growing disposition towards research (Rose et al, 2017). It was concluded that the RLC project had enhanced teacher learning outcomes, but also recognised that this did not happen without some challenges having to be overcome if this work was to be sustainably and effectively embedded. Harris and Jones (2017) pointed out, teachers are attracted to engage with research where the aim is to improve learner outcomes as well as teacher outcomes.

Research activity has the potential to shift teachers' practices, change their choices about what they teach, alter their mindsets and empower them. Cain (2017) argued that research can influence how teachers think in the following ways. First: research can facilitate spaces for teachers to experiment and can also encourage them to try new practices. Second, research can develop teachers' understandings of evidence realising the difference between 'hard' evidence (test data) and 'soft' evidence (qualitative data) and shift their preferences from hard to soft data as they begin to understand its power. Third, research can develop teachers' ethical awareness in relation to discussion around the ethics of the conduct of academic research.

School leaders and teachers were advised to look critically at the work they are doing, and this can be done through engaging in research, in order to improve teaching and learning. Jones (BERA-RSA Report, 2014) wrote:

> A flame needs air if it is to burn brightly. They [teachers] also need to engage with other professionals from their own and other schools. Research-focused policy must honour these professional commitments. That is why schools should become "research-rich environments" and teachers to be 'research literate'.

Research can play a pivotal role in creating a vibrant school improvement. Research-rich schools are the schools that are likely to develop the ability to self-improve (Darbyshire et al, 2018). Darbyshire et al (2018: 446) argued that in a research-rich environment:

> Every learner is entitled to teaching that is informed by the latest relevant research.
> Every teacher is entitled to work in a research rich environment that supports the development of their research literacy and offers access to facilities and resources (both on-site and online) that support sustained engagement with and in research from trainee to teacher.

Hence, schools can help create an environment in which teachers endeavour to develop their research skills as part of their CPD and collaborate with other teachers and members of the research community, in schools and universities (Darbyshire et al, 2018). In schools in Scotland, "research is embedded within career long professional learning and for universities and others to reach out and support those who are engaging in practitioner research to inform strategic improvement" (BERA-RSA, 2014: 6). Mincu (2013) observed that Stenhouse's ideas suggested in the 1970s and1980s still have relevance. In a research-rich environment, teachers can improve their practice where they are actively engaged in research, solving problems and developing solutions. Mincu (2013) believed that when teachers are involved in collaborative research, they can find a way of

exploring their potentials, lifting their morale and contributing to the improvement of their employability, professionalism and outcomes, as well as benefiting their students and schools. Nevertheless, as Cordingley (2013) realised, the attempts of schools in the UK to offer such a research-rich environment is still very fragmented. He goes on to say that making all schools research-rich environments requires a nationwide strategy as well as the provision of resources to support it.

2.4.1 Problems with research activity in schools

According to Cain (2018), teacher research can be viewed in terms of the “good the bad and the ugly”. He saw the ‘good’ outcomes of research in terms of teacher’s attitudes to it ranging from ‘cautious optimism’ to ‘strong enthusiasm’. The ‘bad’ outcome of research is when teachers adopt research unthinkingly and misuse research for purposes that were never intended. In terms of the ‘ugly’ side of research, Cain commented that teachers might have taken up research ideas because they believed that research recommendations were inevitably going to be superior to their own practices. Hammersley-Fletcher et al (2020) argued that it is important for academics supporting such development to reduce their own input and facilitate teachers to take increasing responsibility for the research journey. Moreover, this models to teachers how, as they become more confident, they can mirror this process with other teachers. It is therefore a problem where academics or staff in schools want to ‘control’ the processes around research activity.

This issue was previously discussed by Nicholson-Goodman and Garman (2007) who explained that when teachers are told that an idea is “research-based” it meant to them that it was better than their own ideas and as such it undermined their authority and self-confidence. Zimmerman (2006) outlined some of the barriers that might play a part when teachers embark on activity that can result in change. For example, they may fail to recognise that there is a need to change their practice; they may not want to change learned and long held practices; they may fear the unknown or worry that they are unsure

of how to undertake what is required; they may become disillusioned with research activity where findings are not adopted; they may be risk averse in case failure has consequences for their position in the school.

2.5 TEACHING SCHOOLS AND MULTI-ACADEMY TRUSTS: THE POLICY CONTEXT

Gunter et al (2013) argue that recent efforts to improve schools have been based upon neo-liberal and narrow agendas around performativity. In other words, improvement is judged through measurable targets for success. Ball and Youdell (2007) state that the market pressures placed upon schools to succeed against international league tables, have created problems for school leaders who have had to juggle performativity agendas against their own visions for education and good educative practice. This positions them as ‘victims’ of market forces in ways that constrain practice and diminish democratic practices. Moreover, as new models of education emerge, Husbands (2015) challenges his readers to consider what such initiatives achieve and points out that often they crumble under the weight of the expectations put on them. Recent initiatives include the move towards teaching school alliances followed by multi-academy trusts. This study is taking place within one teaching school alliance, Aquarius Alliance, and one multi-academy trust, Pisces Trust. It is therefore important to discuss what each of these school groups involves.

2.5.1 Teaching School Alliance

The thinking about setting up teaching schools started by George Berwick, for the cabinet office a decade ago (Matthews and Berwick, 2013). He used the analogy with teaching hospitals, which are hospitals affiliated to the university medical schools, which provide care and teaching and training activities as well, and suggested that the same could be done with schools. Thus, teaching schools who were proven to teach children to the highest standards could then provide training activities for other schools. However,

the analogy between schools and hospitals seems not to be strongly founded, because hospitals have the support of the medical centres at the university (Husbands, 2015).

Teaching schools develop school-to-school support and the aim is for an outstanding school, deemed worthy by DfE to gain teaching school status following an application from the school, to improve the performance of failing schools. This happens through head teacher to head teacher support, teacher to teacher support, or through support from academics and education specialists. Schools applying for this status had to firstly be deemed 'outstanding' through inspection considered by the office for standards in education (Ofsted) and secondly demonstrate their capacity for developing others. Support can be very important in as much as it has the potential to end poor performance in schools (Hutchings, 2013). Husbands (2015: 32) discussed the development of Teaching Schools explaining that

> Teaching schools developed rapidly after the 2010 White Paper on The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010). Teaching school designation would constitute an elite designation: in order to qualify for designation, schools would need to demonstrate both that they were outstanding, including an outstanding designation in teaching and learning, and had a track record of collaborative work. It was from early work on designation, in order to give some shape to the programme, that the idea of the key responsibilities of teaching schools - the so-called big six – emerged: the six core priorities.

The priorities of the 'big six' were rolled out as a list of criteria for teaching schools to address and were according to Husbands (2015) to

1. play a greater role in training new entrants to the profession
2. lead peer-to-peer professional and leadership development
3. identify and develop leadership potential
4. provide support for other schools
5. designate and broker specialist leaders of education (SLEs)

6. research and develop.

The inclusion of research and development in this list shifted the focus of schools towards a research agenda and provided a rationale for some schools to begin working with university academics. Husbands (2015: 32) went on to state that, “[i]t makes sense to put schools in the lead on improving practices in other schools and it makes equal sense to put outstanding schools in the lead, even if one of the characteristics of ‘outstanding’ practice is a recognition of the limits on our own practices”. However, teaching schools were then encouraged to become accredited providers of teacher education. Husbands expresses his contention that teaching schools would be able to offer professional development as long as politicians refrain from telling them what to do and expecting miracles from them.

Legislation since this period, still includes research but it has been less the subject of emphasis by government. Policy makers focussed on changing the education system through yet more reforms. The coalition government (2010–2015) sought to further withdraw the state from the workings of society. This meant the adoption of a ‘self- improving system’. It was a policy that fitted the government as funding was becoming scare, hence support for schools and research was reduced. CPD for teachers and the encouragement of research dwindled. For instance, they abandoned the policy in which the Labour Government in 2011 had suggested that funding was to be made available to all new teachers to do research and gain Master’s degrees in teaching and learning (DfE, 2014). Nevertheless, it has been asserted that the changes to the school system in England and the creation of academies and teaching school alliances have paved the way for research to flourish. Godfrey (2016:13) traced the changes to the school system in UK and summed up the engagement of schools in research, particularly secondary schools, in these words:

> research engagement for secondary schools was subject to a context of deep cuts in a time of economic austerity and renewed demands

> for improvement, coupled with a new inspection framework with stringent new guidelines. Important changes were occurring that affected most or all of the case study schools in terms of designation to academies and/or as Teaching Schools. Numerous challenges emerged to Teaching Schools Alliances to embed research activity and to drive improvements across the system. Opportunities for a reinvigoration of the research-engaged schools movement also came to light in which sustainable, bottom-up driven approaches to research-informed practice could potentially thrive.

Similarly, in 2011 there were about 1000 Academies and by March 2016 the number grew massively to more than 5000. Academies gained financial autonomy (free from the local education authority) with freedom to adopt their own curricula (Commons Library Briefing, 18 July 2019).

2.5.2 Multi-Academy Trusts

The neoliberal policies that had prevailed and controlled education in England since the 1980s had led to a shift in the administration of schools prompted by the marketised agenda of education (Ball, 2014). Schools were to be freed from the control of the local authority and able to generate and vary their sources of income. Thus, schools could affiliate with agencies, businesses and charities to generate funds in a bid to self-improve (DfE, 2010). The origin of the move to academisation goes back to 2000, when a number of failing urban secondary schools were targeted to become academies in order to free them up to improve where local government was argued to have failed (West and Bailey, 2013). In 2002, the sponsored academies programme to support struggling schools, mostly in poorer area of England, was launched. By definition, academies are 'independent state schools' (DfE, 2010: 51) funded by central government and self-regulating, free from the control of the local authority. This was followed in 2010 by the Academies Act which introduced 'converter' academies. According to this act, any local authority maintained schools in England were allowed to

assume academy status. Moreover, as time passed more schools were actively encouraged to become academies (Ball, 2008; Gunter, 2011).

The development of the academies programme led to the emergence of multi-academy trusts (MATs) as a foundation for supporting academies to expand and work together. As such a MAT status allows a Trust to take other academy schools into the Trust to work co-operatively usually around a set of professed ideals or educational philosophies. DfE (2016: 2) describes the MAT as follows:

> The MAT has a single set of articles and therefore is a single legal entity accountable for a number of academies. The trust enters into a Master Funding Agreement (MFA) with the Secretary of State, and into Supplemental Funding Agreements (SFA) for each academy it operates.

The Multi-academy Trust performance measures 2015-2016 stated that,

> In November 2016 there were 1,121 active MATs in England. In comparison in March 2011 there were 391 MATs. In March 2016 65% of all academies and free schools were in a MAT, including 75% of primary academies and 51% of secondary academies. (DfE, MAT 20, para 31). In November 2016 there were 21,525 state-funded schools in England of which 1,618 were stand-alone academies and 4,140 schools were in MATs (DfE, January 2017).

According to the 7th report of the House of Commons Education Community (2017), the number of schools converting to academy status has increased over the last five years and there is an expectation that the number of MATs will continue to increase. The government also predicts that the schools which are in the process of converting to academy status will be joining a MAT. As the MAT is a single body which oversees a number of schools in its ‘chain’ it has overarching responsibility for the governance of these schools. Influencing the performance of students in MATs may be limited and vary from one MAT to another. This may be related to the

positions of the academies in the inspection league table before entering the MAT and will also be influenced by the MAT organisational approach which by their nature can be very individual in scope, influence and direction. Some MATs have taken on schools that belonged to particular geographical locations, for others they cover a wide geography. Some have expanded rapidly and others more slowly and carefully. As a consequence, there are mixed reviews on the benefits of MATs.

Article 63 of the Government Multi-academy trust report 2016-2017 (p.23-) stated that:

> The Church of England education office told us that small primary schools are significantly less likely to join MATs … It is also the case that secondary schools and larger primaries have been more likely to establish or join MATs while smaller schools (those with less than 100 pupils and particularly those with less than 50 pupils) have either been seen as not sufficiently attractive in financial terms to MAT or potential MAT leaders or are themselves less interested in MAT structures.

Article 114 of the same report mentioned that:

> Several of the larger MATs who submitted evidence spoke of the importance of school to school support. Oasis wrote that their academies 'participate in a school to school led improvement model and therefore work collaboratively with academies within the MAT regionally and nationally, schools in their locality and the Local Authority (LA) to share best practice and accomplish improvement through partnership'.

Greany and Ehren (2017) also suggested that peer support between high and low achieving schools can have benefits for the "donor as well as the recipient." In written evidence submitted by Greany and Ehren to the Government parliamentary report of 2016-2017, it was stated that:

> The move to a MAT-led school system offers the opportunity for enhanced collaboration between schools aimed at improving the quality of teaching and the richness of children's learning. Some MATs are already demonstrating this potential and a few are going further to show how their increased capacity can secure efficiencies and enable schools to address entrenched disadvantage in ways that stand-alone schools could not...
> Capacity and effectiveness in MATs and risks of fragmentation: This risk has a number of dimensions, most of which relate to the pace and scale of change required to move England's remaining 17,000 non-academy schools into sustainable and effective academised structures (Greany and Ehren, 2017, Online Parliamentary Report 2016-2017, MAT0010).

However, some scholars have questioned the potential of MATs to bring long term success, and moreover question the notion of creating MATs in the first place. For example, Gunter and McGinity (2014) and Rayner (2017) have argued that the growth of MATs has worryingly removed schools from the public sector and relocated them to the private sector where they can act free from local democratic processes. Therefore, trustees who are not necessarily appointed by merit, become decision makers instead of community elected school governors. West and Wolf (2018) argued that this meant that English school-based education has changed beyond recognition as there is no longer transparency in governance. Moreover, with schools representing a mix of state and private enterprises, the sector is muddled and fragmented. West and Wolf mentioned a case where one MAT openly dropped the governing bodies of each of the 25 academies it took into the trust claiming that they were mirroring the actions of other MATs. For authors such as Greany and Higham, (2018); Gunter and McGinity, (2014), and Gunter (2011), such moves represent a negative impact on schooling.

In principle, MATs have the role of working with the communities where their schools are located and also these Trusts should engage with parents and the regional governing boards. The local authorities have the role and

responsibilities for monitoring the expansion of MATs and the Government and the local authorities take account of the schools that are performing well, as those can be given the go-ahead by the regional educational authorities to become MATs. But MATs cannot succeed unless there are sponsors and support. This largely depends on the catchment area of the schools with some communities and schools labelled as failing being less attractive for MATs to recruit. This is an interesting trend given that the programme was initially created to support poorly performing schools. The Government has stated that its intention is for schools to use the MAT model to share best practice and expertise. It also seeks to support high performance across MATs providing them with a platform to allow sharing of good practice and also publishing data.

The Government's White Paper (DfE, 2016:144) anticipated that:

> In the future, there will be more MATs spreading best practice across the schools system and by joining, forming, expanding or leading MATs, the best leaders, who have already proven their success, ability and skills, can play a greater role in the system and spread success more widely to benefit more children.

The White Paper, *Education, Excellence Everywhere* (DfE, 2016), stated that all schools are to become academies by 2020, fulfilling the trend started by the New Labour Government of 2000. The policy of forcing all schools to academise has been modified by the Conservative Government who focused on 'underperforming' schools. However, the idea behind the establishment of the MATs was considered as a way of creating the conditions for the success of schools, a notion criticised by Gunter and McGinity (2014). Sims et al (2015) reported, that there are multiple factors such as funding, pupil intakes and profiles of converter and sponsored academies which add complexity to the notion of MATs. Moreover, the claim that the academies programme was being set up to "empower local communities, putting children and parents first" (DfE, 2016:153), is not clearly evident in the data gathered on this movement thus far.

2.6 CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTION FOR THE RESEARCH

Qvortrup (2016) argued that teachers do not need to be told what to do, they need to be given the means to better judge their practices. In order to do that, the literature has indicated that teachers will benefit from the support they receive from their schools, where they are facilitated with the time and spaces necessary for debating theories, initiatives and practices. The BERA and the Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce (RSA) Report (2015) was the culmination of an 18-month Inquiry in which they looked at the contribution that was made by research to the improvement of the quality of teaching. This report concluded that teachers and students flourish and succeed in research-rich schools and colleges, as these are settings where self- evaluation and improvement are more likely to exist (Furlong, 2015).

In this chapter I have argued that engaging teachers in research helps them to develop both their professional practice and their identity. I have also argued that education has been subjected to increased regulation and control, which has acted to curtail some of the freedoms that teachers had previously enjoyed. Teachers have become subject to meeting targets and delivering a curriculum delineated through government initiatives and policies. Further, teacher development has largely focussed on an agenda of compliance. However, I have asserted that research activity can facilitate teachers to adopt a more critical and questioning stance through conducting investigations into practice. In this way, teachers are able to more clearly identify links between practice and intent, and to initiate new approaches to teaching and learning. They are also more able to identify problems and issues plus see when they are making assumptions related to the profession, students and learning. I have also argued that research activity enables teachers to co-create knowledge and thus feel empowered and inspired to make shifts in their practice.

I then argued that humans learn best within groups where they are facilitated to learn with and from one another. In such ‘communities of practice’, teachers will share and develop expertise and shape their identity to meet that of the others within the community. Moreover, they are not only influenced by the community, but they can also actively influence the community. There are, however, some restrictions within the concept of communities of practice around issues of inequalities of power and a lack of recognition of the contexts which impact on individual engagement. The notion of ‘figured worlds’ adds both agency and power to the notion of working in such communities. Figured worlds also take account of identity and the ways in which this is formed and shifts through interaction. Identities are not considered as fixed, rather identity is in a constant state of adaptation and development. As part of a figured world people learn to recognise particular sorts of actors and attribute particular significance to particular acts. I then argued that emotion was also intimately involved in shaping identity and actions. Emotions are moreover shaped by the figured worlds in which we live. Thinking about the world and individuals that are shaped in these ways fits into a socio-cultural perspective. This theory is based on the notion that social and cultural interaction is vital to cognitive development.

From the literature, it is likely that the development of bodies such as the MAT and TSA has positively influenced the development of teacher researchers, as many researchers advocated. There are numerous references to the freedom that teachers feel as compared to the situation when they were under the control of the local authorities and only restricted by government curricula. Teachers at the Pisces Trust and the Aquarius Alliance are finding in research encouraged by their respective research commissioners an opportunity to criticise, explore, and be creative, unhindered by the stringent rules and regulations that limited their freedom. Teachers still feel obliged to produce results, but now they are finding a new way of producing the same results or even better with the freedom that they find in research and the knowledge they are acquiring. This is more apparent in the case of Aquarius Alliance teachers who follow unaccredited route to research. However, both the Pisces Trust and Aquarius Alliance are

contributing to the creation of a research culture in schools and this has the potential of improving education, as a number of the studies reviewed suggest.

This thesis offers a distinct contribution to knowledge as it addresses a dearth of detailed ethnographic study undertaken with MAT and TSA teachers engaged upon a research journey. Moreover, through utilising the lens developed through notions of communities of practice and figured worlds, this study takes a socio-cultural perspective on looking at teacher development within the current political context for schools. Consequently, this research took place within a teaching school alliance and a multi-academy trust both of which groups are new arenas for schooling and as yet under researched; particularly in relation to MAT and TSA teachers engaging in research. In this way, it brings new perspectives to thinking about teachers as they develop into teacher-researchers and asks whether such a shift in identity is sustainable or even desirable.

In relation to this thesis the literature raises some important considerations for the work being undertaken, particularly as the research activities that teachers are engaging with involves them potentially adopting a new identity, which is that of a teacher-researcher working in a group with fellow teacher-researchers. Adopting a socio-cultural theoretical lens, it is important to consider whether teachers are becoming more critically engaged with practice and more aware of the ways in which they position themselves in their figured world. Moreover, it is interesting to ascertain whether teachers identify as actors in a figured world, to what extent they have agency and whether they see themselves as having agency to shift the practices of teachers around them. In the following chapter, I present my research questions and discuss the ethnographic methodological approach and methods that I have adopted.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> Research is formalised curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose (Hurston, 2018).1

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Methodology is the telescope that enlightens the observations and interpretations of the researcher, while the methods used in research constitute the procedures that are employed in the data collection and interpretation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This thesis investigates how teachers' experience engaging with research and what they perceive to be the consequences of such engagement over a period of two years. Data were gathered through focus groups, observations, field notes and semi-structured interviews. The research was designed to gather accounts from the teachers themselves about what they think their engagement in research is doing for them, if anything, and whether or not it has a sustainable impact on them as practitioners. There are few studies detailing the research experiences of teachers within settings involving multi-academy trusts and teaching school alliances. Moreover, adopting an ethnographic approach to untangle and understand teachers' approaches and activities within their working context makes this study an original contribution to the field. This chapter explores the framework that underpins my research and develops answers to my research questions.

The methodology chapter of this thesis is discussed and arranged in eight sections. Following the introduction and overview of the chapter in 3.1, in section 3.2, the questions and aims being pursued in this work are reviewed.

1Zora Neale Hurston (2018) Online statement. Available from: writerswrite.co.za/literary-birthday-7-january-zora-neale-hurston (Accessed 12.09.2018).

Section 3.3 discusses the significance of research that adopts an ethnographic approach and how I became involved in this data collection. It moves on to discuss the ontological and epistemological positioning of my work. Section 3.4 discusses the use of ethnography in greater detail. In the first sub-section ethnographic principles are explored and in the second the types of ethnography available are commented upon. Section 3.5 explores the principles of conducting ethnographic research and considers the practical aspects of the research detailing numbers of teachers involved, the school context for the research data collection and an overview of the MAT and TSA within which data collection took place. This section also delineates the methods and tools employed to gather data and analyse it. It looks at issues of data analysis in ethnography and details the approach taken, considering how thematic analysis was used in the exploration of the data and in how ideas were interlinked across data, context and literature.
In section 3.6 there is a detailed explanation of the ethical complexities of this work and the steps taken to ensure this study met ethical guidelines. Section 3.7 looks at issues of validity and authenticity whilst undertaking ethnographic study. Finally, in 3.8 the chapter connects this study to the research questions, explaining what was most important in thinking about the data presentation in the following chapter.

3.1 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This study addressed the following research question:

- How might engaging school teachers in research activity enhance their levels of critical thinking and what do they perceive as its impact on their practices?

The aims of this study are:

1. To examine the ways in which teachers regard the nature and role of research in education.
2. To consider the influences on practice that teachers identify as a result of engagement in research activity.

3. To identify whether the involvement of teachers in research activity enhances their critical perceptions around their daily working practices.
4. To investigate the extent to which research activity might lead teachers to argue that they have experienced sustainable shifts in their educational approaches.

3.2 THEORECTICAL PERSPECTIVES

This thesis is concerned with examining research activity as an aspect of teachers' professional development. However, as Caldwell and Simkins (2011) argued, professional development activity is hard to capture through conventional 'level models' which measure particular outcomes or learning points achieved as a result of particular inputs. Instead, they suggested that evaluations such as rich case studies were a much better way to capture professional and emergent learning as part of a social and personal process. As explored in the literature review, many experiences that teachers undertake contribute to their continuing professional understanding and can be considered professional development. Therefore, if research has an impact on professional learning and understanding, then it too can be considered part of their continuing professional development. This study involved an ethnographic approach to examining this issue, generating rich material that enables the researcher and others to understand and describe the wider picture (Hammersley, 2006).

The practice of ethnography usually takes place over a lengthy period of time with the personal involvement of the researcher and informants/consultants. It involves the interplay between looking and listening, watching and asking (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). Thus, the ethnographer, as Fielding (2001) explains, studies the shared patterns of a cultural group and how such patterns shape each individual within the group. Therefore, the ethnographic approach involves a process of becoming in which knowledge is produced through interaction between the researcher and the researched. As a

consequence of taking this approach, I am deeply embedded within this research and it is important to outline how I became involved in this study. The teacher research activity was already taking place with an academic research lead who had a sense of the impact of the work, but no rigorous study had been undertaken to assess this academic's opinion. Thus, the academic research lead was seeking someone who was interested and willing to undertake such a study to see what could be learned about both the difference, if any, that the programme of research activity was having and also whether any shifts detected were seen to be sustainable. In addition, the academic research lead was engaged with two large groups of teachers, one group who also undertook accreditation alongside the research activity and another group that was not involved in accreditation. This created the potential for me to undertake research and also some interesting tensions to navigate. For example, would I find differences between those undertaking accreditation as opposed to those not accredited? Also, would I feel unduly influenced or restricted in undertaking research where the researcher clearly had an ongoing investment in the work?

From the outset the academic research lead welcomed my investigation and I was able to sit in on all taught delivery sessions for the two academic years of my study. However, the academic research lead took no part in setting the questions that I asked or in gathering feedback from me as I undertook this work, although I was able to ask questions of her throughout the data gathering process where this was helpful. I was left to undertake interviews, observations, field notes and gather feedback from teachers without interference and the academic research lead also facilitated me in conducting focus group interviews at the end of each taught session. I did however agree that I would feedback some key issues which might be useful for developing thinking about the work being undertaken. An advantage of this work was that I had the ability to discuss and question the work going on, the intentions embedded in taught sessions and gain the perspectives of both the academic research lead and the accredited programme lead. Thus, I had not only access to the schools but also access to the full processes

behind the research sessions that I attended and observed. This gave me a very broad understanding of the research activity from a variety of perspectives that might have been more difficult to obtain had I been doing this independently of the ongoing school research initiative.

In conducting this ethnographic research, I have adopted Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory to explain how the social, political and economic factors have impacted upon teachers' identities and their professional development, particularly in relation to the situated learning within communities of practice and figured worlds. Lave (1991) explained that situated learning happens as a consequence of an activity, a context and the culture where it takes place. It grows with the help of other sources and interactions with others in a constructive environment of knowledge. In attending development sessions and in visiting the schools and teachers who were engaging in research, I could begin to unpack knowledge about their activity, the context and the culture underpinning this work. Lave (1991: 65) realised that "learning identities …. are embroiled in pervasive process of commoditization". This commodification of learning identity was also an area that would be investigated through listening to the language adopted by teachers and their explanations of their thinking. Through the variety and combination of data I was collecting I was therefore able to build insights into the research learning of teachers.

3.2.1 Research Ontology and Epistemology

Kuhn (1962) argues that scientists have built up particular sets of common beliefs and agreements that enable them to look at how to answer and understand particular research problems. These sets of common beliefs are known as paradigms. Different paradigms view the reality and knowledge which underpin research differently (Scotland, 2012). Each paradigm is nonetheless dependent upon certain constituent parts in terms of shaping a view of reality. Lincoln et al (2011) argue that all paradigms operate with an ontological presupposition about what reality might be; an epistemological

approach that considers how we know something; and third, they each adopt a particular methodology or methodologies.

Ontology relates to the philosophical study of the nature of existence and 'being' (Dainty, 2008). The assumptions of ontology, as the study of being, are embodied in what constitutes 'reality', i.e. what the matter really is and how it works in reality (Crotty, 1998). However, since realities are mediated by our senses, the reality of an object is constructed through our interactions with it and is therefore influenced by our paradigmatic approach. For example, realists would seek something as a potential approachable reality, whereas critical realists would argue that perceptions of reality are shaped by such things as social norms, political agendas, economic, cultural, gender and ethnic values (Lincoln et al, 2011). Moreover, constructivists would look at how realities are constructed locally and by groups who may agree on an interpretation. Reality is thus shaped through things like language, perception, and agreed understandings, all of which are open to varied interpretation. Moreover, as Frowe (2001) argued, the language used to represent reality is also itself a representation of the interaction between language and the real world. In addition, for Cohen et al (2007) the real is always independent of the knower so that both researcher and the researched have independent identities and will engage with independent interpretations of reality that may or may not be the same.

However, in the conduct of research, as Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 31) stated, "any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity". This is important to consider as the construction of knowledge is part of an epistemological approach (King and Horrocks, 2010). Thus, epistemology relates to the nature and forms of knowledge. It is the study of the theory of knowledge, its scope, nature, and limitations (Cohen et al, 2007). Epistemological assumptions focus on the acquisition, creation, and communication of knowledge. Epistemology focuses on the nature of what it means to know and the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known (Dainty, 2008). For example, positivists tend to venture that they can produce knowledge that

can be considered to be objectively ‘true’, whereas others, such as critical realists, acknowledge subjectivity and that findings are mediated through values amongst other things (Lincoln et al, 2011). Lincoln et al go on to argue that constructivists co-create their findings, whereas participatory approaches emphasise the experimental, propositional, co-created and practical knowing nature of what they discover.

In order to address the potential issues of bias in my gaze, I had to make sure that I accounted for the minute details of my experience when collecting data in an attempt to reduce the extent to which my lens would distort the way I saw people, things, or interpreted phenomena and actions. As a teacher whose teaching experience is mostly overseas, I was fascinated by the idea of teachers undertaking research, as this seemed to me to be an unfamiliar idea. I saw my ‘outsider’ position as both an advantage and disadvantage. I had to adjust to a very different approach to teacher learning than I had experienced previously. This meant that I could see what was happening around me with fresh eyes, but I realised that my view might not give me full access to the understandings of the teachers. Consequently, working alongside the teachers and being able to question them about meaning and to check my interpretations with them was a useful tool in addressing this issue. Moreover, observing teachers’ journeys over a period of two years enabled me to gain an insight into the factors that were embedded in their ontological and epistemological beliefs.

Adopting an inductive approach allowed me to collect data relevant to my topic and then study the data patterns to develop a theory to explain these patterns. Hence, using an inductive approach to interpret my data (Wisker, 2007) meant that I had to recognise that an interpretivist epistemology facilitated me in not only interpreting the data, but also enabled me to recognise my role as interpreter. I had to be aware of the interpretations I was making and understand why I had interpreted data in that way. Consequently, the validity of the data I collected was partly determined by my role as a researcher and the position that I adopted within the qualitative paradigm based on an interpretivist outlook, as Denzin and Lincoln (2003)

have recommended. In other words, my data would drive my understandings and lead me to develop and engage with theory that would best explain the data rather than my imposing theory onto the data.

3.3 USING ETHNOGRAPHY

This study is based on ethnographic observations, focus groups, interviews and field notes which provide strong detail about the subject and people investigated (Madden, 2010; Mason, 2002, O'Reilly, 2012). Ethnography supports a socio-cultural perspective in revealing what practices are in place, how these may shift and how new practices can become embedded (Rogoff, 1984). The use of ethnography allowed me to observe participants in their everyday interactions and ask them questions in relation to their experiences, sometimes as and when these happened. Ethnography is one of the most frequently used approaches in education (Pole and Morrison, 2003; Cohen et al, 2007). The use of ethnography allows researchers to consider a host of cultural structures and the thoughts and feelings of participants in their daily lives and actions. It is an ideal way of researching cultural practices. Ethnographic data is collected in the context of the research being undertaken, while expressing the culture being observed. It also means being aware that what people say they do is not necessarily what they do, as what they do is related to their circumstances, settings and moods.

Crotty (2003) believes that researchers are the architects of their research and every research methodology that is followed is distinctive to the particular piece of research that is being conducted. Ethnography is a good method for generating rich material, which explores the broad picture that enables the researcher and others to understand, structure, and describe the entire frame of the issue investigated. The ethnographer collects as much data as possible about the informants (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). The ethnographer observes how the details of the daily lives of the informants are structured and tries to understand, and asks about the reasons why, such

structures exist. Hence, the ethnographer studies the connections between people's personal lives and the cultural artefacts and behaviours that surround them. Thus, ethnography differs from a narrative study, phenomenology and grounded theory insofar as it focuses on the *shared* values, meanings, beliefs and attitudes which are constructed amongst a group of people in a particular setting or space (Creswell, 2013). It should be mentioned here that ethnography is different from anthropology. According to Ingold (2017: 21-22) ethnography has the aim of:

> render(ing) an account… of life as it is actually lived and experienced by a people, somewhere, sometime. Good ethnography is sensitive, contextually nuanced, richly detailed, and above all faithful to what it depicts…

Ingold goes on to say that anthropology,

> …is a generous, open-ended, comparative, and yet critical inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of human life in the one world we all inhabit. …. To study anthropology is to study *with* people, not to make studies *of* them; such study is not so much ethnographic as educational. An anthropological education gives us the intellectual means to speculate on the conditions of human life in this world, without our having to pretend that our arguments are distillations of the practical wisdom of those among whom we have worked. Our job is to *correspond* with them, not to speak for them (*Ibid*).

Furthermore, as Walford (2009a) stated, in ethnographic study multiple methods are used as no one approach, such as interviews, is likely to give a comprehensive account of any situation investigated. This can however imply a huge time commitment, so researchers may use faster and more convenient approaches and vary the techniques and approaches used. Walford (2009a) expressed concerns about models of ethnography that see it as synonymous with either qualitative research or anthropology and seeks to defend a different and richer understanding of what ethnography is.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that ethnography involves the tacit and overt participation of the researcher in the research that they are doing and the lives of the people that they are working with over a long period of time, observing and asking questions about what is happening and being involved in this process. Fetterman (1998) describes ethnography in terms similar to the work of the investigative reporter, but with a focus on the routine everyday lives of people. In this study I act to both describe what I am seeing and experiencing, whilst at the same time checking my understandings against those who I am studying. I am not attempting to be one of the teachers in the study but to be an overt part of what takes place and an observer of the outcomes.

Walford (2009a) made additions to this understanding drawing on Bryman's (2001) arguments, by suggesting that ethnography involves immersion in the society under investigation and: collecting descriptive data that records the culture of those studied; developing an understanding of meanings the group attaches to their social world; and making the data collected accessible to others. He also draws on Troman et al (2006), who explained that ethnographers use a variety of approaches to data collection, including seeing the researcher as the research instrument; considering the formation and maintenance of cultures; taking time to build and test hypotheses; and deeply analysing a particular case as a basis for generalisation. Walford also stressed that ethnographers do at times utilise quantitative methods to complement the qualitative approaches adopted. They 'hang around' carefully selected case study sites. They moreover seek out those who behave differently from others. They try to understand all aspects of the societal groups that they study, and they take care to gather evidence to support their claims. Ethnographers collect data for future use, thus they record their observations at or close to the event and do not rely on their memories. They are also aware of the ethical issues that their work involves and work to avoid making assumptions, pre-judgements and look for evidence that contradicts any initial guesses they make. In undertaking this work, I carried a research journal and recorded events as they happened. I

sat amongst the teachers in their taught sessions and engaged with the tasks set.

Walford (2009b) also recognised that changes have taken place that prevent ethnographers from interpreting the world as they once did. An example given is the ways in which cultures are not individual and discreet but cross boundaries in terms of membership and accessibility; therefore, a range of complex influences play a part in the activities of any societal group. In addition, many of the boundaries around ethnography have blurred as researchers have less time to undertake ethnography and, in some instances, wish to disrupt the boundaries between approaches. Walford (2009b) believed that ethnographic data should be logically constructed and developed to support the demands for empirical data to be embedded with precision and clarity. In other words, ethnography aims at constructing a readerly text and should tell a story based on evidence (Walford 2009b). Ethnographic writing is commonly understood to be “contextual, rhetorical, institutional, generic and political” depicting the stories of actors as “true fictions,” (Clifford, 1986:6). For Walford (2009b), it is important not to neglect the core of ethnography insofar as the traditional purpose of ethnography is to communicate something about others. Ethnography allows researchers to apply traditional and innovative research methods to people. However, although ethnographers have asserted the significance of long-term fieldwork, “arguing for the importance of spending at least a year or so, though many go on for whole careers working in, or returning to, one place. Others argue that the quality of the research and analysis matters more than the time one spends in a place” (Mills and Morton, 2013: 132).

The focus of ethnography is about gaining an in-depth insight into a community through the data gathering approaches adopted, as I did in this study. Whilst acknowledging my position as researcher, however, my research did not equate to living in the community in the way an anthropologist does (O'Reilly, 2012). I took part in the research activities teachers were doing and engaged with teachers in the discussions of the issues presented and recorded the ideas presented in the various sessions

and activities. I observed teachers while they were engaged in research and noted their attitudes and, through interviews, recorded the impact of the research they were engaged in and to what extent they were benefiting from what they were doing. For instance, the teachers learned how to conduct interviews and focus groups. They were also engaged in sessions on how to analyse these data and they presented the results to an accredited programme lead and their colleagues for discussion. They engaged in open discussions where each could offer the others constructive criticism. Observing these activities, I noticed what the teachers were learning from the research they were doing and how they could implement some of the ideas that had arisen from their research work through working as a community of practice.

People sometimes use the term participant observation or field research as a synonym for ethnography (Sandiford, 2015). However, ethnography has a deeper history and understanding than that gained from observation alone. Thus, ethnography is the primary source of knowledge that gives an account of the way people lead their lives: how they work, play and interact with each other on a regular basis, specifically through face to face interaction with others. Ethnography allows researchers: ‘to engage with and analyse these complexities and moreover portray them in a way that can capture the sensuous array of sights, sounds, and smells as well as represent the traumas, passions and emotions, of … lived experiences’ (Bagley, 2009: 251). Ethnography allows us to understand a group of people’s day to day work environments and their interactions. People in groups often share language and belief systems, for instance, where they are in the same shop, or factory, or a village. However, if people do not choose to enter the group, they feel alienated and find it hard to function. Hence, in ethnography the research question is broad because it encompasses a statement about the purpose of the research that is about a particular cultural group or activity. Then this broad question is broken up into specifics as data is collected and compiled. When we study human activity, we can consider particular aspects of the group being investigated as a micro-culture. Within this micro-culture we can identify shared beliefs, values, behaviours, languages and work

routines that are used by the group. For example, in the case of this research, teachers have particular references and uses of language that are more difficult to interpret as an outsider to this group. I have had to ensure that I am asking for clarifications without disrupting their chain of thought. In interviews, this sometimes means that I note words or issues to ask them about at the end of the interview. In this way, we are able to make potential judgements about what is happening in the wider society, or the macro-culture. As Maxwell (1996: 17-20) outlines, ethnography is used for:

1. Understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of events, situations, and actions that they are involved with and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences;
2. Understanding the particular context within which the participant acts, and the influence that the context has on their actions;
3. Identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, generating new grounded theories about the latter;
4. Understanding the process by which events and actions take place; and
5. Developing causal explanations.

This approach aligns with the focus of my study, which is about reaching understandings about the ways in which teachers engage with research activity, how this influences their thinking and practices in schools, together with gaining an understanding of the wider context within which they are working. Moreover, these data sets are gathered in relation to teachers' perspectives. In this way, I reach a rich and developed perspective on the potential strengths and weaknesses when teachers engage on a research active path from which I can make recommendations in relation to future research activity. In addition, this represents a novel (in terms of depth and detail) approach to considering such work in schools.

3.3.1 Ethnographic principles

In discussing ethnography, O'Reilly (2012) invites the reader to engage in reflexive and creative research that draws critically and creatively from the

full range of qualitative methods. Ethnographic researchers use observation as part of the ethnographic materials to describe what they encounter. The first principle according to Mills and Morton (2013:3) is that ethnography is “a way of being, seeing, thinking and writing”. It is not only a tool or a research method, but a way that enables us to think about research while at the same time utilizing various methods of research together. The second principle risks making researchers uncomfortable, doing unconventional research, leaving them to express their struggle between their inner worlds and the emotional dislocation that is necessary for them to reach an understanding of their research. It involves immersion in the research and at the same time standing back to make sense of it. “It involves questioning things others take for granted, making the familiar strange, not jumping to conclusions” (Mills and Morton, 2013: 4). The third principle encompasses the issue that in doing ethnographic research, it necessitates employing empathy for those being researched; i.e., understanding and being “attentive to the feelings of others on their terms” (ibid), while at the same time recognising that there is a tension in undertaking this. So, the researcher must derive ethnographic knowledge from dialogues and communication. If conducted successfully this approach facilitates the researcher to gain more profound understandings and insights of the subject of the research (Mills and Morton, 2013: 3-5).

3.3.2 Types of ethnography

The types of ethnography I am concerned with in this work are realist ethnography and critical ethnography. I found these to be more applicable in the conduct of this research.

- Realist Ethnography is one in which the researcher provides an objective account, and becomes a third person, producing a dispassionate report of facts, standard categories, and the ethnographer’s interpretations. The researcher displays himself or herself as an outsider (Rees and Gatenby, 2014). However, as ’realism’ is a general approach to epistemology, realist ethnography assumes a certain relationship to what it is that is being studied. My research attempted to adopt a realist account of the study, but also

recognised that whilst I aimed to be objective in my reporting of facts and categories, at the same time I was conscious that I would bring my own ideas and potential bias to this account. This is why it was important to check with the teachers that I was working with on a regular basis. I was clearly an outsider to their school settings but at the same time aimed to be accepted to the point where teachers felt comfortable enough to tell me their stories.

- Critical Ethnography is characterised by a researcher who is an advocate for emancipation, serving marginalised groups, being against inequality and domination, he /she is value laden, empowers people and challenges a status quo and addresses power and control. Here the researcher tries to find value in data collected. Critical ethnography describes events … "by identifying the influence of structural factors on [their] agency. Specifically, its objective would be to elucidate the specific, contingent manner in which a certain mix of causal powers has been formed and activated" (Rees and Gatenby, 2014: 6). Whilst I did not act in any way to advocate any particular position, I was nonetheless conscious that the programme of research was designed to empower teacher voice. Thus, I wanted to be aware of any issues related to power and control but as an observer rather than as the advocate involved in critical ethnography.

Some of the challenges that are encountered by the ethnographer include gaining access to participants, building trust and rapport with the subjects of the research, selecting key informants wisely, spending considerable time collecting data, assessing the impact of the findings on the people who belong to the culture the researcher is working with. In addition, ethnographers must maintain sensitivity to the participants and what they do, as well as resisting the potential for "going native". The result could have an impact on the researcher and this should be kept in mind whilst thinking about and undertaking the work (Singh and Dickson, 2002). Working alongside a group of teachers as a researcher means that taking a realist approach to ethnography, keeping in mind some of the aspects of critical ethnography, was the most fruitful approach for gathering data.

3.4 CONDUCTING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

In conducting an ethnographic study, first, one must identify the cultural group that will be investigated. Next it is necessary to select the appropriate type of ethnographic model to be used. Then one should identify patterns within the group of interest. After this it is important to select specific themes to study about the group, and identify a group pattern, such as the life cycle, events, cultural themes, relationships, group dynamics, as any of these can provide grounds for analysis. Because a group is generally so dynamic, there is a need to revisit the group over time to see if the dynamics are constant or changing. Most importantly, ethnographers observe cultures that serve as a transition from childhood to adulthood in a community, noting cultural inclusion and cultural exclusion as elements that can provide valuable evidence of cultural practices. Thus, in writing about the cultural practices of another culture, researchers make sure that they offer the best account possible of that particular culture, at that particular time (Ejimabo, 2015). Therefore, ethnographers tend to revisit their interpretations and attempt to discern the impact that the research has had on the group. In this way ethnographers usually undertake research and make claims about a culture, reflecting on the cultural practices of their own culture or another culture.

In undertaking this ethnographic study, the two sets of schools were already identified as indicated earlier in this chapter. This involved a multi-academy trust (Pisces) consisting of 12 schools and a teaching school alliance (Aquarius) consisting of nine schools. I attended the research sessions that both groups were engaged in and made observations noting how they took part in the research activities, how the academic research lead, visiting researchers and the accredited programme lead were communicating with each other and how sessions were facilitated. I also noted the environments within which sessions took place. Using a combination of observation and literature, I developed questions to ask those teacher researchers in the

individual interviews conducted with them. Individual interviews were conducted in the teachers' own schools and lasted for approximately twenty-five minutes. I repeated this pattern of data collection in year two and, as the study was longitudinal, this allowed time to record perceptions about the impact of the research programme on teachers and to gain an idea about the sustainability of the engagement of teachers in research.

It was also important to set the methodology and data collection into the context of the intentions of the staff facilitating research sessions which included developing critical thinking and opening thinking and practice to new possibilities in order to facilitate teachers to work differently. Thus, this research considers the extent to which these ambitions were evident in the data gathered. As the researcher both observing and experiencing this work, it was important to gain acceptance from the groups with whom I was working. This was facilitated when I spent time with different groups addressing the tasks set because working together allowed us to make bonds. In addition, many of the teachers did not know each other as they worked in different schools and had not necessarily worked together or even met before. This was particularly true of the Pisces Trust as the schools were more geographically spread. In the Aquarius Alliance, teachers were already more comfortable with each other as they or colleagues had worked over some period of time with the academic research lead and had been engaged in cross school projects. However, in both cases I appeared to be accepted as part of the group. Attending with the academic research lead had some advantages as there was a clear level of trust already present in the Aquarius Alliance and one that was built quickly in the Pisces Trust within the first session. Also, humour played an important part in communications within the groups and this served to relax any residual tensions. I soon felt accepted and part of the groups although, as I will discuss in section 3.7, at interview I found some of the teachers more difficult to talk to than others.

3.4.1 Research Context

There were some differences between the two school groupings which needs to be explained in greater detail. A MAT is a group of Academy schools that are governed and led by a Chief Executive Officer and a Trust board who supply the support mechanisms formerly delivered by Local Authorities. The Trust is funded through a top-slice from each school's budget from each participating academy school. Once schools have been academised, it is very difficult for them to return to state education (Bailey, 2013). A TSA is a collection of schools where a lead 'outstanding' school (as identified through government body inspection) gains 'teaching school' status on application to the government and can then provide other schools with professional development activities that are paid for by the participating schools and from government funding to the Teaching School in its initial years. The budget dedicated by the participating schools influences the level of development on offer particularly when government funding is withdrawn.

During the first year of data gathering, I attended all facilitated development sessions designed to engage staff in research activity including at the Pisces Trust the accreditation sessions. Some sessions were conducted at the Pisces headquarters and others across school hub locations. The Aquarius Alliance also used school locations as activity hubs. At the end of the research activity sessions across both groupings I recorded focus groups, which reflected on the thinking developed across the day including any expressions of fears and concerns. In addition, I took fieldwork notes whilst acting as both a participant in the activities and as an observer, notes being finalised within two days of the event having taken place. Data collected, as a result of these observations, notes and focus group activities, were reflected upon alongside the data to inform the later interview questions asked (and reflected upon again alongside the interviews to inform the questions for the second set of interviews). In addition, at the end of the academic year, I was invited to attend research celebrations in both groupings where the teachers presented on their research activities, purposes and intents to each other and senior leaders across the schools involved in the Trust and in the Alliance. I also recorded these events to

ascertain further information about their sense of how undertaking research had impacted upon their work.

In year one, 15 Pisces Trust Teachers attended the first session although this reduced quickly to 12 teachers as three decided the accreditation route was not for them at this point in time. So, 12 attended the five facilitated research sessions and four accreditation sessions, although by the end of the academic year only nine had submitted their work for accreditation (discussed further in Chapter Five). Interviews were conducted with all 12 teachers involved in this accredited research together with two additional teachers who had engaged with an unaccredited programme delivered by Holly in the year previous to my engagement in this study. The teachers interviewed represented eight of the 12 Pisces Trust schools. For the Aquarius Alliance I observed, and audio recorded four non-accredited taught research sessions each session including focus group discussions (19 teachers). I also interviewed six teacher-researchers who had varied experience of working with the academic research lead and on a research agenda, the Alliance having been working on this agenda for seven years previous to this research. Four of these teachers had also presented an academic paper with the lead researcher at an academic conference which I also audio recorded and they are in the process of writing academic papers as a result of this work. Towards the end of the academic year, I interviewed those Trust and Alliance leaders who had commissioned the research activity to establish their reasons and intensions for the research activity. In addition, I interviewed the academic research lead and the academic programme lead.

In year two, the teachers from the Pisces Trust shifted delivery patterns to attending accredited sessions at the University and were joining different groups according to their subject interest and stage of accreditation which made this impossible for me to track this part of their experience. Nevertheless, they were also invited to attend five research support sessions with the same academic research lead, which I was able to attend as well. I was also informed by the research commissioner at the Trust that four

Pisces Trust teachers who were involved in research in stage one had withdrawn from the programme due to pregnancy in one case and health/work issues for the other three. This did not, however, prevent me from obtaining interviews with almost the whole cohort in the second year and gaining their reflections despite leaving the programme. One teacher was unavailable when I arrived at the school for her interview but had attended all of the teaching sessions. This was argued to be because of duties that had been placed upon her in the school following other staff absences. In year two, the research sessions had an additional focus on leadership skills and other teachers interested in developing leadership through research had been invited to attend. I continued my focus however, on those teachers from the original research programme but captured the full new cohort via observations, fieldnotes and focus groups. In the second year, my interviews were mainly based within the Pisces Trust.

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 outline the staff involved in the semi-structured interviews in either the MAT or the TSA. Pseudonyms are given to each individual, their role in the school/Trust/Alliance, how experienced they are and whether they are involved in accreditation work or not.

Table 3.1 Teachers by role, experience and type of research (Pisces Trust)

Pisces School Trust	**Role**	**Years of teaching experience**	**Accredited Non-accredited**
Lorna	Teaching assistant	2	A
Anne	Assistant headteacher & subject leader	10	A
Gemma	Deputy Head	20	A
Marion	Teacher & assistant headteacher	8	A
Donna	Teacher & subject leader	20	A
Patricia	Teacher	3	A
Rhonda	Subject leader	7	N
Dave	Subject leader with cross Trust remit	4	N

Hattie	Subject leader with cross Trust remit	8	A
Tim	Teacher & subject leader	6	A
Dawn	Teacher	5	A
Gina	Assistant headteacher	12	A
Marlowe	Teacher	3	A
Moira	Teacher	2	A
Tilly	Research commissioner at the Trust	25+	A

Table 3.2 Teachers by role, experience and type of research Aquarius Alliance

Aquarius Alliance	**Role**	**Years of teaching experience**	**Accredited Non-accredited**
Shirley	Teacher & senior leader	14	N – previous credits
Peter	Teacher	5	N – previous credits
Stephen	Subject leader	11	N
Brenda	Assistant headteacher	22	N
Molly	Middle leader	6	N
Esme	Assistant headteacher	25	N
Norah	Research commissioner at the Alliance	10	N
Maria	Research commissioner at the Alliance	21	N

These tables provide an easy reference point which can be referred to in relation to the data presentation in Chapter Four.

This thesis makes regular reference to teachers' engagement with research. In relation to this study this refers to three strands of activity. First, it references teachers' engagement with academic literature, using this to promote thinking and inform action. Second, it refers to teachers' involvement in a cross-organisation research programme developed for them by academic staff. Third, it refers to the individual research projects and research activity that each teacher undertook based on initiatives or practice issues that interested them. Therefore, these were teachers who were designing and conducting their own pieces of research, drawing upon literature and analysing their data in the expectation of using this work to influence practices within the

classroom, school or wider organisation. In order to gain a deeper insight into the research approach I will now talk more about the tools that I adopted.

3.4.1.a Semi-structured Interviews

Walford (2009a) argues that interviews are an important part of the ethnographer's toolkit allowing for particular forms of conversation led by the interviewer in terms of topic and in terms of questioning which are recorded and kept, which sets up a particular form of relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Interviewees are inevitably likely to take care in interview situations and only give what they are prepared to tell the interviewer at that time about the event or idea investigated. Thus, interviews never reveal the whole 'story' or even a fully rounded perspective. For instance, interviews are subject to partial memories, constructions of reality from particular perspectives, potential deception and evasion. Walford argues that following interviews he can edit out aspects of the interviews in the transcripts to enhance the meaning. For Walford, one way of checking that this has been done appropriately and ethically is to show where such editing has taken place and to engage the interviewees in adjusting and commenting upon their transcripts. Berg (1998: 249) suggested that "interview questions require the recurrent use of reflection by interviewers to develop their interviewing skills". Creswell (2007) intimated that it is customary that warm-up questions are used followed by the interview in earnest focusing on the research question, with follow-up questions probing the focus of the interview. However, as Williams and Vogt (2011) explained, direct specific questions are helpful to garner relevant information and it may also be necessary to clarify and interpret what the interviewees have already said. I phrased questions in ways that avoided leading them to reach particular conclusions but ask for clarification of ideas and question perspectives that were articulated to gain a deeper understanding of what they were saying to me. Examples of interview schedules and sample responses can be found in appendices four, five, six and seven.

For the data collection, interviews were arranged with teachers during the first taught delivery and following an email providing them with information about the study, my contact details and a copy of the consent form that I would be asking them to sign (information that was reiterated at the taught session). Teachers were thus able to contact me to ask about the research both via email and within the first delivery session. Once teachers had agreed to be interviewed the dates were organised in the Pisces Trust through the administrative support for the Trust, and in the Aquarius Alliance through individual arrangement at the end of the delivery session. Individual face to face interviews were conducted after first gaining the interviewees' written consent and reminding them that the interviews would be recorded and that the data and recording would be anonymously used and stored securely. I assured them that they had the right to withdraw at any time and that all their data would be destroyed within five years of capture. I made it clear to them that their records would be anonymised, as would the names of their schools and any person mentioned in the interview (see the discussion of ethics in section 3.6). Interviewees were offered the opportunity to see their transcripts and to amend or comment on these as they saw fit. Four teachers asked for transcripts, but no amendments or comments were offered. I prepared thoroughly for the interviews and established trust between myself and my interviewees through first working alongside them in the taught sessions and then by providing full details about the study. I recorded the interviews only after making sure that the interviewees were happy for me to do so. In addition, I obtained permission to record the end of academic year presentations made by teachers. Interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

The main questions I asked differed in the first year to the second year in the Pisces Trust, and the second year interview questions were also used for those in the Aquarius Alliance. In addition, I was given access to two former non-accredited programme teacher researchers from the Pisces Trust who had engaged with the programme in the year prior to my study. They also answered second year interview questions. First year interviews focused on the themes of:

1. The motivational issues around engaging with research;
2. The benefits and challenges experienced in engaging with research activity;
3. The support mechanisms used when developing research activity; and
4. Views around undertaking the accreditation of research activity

These themes sought to develop my understanding of participants' motivations to engage with this work, how they valued this activity against other demands on their time, whether research engagement linked to specific aspirations related to being a teacher and whether they felt time spent on this shaped or re-shaped their thinking in relation to their work. Second year interviews focussed on the themes of:

1. The value attached to undertaking research activity and its sustainability;
2. The influences of group working and its impact on critical approaches;
3. The role of academic support through both literature and session delivery; and
4. The importance of recognition of this work, accredited or in other forms.

The second set of interview questions were designed to interrogate teachers' perspectives after they had already taken part in some research training and to examine whether additional experience had caused them to feel differently about the research work they were undertaking. In addition, I interviewed the research commissioning leads from the Trust and Alliance and also the university academic research lead and accredited programme lead. In these interviews I sought to unpack why they had commissioned this work and what they hoped to gain from it. Conducted at the end of the first academic year these interviews focussed on:

1. How they first got involved in commissioning research activity;
2. The benefits of research active teachers and any challenges they envisaged;
3. Whether they saw advantages in cross-school research activity; and

4. What they hoped to gain from teacher research activity

Table 3.3 presents an overview of the data gathering approaches taken, the focus for the data collected and when data collection took place.

Table 3.3 Schedule and focus of interview data collection

Dates	Group	No.	Focus of data collection
Year 1 2017-18			
Spring Term (Jan – April)	Pisces Trust	12 from 8 schools	Interviews based on: motivational issues around engaging with research; benefits and challenges experienced; support mechanisms used ; the accreditation of research activity
Summer Term (May-July)	Pisces Trust	2	Interviews based on: undertaking research activity and its sustainability; group working and its impact on critical approaches; academic support; recognition of this work
July 2018	Pisces Trust	1	Interviews based on: commissioning research activity; benefits of research active teachers and challenges envisaged; advantages in cross-school research; gains expected
July 2018	Aquarius Alliance	2	Interviews based on: commissioning research activity; benefits of research active teachers and challenges envisaged; advantages in cross-school research; gains expected
July 2018	University	2	Interviews based on: commissioning research activity; benefits of research active teachers and challenges envisaged; advantages in cross-school research; gains expected
July 2018	Aquarius Alliance	6 group experienced in research	Interviews based on: undertaking research activity and its sustainability; group working and its impact on critical approaches; academic support; recognition of this work
Year 2 2018-19			
Summer Term (May – July)			Interviews based on:

	Pisces Trust	11- one teacher unavailable	undertaking research activity and its sustainability; group working and its impact on critical approaches; academic support; recognition of this work

3.4.1.b Focus group interviews

Focus groups are small groups of selected participants who meet to express their opinions and experiences and share these with the group. They focus on views that are shared amongst the participants who respond individually and build on the ideas discussed. The use of focus groups is important as it helps researchers to examine how the members of the group understand a particular issue and what they think about it or how they react to it. This is a trait of focus groups that is not achieved using interviews, questionnaires, or case studies because focus groups convey different views, reactions and insights at the same time (Stewart, et al, 2007; Morgan, 1996). Focus groups provide the researcher with an opportunity to challenge participants and develop a more realistic account of their thinking, as they are prompted to reflect on their views by other members of the group (Bryman, 2001). At times, dominant voices may take over or groups may agree issues with which individuals may privately disagree. The researcher can potentially reduce these effects through suggesting other options or ideas and through inviting participants to express different perspectives (Bryman, 2001).

Focus groups were conducted as part of the research teaching sessions, at the end of each day in both settings. Working alongside an experienced researcher not only allowed me to observe her practice but also enabled me to talk through my focus group questions and gain feedback and suggestions in relation to them. We initially conducted these together with me taking more responsibility as I gained experience. I was therefore able to observe how questioning could be developed and re-focussed to gain answers around the questions that I had identified. All participant teachers were involved in the focus groups and as with the interviews I operated an informed consent policy and gained written consent from each participant. I had assured anyone who did not want their voice recorded that their contribution would be noted and eliminated from the transcription following which the recording

would be deleted. All participants were happy to take part in these discussions which they appeared to enjoy as a way of furthering their thinking. Five focus groups were conducted in the Pisces Trust (including the end of year celebration) and four in the Aquarius Alliance in year one, with three focus groups being conducted in year two with the Pisces Trust (including the end of year celebration) and an end of year celebration in the Aquarius Alliance. Table 3.4 illustrates where and when focus groups took place (See also Appendix Eight).

Table 3.4 Schedule for Focus Group Interviews

Dates	Group	No.	Setting
Year 1 2017-18			
October and June	Pisces Trust	2	Headquarters
February and May	Pisces Trust	2	Hub Schools
July	Pisces Trust	1	Headquarters: End of Year Celebration
November, February, June	Aquarius Alliance	4	School based
Year 2 2018-19			
October	Aquarius Alliance	1	Hotel: End of Year Celebration
November	Pisces Trust	1	Headquarters
March	Pisces Trust	1	Hub School

July	Pisces Trust	1	Headquarters: End of Year Celebration

Focus groups lasted between thirty and forty minutes. On each occasion, the atmosphere was relaxed and because they were a part of the activities of the day where teachers were enjoying lively debate and engaged in group work designed to challenge their thinking, participants engaged with enthusiasm. I made sure that every individual in the focus group had a fair opportunity to speak and when I found the conversation dominated by one or two teachers, I reverted to asking people in turn so that I gave everyone the chance to air their views to others. One or two participants were quiet at the first focus group but engaged with subsequent sessions. An example from a focus group can be found in Appendix Eight.

3.4.1.c Observation of research activities

Participant observation is a method that involves the researcher participating in the activities of people, places, relationships, and activities as if they were part of the group (Jorgensen,1989). Participant observation involves describing issues pertaining to people and their practices of such issues. Trust is a significant element of participant observation. The researcher who is a participant observer should be trusted and fit in without causing unease or disruption to the group and their activities. At the same time the researcher should establish adequate distance between him/herself and the group observed in order to be able to observe and make judgements as a research observer. Participant observation reduces problems with accessing information, establishing a rapport with participants and managing ethical concerns (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). Schwandt (1997) defines participant observation as a research method in which a participant observer directly observes, and formally or informally interviews people and interprets his/her own observations. When researchers undertake participant observation, this facilitates them to gain insights into targeted aspects of the lives of the people observed. As such, researchers will be in a position to outline the activities and reactions of the people they are observing also

taking account of the culture people are embedded within and gain some sense of why people do what they do in the way that they do it (Laurier, 2009).

In conducting my observations in both groups, I was only partially acting as a participant observer, because I was not teaching in the schools the teachers came from, but I was engaging in class sessions alongside the teachers. My observations were restricted to facilitated sessions and therefore no observations were made of teachers in their own school settings. I did however note aspects of the schools visited and the training locations (see the discussion of field notes in the following section). Teachers seemed very happy to share their thinking with me and explain their approach to me during sessions. I was treated as a member of the group, albeit one that was taking copious notes and engaged in focus group facilitation. At the end of each year, the teachers in both groups presented overviews of their research to schools and an invited audience. This added valuable information to my gathering data about how each teacher felt about their research engagement and teachers agreed to my audio-recording these sessions. It was also apparent that the teachers really enjoyed this opportunity to talk to a variety of people about their work.

3.4.1.d Field notes

Walford (2009a) observes that ethnographers have different approaches to writing field notes and recording what they do, but all detail the activities taking place in their field sites that one might forget without such recordings. These are however sometimes shorthand and the ethnographer will use these notes to write up more detailed records after the event to have a more in-depth picture whilst the memories are still fresh. The same is true when for particular events the ethnographer cannot sit taking notes at the time because it would not be acceptable. Some ethnographers in interviews may write on one side of the paper, putting few words which interviewees can ask the ethnographer about. In general, notebooks remain in ethnographer's hands all the time to allow for continual documentation. Ethnographers make use of the time and space allocated to them, noting new locations and

marking maps and recording their own activities as well as those of others. Thus, it is incumbent on ethnographers to record events continually and keep a running record. Often it is wise to capture as much data as possible as the researcher can decide later what is and is not of importance in developing understandings of the research setting and the participants.

After gaining the permission from the academic research lead, my involvement in facilitated research delivery sessions for the Pisces Trust teachers was arranged to begin from the start of their research programme after gaining the permission of the teachers involved. I also sat in on the accredited element of the programme when the accredited programme lead was working with the Pisces Trust in relation to accredited input. I was moreover able to attend, observe and engage with the activities that were taking place in the Aquarius Alliance. I recorded events through taking continual notes concerning the way in which the research sessions developed and how teachers reacted to it. I also gathered notes on the environment, location and setting. I reminded all teachers that I was observing and recording the session, taking notes which would remain anonymous. The sessions were day long with the exception of hub activities in the Pisces Trust which were half-days. Some sessions were conducted at the Pisces Trust headquarters and others in schools. The Aquarius Alliance also used different schools within the Alliance. Clearly, during some of the activities I could not be with all groups, but I attempted to move around to work with different groups at different times. This had the added benefit of building relationships across all the teachers in the groups. Also, I noted that teachers, particularly within the Pisces Trust, did not know each other well at the start of the research sessions but soon came to know and be comfortable with all their colleagues. An example from my field notes can be found in Appendix Nine.

3.4.2 Data Analysis

Creswell (2002: 282-283) asserts “with all qualitative research, a small number of themes, such as five or seven, are identified by the researcher” and then analysed. In the case of these data, in order to arrive at themes

that may help me to think about this research I went through a process of reading and re-reading transcripts of the interviews and focus groups noting particular ideas that seemed important. In the case of the first focus group in the Pisces Trust, the participants themselves engaged with these data as we used the initial focus group transcripts to work on together as an analysis exercise where I audio-recorded their responses. Once I had gathered some sense of arising themes, I utilised a process of mind-mapping where themes were mapped onto paper and interlinking ideas could be visually captured (Buzan and Buzan, 2007). Examples of mind-mapping can be found in Appendix Eleven. Moreover, transcripts and quotations were connected via codes to each theme. Minor themes were then grouped into larger themes and discussions with the supervisory team were used to check for the reasonableness of the themes identified. Whilst it is always likely that others may group issues differently what is important is that the logic of the groupings made can be understood by others and deemed a reasonable categorisation. (Bryman, 2001). Once the key themes were identified, then these were linked back to the literature to ascertain whether new reading was necessary and whether the literature could enrich the developing understandings of these data (Lingard et al, 2008). The observational notes were then used to provide rich contextual data within which the interview and focus group data could be more deeply understood.

Madden (2010: 24) argues that:

> an ethnography that is not informed by scientific principles (like systematic data collection, analysis and presentation) is not good ethnography, it is more like fiction; and an ethnography that is not informed by the art of prose-writing, argument, rhetoric, persuasion and narrative, is not ethnography, it's just data.

Consequently, there are arguments that ethnographic data should not be treated as science. Ethnographers do not apply rules to data on the basis that "the 'world' is not to be understood in general by adopting a methodological version of auditing" (Law, 2004: 6). Both arguments have

their advocates and opponents based on whether they think of ethnographic material in terms of empirical data or based on the creation of “juxtaposition between ‘what the data is saying’ and ‘what the theory is saying’. Both have their place, but the latter allows for creativity and experimentation, whilst the former privileges empirical accountability” (Mills and Morton, 2013: 125). However, in utilising mind-mapping techniques alongside regular reading of the transcripts, and through the inclusion of interview data and checking data when working with the participants, I have attempted not to treat data as a form of auditing but instead as a way of gathering ever deeper understandings of the experiences of both the participants and of myself (Edwards and Holland, 2013). I undertook two rounds of analysis the first was quite emergent, while the second phase revisited the data using more theorised concepts matched to the themes that have emerged. The literature was then used as a way to further deepen understandings in ways that feel relevant and sympathetic to the teachers with whom I have been working for two years.

3.5 ETHICS

Ethical considerations in research are designed to protect the research participants and the researcher(s) to ensure that no harm, whether physical or psychological, is done or will be done as a result of participating in research. The agreement of the participants to take part in the research with a clear understanding of their involvement is a prerequisite for their participation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) and participants have the right to be informed about any potential consequences of participation for them. Parker (2007) points out that when we negotiate conducting ethnographic research with the researched, we need to use ethical concepts such as respect, recognition, dignity and justice and therefore ethical processes are not easy as they have multiple elements embedded within them. This is especially important as Fox (2004:314) pointed out:

> It is through ongoing interaction and a developing relationship with the individuals and groups who belong to the milieu being explored that the researcher enters ever-more deeply—psychologically and interpersonally, as well as intellectually—into its social structure and culture and the experiences, personae, and lives of those who people it.

Thus, researchers have an ethical duty of care to their subjects. Parker (2007) adds further complexity to notions of ethical consent pointing out that in ethnography, anticipatory consent is incompatible with notions of developmental and creative capturing of data.

Whilst I recognise this tension within my research, I have sought to talk regularly with my participants and explore my changing thinking around the research being undertaken. Further, I have re-confirmed consent with them at each step in the data collection. As Parker (2007: 225) states, “appropriate consent can only be achieved through an ongoing and developmental negotiation of the relationship between researcher and research hosts”. Hammersley and Atkinson (2006) promote the use of thick description to gain a deeper level of understanding of lives as they are lived. Alongside re-negotiation, the gathering of as much data as possible throughout the research period can also add to more sophisticated understandings. My research involves a range of data capture. Much of this data is to enable the researcher to make more insightful translations of the words and meanings used within the participant group. Thus, I present my participants’ words accurately but also contextualise these in relation to the understandings of their context and meanings that I may be able to offer through having been emerged in these data contexts myself, alongside the teachers. It is also important to make tentative interpretations that are open to debate by the participants. Hence, asking for clarity about my interpretations both during interviews and focus groups and in casual discussions with the teachers was an important part of my approach.

For the purpose of this research and prior to undertaking my data collection I submitted a full ethical application to obtain the university's consent for me to undertake my research (see Appendix One). Ethical permissions were also sought from the school staff themselves and from the overarching organisation (The Pisces Trust and the Aquarius Alliance). Consent forms and information sheets were supplied, explained and signed (see Appendices Two & Three). Anonymity of participants was assured, and all data was stored in an anonymised format. The teachers involved were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without prejudice. I followed the recommendation made by Wisker (2007) that in order to reduce the potential of the withdrawal of participants from the research, it is necessary that participants should be fully informed from the beginning what their participation means and what it completely involves. However, in this study, although three teachers withdrew from the programme, they were still happy to be interviewed and for me to use all data collected from them. I worked in line with BERA (2011) ethical protocols together with following the university ethical guidelines throughout the research study.

This study did not involve physical interventions or highly sensitive questions which might make participants feel uneasy (Blaikie, 2000). However, I was aware that some of the information that teachers were supplying might be critical of the programme or of their schools. To address this, I assured students of the importance attached to anonymity and data handling and made sure at every data collection point that the teachers were still happy about the consent given. I also assured them that any information given to me that would link their identity to what they said would be removed or disguised. For example, if someone was undertaking a maths initiative, this would be likely to make them identifiable and thus the subject and content of the initiative would be removed and they would be labelled a subject leader. In my ethics application I included information to participants explaining that interviews and focus groups would be voice recorded. I also repeated this prior to each interview and focus group. None of the teachers objected to being voice recorded and gave their written consent. I also informed teachers that I was taking field notes and making observations. Again, this

was part of a written consent form that they signed. Moreover, the ethical processes that I followed was used as a teaching tool to demonstrate ethical issues to teachers as they conducted their own pieces of research.

All semi-structured interviews with teachers took place in schools in a quiet location where possible. In spite of the fact that there was meticulous planning and consideration on my part, some disorder in data gathering is part and parcel of the way research progresses, as Goodnough (2008) explains. Despite prior arrangements being made, schools were subject to unexpected changes of plans, which on some occasions led to less convenient settings for interviews, and I conducted some, where interruptions took place. In each case I recorded this information as additional contextual information. The teachers interviewed mentioned on numerous occasions that the research that they were engaged in themselves was in fact adding to their learning experience. It gave them the basis to explore their own ideas and learn from the ideas and experiences of others and the experiences of the theorists and educationalists they had the opportunity to read and review. Moreover, in the interviews and the focus groups that I conducted, I came to realise that the participant teachers were adding to their learning experiences through observing and discussing new techniques that opened their horizons to new ways of approaching data gathering and gaining an understanding of it. This resulted in them having a greater sympathy for the work that I was conducting and in them using me as a sounding board for ideas and thoughts. In this way I felt that my presence within the group was advantageous as I could openly talk through my own learning journey with fellow researchers as could they discuss similar issues with me. In this way I was very much part of the group and my presence did not appear to have any negative consequences. Rather teachers appeared, on the whole, to be relaxed in my presence. In the initial interviews however, there were two staff that appeared less relaxed and were more closed in their interview responses. This issue seemed to ease as they got to know me better and could also have influenced by my inexperience during the first interviews. In addition, these two teachers were more reserved than others in the study in general so might have been an aspect of their persona. They,

nevertheless, put forward opinions that were helpful in adding to the data collected.

3.6 QUESTIONS OF VALIDITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Critical researchers measure validity by checking the accuracy of the observation and the ethnographic sources and interviews conducted (Patton, 2002). Morse et al (2002) argue, however, that in work that is qualitative it is problematic to associate lists of methodological procedures and assume that this equates to rigour in research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) instead recommend adopting ‘authenticity criteria’ to validate ethnographic research. The authenticity criteria include: “fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity” (Lincoln et al, 2011:122). By fairness it is meant that the research is inclusive and not marginalising anyone. Ontological authenticity refers to participants in research developing a better understanding as a result of the knowledge they gained. Educative authenticity refers to the interactions between participants in research which allows them to form some understanding of the values and constructions of others, thus making them appreciate the ideas, actions and judgments of others. Catalytic authenticity happens when various different constructions and values are recognised, due to participating in research. Participants are then empowered to follow the judgements that they make themselves. Catalytic authenticity also considers knowledge relative to time and place and that subjective meanings matter, as truth is “a consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors” (Lay and Papadopoulos, 2007; 495). Tactical authenticity encompasses the extent to which participants can act on the basis of the research. Table 3.5 presents these principles of authenticity and its criteria with definitions.

Table 3.5 Authenticity principle and its criteria with explanations

Principle	**Criteria**	**Definition**
Authenticity principle (Guba	Nelson, et al 2003 cited in (Wilson and Clissett, 2011))	Definition (Guba and Lincoln, 1989)

and Lincoln, 1989)		
Fairness	All viewpoints are represented even-handedly	The extent to which all competing constructions have been accessed, exposed, and taken into account in the evaluation report, that is, in the negotiated emergent construction.
Ontological authenticity	Participants understand their situation in more informed ways as a result of participation in the research	The extent to which individual constructions (including those of the evaluator) have become more informed and sophisticated
Educative authenticity	Participants understand the situations of others in more informed ways as a result of participation in the research	The extent to which individuals (including the evaluator) have become more understanding (even if not more tolerant) of the constructions of others.
Catalytic authenticity	Participants have a greater insight into actions that they might take to change their situation as a result of participation in the research	The extent to which action (clarifying the focus at issue, moving to eliminate or ameliorate problems, sharpening values) is stimulated and facilitated by the evaluation.

Source: (Johnson and Rasulova (2016: 13) "University of Bath Papers" drawn from Wilson and Clissett (2011) and Guba and Lincoln (1989).

These authenticity principles are respectful of variance in participants' constructions of issues. It is moreover important that researchers have in mind these different potential constructions when attempting to interrogate data. They need also to acknowledge any conflicts arising between these models of authenticity and the value structures underpinning them. To add to this, understandings and views from participants in research are likely to change over time, with experience and in relation to interactions with others (Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba 2007). This in turn may lead participants to change their constructions based on their understandings. It follows therefore that negotiation is important for authenticity principles to be achieved (Johnson and Rasulova, 2016).

In conducting my data collection, I sought to adhere to these authenticity criteria and my data suggests that participant teachers were demonstrating elements of all of these. Moreover, I have sought to represent all voices within my data findings. Through open discussion and working together teachers demonstrated growing understandings of both their own position and that of the position of research activity. They also demonstrated growing awareness and insights into their own behaviours and activities as a result of engagement with my research and that of the facilitated research sessions. Engaging with two very different groupings of teachers also enabled me to draw insights via comparisons between the two groups. Additionally, in sharing my data with them, teachers were able to use this information to consider the ways in which they wished to take things forward in terms of their own practices and research.

There were some challenges to note that I faced as a researcher in considering issues of validity. First, the academic research lead and accredited programme lead are from the same institution as myself and both are known to me. This could make it more difficult to criticise their practices. Second, this might have made it more difficult for the teachers to be open with me. In order to address these issues:

1. I ensured that all interview and observation data collected were confidential and not shared with the school, Trust or Alliance leaders, or university staff.
2. I made clear the importance of anonymity in relation to the data being collected and my findings.
3. I engaged in a detailed and critical analysis of the anonymised data, involving my supervisory team to ensure bias of interpretation is overcome.
4. I offered feedback to the teachers interviewed for their additional comments and amendments.

In semi-structured interviews it is helpful to check interview questions before they are used with the intended participants, as for instance questions can

be misinterpreted and may not achieve the detailed answer wanted. In the case of my research, interview questions were piloted with some of my fellow PhD students and with the two academic staff working with the school organisations from whom I was gathering the data. Once I was assured that any ambiguities were addressed and that the content was clear I was able to go ahead with my interview data collection. All respondents were offered the opportunity to review and revise their transcripts and four teachers took up this opportunity although none made changes or clarifications to what was recorded at interview. The results of the first set of interviews in addition to focus group material and field notes were used to inform the questions asked at the second interviews. As a second step in checking validity I fed back to each teacher group engaged in the research, the key findings at the final stage of gathering data. I sought the thoughts of the teacher groups and asked for additional comments which were captured through focus group recordings and woven into my interpretations of the research. I also made an executive summary of my doctoral work available to the teachers engaged in this research.

The challenges I faced about feedback, as with any other research, were in relation to the validity of the responses given. For example, how would I know if teachers were simply telling me things to please me? One method to address this problem was through interviewing multiple teachers. Clearly, where similar responses are given this adds power to any arguments made. Moreover, if some teachers felt free to say something different or more critical this indicated that I had created an atmosphere where teachers were likely to feel able to do so. I exemplify this with data from those who did not like accreditation whereas the majority did (see chapters 5 & 6). In addition, teachers also displayed a willingness to be open by offering critical answers or challenging my understandings. Where this happened, it added further validity to the whole data set. Also, sharing feedback for commentary gave teachers further opportunities to challenge my understandings of what they had said and my representation of it.

3.7 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented and discussed the methodology and approach that has been adopted in this research, making it clear why ethnography is appropriate to employ in the pursuit of garnering deep and insightful understandings of the data. This ethnographic approach provides a rich contextual background for the research data. Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 3) argue that qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them". Consequently, the reality and understandings researchers reach derived from their data, are also shaped on the basis of how people interact with their environment (Freebody, 2003; Silverman, 2000). The chapter further explores why particular tools have been selected to respond to the research questions posed in order to garner teachers’ perspectives on whether they are feeling more empowered and demonstrate greater critical thinking in engaging with their daily practices as a result of engaging in research activity. The approach to ethical questions is also exemplified and explained (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013). I have also explained how each stage of this ethnographic enquiry helped inform the following stages of the data gathering so that as my understandings deepened, so did the questions I asked of the teachers with whom I was working.

I have also explained how my ethnographic data was analysed based on a thematic approach which allowed me to tease out how ideas were interlinked across data, the context and the literature. Towards the end of the chapter I have explained my story within this research as a teacher coming originally from another country, being fascinated by the idea of the research teachers undertake and its viability. The next chapter, Chapter 4, will begin to explore these data setting the context for the further data chapters by examining the individual interviews with the academic research lead, the academic accreditation lead, and research commissioners within the Pisces Trust and the Aquarius Alliance.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS: RESEARCH LEAD PROVIDERS AND RESEARCH CO-ORDINATORS AT THE PISCES TRUST AND AQUARIUS ALLIANCE

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This first chapter of data findings is organised around interviews with the university member of staff leading the research facilitation, referred to here as *academic research lead* or Holly, and the member of staff delivering the accredited work, referred to here as *accredited programme lead*, or Bill (See Appendix Six). Data for this thesis was gathered over two years and the interviews with Holly and Bill were conducted towards the end of the first year of this study. The chapter also includes the semi-structured interviews conducted with the Pisces Trust and Aquarius Alliance professional development leads who commissioned the research work in their respective Trust and Alliance, referred to here as *research commissioners* (See Appendix Seven). In each case respondents were asked to comment on the purposes and intentions around engaging teachers in research activity from their perspective. For example, the Pisces Trust and Aquarius Alliance research commissioners were asked to discuss why they had employed university staff to work with them on the research agenda.

The chapter begins with discussing perspectives from the university staff facilitating this work and then in relation to the practitioners employing them. The primary purpose of the data and discussion presented in this chapter is to highlight the contextual issues arising around the provision and development of this research-learning package, whilst making brief links with the literature. In this way, the chapter foregrounds and contextualises the

subsequent two data chapters, where these issues and linkages will be pursued in greater depth. In order to explore and compare across these data, commentaries will be divided into two sections within each data group, the first focussing on the development of professional learning communities and the second on critical thinking. The importance of developing professional learning communities is situated in the mutual support, encouragement and strength that came from people working together to make shifts in practice and which links to the work of Holland et al (1998). The notion of critical thinking was important in facilitating teachers to critically engage with practice in ways that enabled them to reflect upon and re-think practice in the light of reading other perspectives and through experiment.

It is important to note that the engagement of teachers in research varied between groups. The Pisces Trust engaged with a standard off-site Master's programme delivered by Bill and assessed through teachers engaging in pieces of practice-based reflection. In addition both the Trust and the Aquarius Alliance engaged with a research programme led by Holly which involved experiences designed to deliver research methods knowledge in the form of different qualitative approaches (including interviews, focus groups, observations etc) and a small amount of quantitative data gathering (mostly in the form of questionnaires). Holly also worked with them on the analysis and presentation of findings. The rationale for the focus on qualitative approaches was that teachers were more used to working with numerical data and analysis, albeit in particular formats for managerial and legislative purposes. Holly's intention was to use engagement in empirical research to give teachers experiences which took them outside of normal practices to think differently and more widely about their own practices and their norms and values. In Appendix Ten, there is a typical agenda used in both settings that gives a sense of how the day is orientated around activities and reflections to facilitate thought.

4.1 INTERVIEW WITH THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH LEAD FOR BOTH THE PISCES TRUST AND THE AQUARIUS ALLIANCE, AND THE ACCREDITED PROGRAMME LEAD AT THE PISCES TRUST

Holly, the academic research lead, developed research activity amongst teachers through delivering sessions that unsettled and provoked discussion. Holly characterised herself as a facilitator underpinning the notion that all voices are equally important and that all bring different knowledge and experiences to the fore as the basis for the learning of all. Holly commented that she was lucky in the case of both the Pisces Trust and the Aquarius Alliance that the commissioning staff had built a good level of trust with her initially through discussions around her philosophy of learning and had found her approach with teachers productive and had therefore continued to commission her to do ongoing work with teachers in their schools. Holly explained that the work depended on insightful leaders who understood what she was doing and fully supported it. “Without this”, she thought, “the work couldn’t continue”.

The accredited programme lead (Bill) was responsible for the engagement of teachers from the Pisces Trust only, on two 30 credit Master’s level, research-based units. Bill was drawn into this work following Holly’s previous year of engagement with the Pisces Trust in non-accredited research projects. In this second year of delivery, the Pisces Trust wanted to offer a new cohort the opportunity to work towards accreditation in addition to the sessions with Holly. Plans were also in place to support these staff to complete the full Master’s programme following this first year of off-site provision.

4.1.1 Developing Professional Learning Communities

Holly discussed how the programme was designed to grow teachers into becoming teacher-researchers. Developing the sense of criticality in

teachers is one way of making them assume a new identity through self-authoring (Holland et al, 1998). Work that develops criticality involves considering not only one's own perspectives, but also the perspectives of others (Biesta and Stams, 2001). Higgs (2002) challenges the notion that meanings are fixed, asserting instead that meanings are context dependent and fluid.

Holly, when asked to explain the background to the work undertaken with both the Pisces Trust and the Aquarius Alliance, explained that she had worked with the Aquarius Alliance over the last 7 years beginning with a Master's programme and that, as the cost of the programme was raised, the Aquarius Alliance decided to commission her directly to develop and deliver a non-accredited and innovative research programme to engage teachers in research. Two Aquarius staff who had worked with her on the Master's programme were particularly supportive: Holly stated

> I was really happy to do this and enjoyed not having to worry about assessment as it made me more flexible. I could adjust sessions as I went along to suit the TSA. I continued to work with the 2 senior staff at the TSA. One was a deputy and the other an assistant head. Basically, this was really successful in developing teachers' thinking, excitement and enthusiasm…For the last 2 years the Deputy Head has come to conference with me and we co-delivered a paper which we have now published in a high-quality journal. This year, 4 teachers are coming to conference with me to talk about our work in their own symposium.

The Pisces Trust had commissioned Holly a year before I began my PhD research. Holly explained that in her first year:

> I was also asked to do a research project visiting each school. I suggested I do a set of interviews with the headteacher, senior leader, middle leader and teacher in each school. Based on my research report they have made some policy changes…. I was also asked to

> support a cohort of teachers to undertake a research project over the year. This was really successful and teachers' presentations at the end of the project period impressed the Trust. They wanted to repeat this work and add the Master's course for a new cohort of teachers …

The Pisces Trust and the Aquarius Alliance had brought in a research leader to deliver research training which Holly characterised as 'provocative'. Yet, for teachers to be research active, and implement their own ideas in the way research recommends, might have at times compromised what the government was requiring of them. For example, not following the dictates of the curricula and the emphasis on test results might have embodied some risks and challenges that the teachers and schools engaged in research found challenging. Furthermore, the readiness of the Pisces Trust and the Aquarius Alliance to get more engaged in research and pay for this activity seemed indicative that they felt these were important aspects of teaching and learning that could only be addressed in this way.

Bill was asked to describe his experience with the Pisces Trust accreditation element of the university engagement. Bill explained that he delivered two units of Master's accreditation as his first experience of delivery 'off-site', although he had considerable teaching experience.

> The purpose of the work is to help teachers obtain further qualification but also these people I am teaching is a group belonging to one Trust… The aim of the Trust is to professionalise the work of the teachers and increase their level of qualification. But also, to provide answers to some of the questions and problems the Trust wants to address. So, for example, they were given a choice between three themes, they could work on through those units… if I compare this programme with the previous ones that I worked on… in this course it is not so much you learn from the tutors more like tutors are a guide or assistant. The real learning is done by the student and comes from the work, the work with students in the hub days … it is surprising, it is effective. It is really an effective programme.

Bill was delivering units as a professional practice qualification designed to fit in with teachers' work commitments. However, Brackett (2007: 31) explained, "a student who lacks a sense of identity and desire to learn may fail to self-motivate despite our best efforts to inspire". Brackett suggested that for a teacher to inspire students they must themselves gain sustenance from an external source. This programme was viewed as a source of such motivation. Bill explained that the real learning came from the students themselves where the tutor acts merely as a guide. Bill added that "it is noticed that their learning is shifting but the real learning comes in the form of shifting their ways of thinking".

For Holly research was about getting schools and teachers to realise that "research is basic to teaching not an add on". Holly continues, "That is why the school and the senior leadership put on courses to work with me and manage staff with time and space to do so... plus all the teachers have identified ongoing benefits from engaging with research." This is something that will be considered throughout the analysis in this chapters and those that follow. Bill believed that:

> Research has given them the time to think about what they know in terms of academic research and how they can marry what they know with what they learn from research.

Holly explained that:

> Teachers have become more motivated and inspired to develop themselves and have the time to focus on their interests and explore new venues and work with other teachers and staff in their schools and beyond … In these schools there is an unprecedented buzz about research and engagement in the research projects…

As Lave and Wenger (1998) explained, learning in communities contributes to motivating learners and those who are self-motivated prosper in

communities of practice. Similarly, Atkinson (2000) argued, motivated teachers were more likely to motivate their students. Carson and Chase (2009) saw motivation as the cornerstone for enhancing the effectiveness of learning.

4.1.2 Critical thinking

Holly highlighted an issue that was raised as part of her own research findings undertaken in the Pisces Trust schools at the beginning of her engagement in this work:

> I was interested to find that notions of debate were seen in some cases as threatening to notions of staff collegiality. Getting used to debate and contesting ideas should be part and parcel of any reflective educational approach with children as well as with adults.

Frost at al. (2013) asserted that the environment sustaining teacher professional growth is related to way that teachers engage in research and become more able to construct theories that they can then implement. Research can increase teachers' confidence in their abilities to implement change in their classrooms and schools and hence teachers became more able to construct their theories (Frost et al, 2013). Holly was advocating working with school staff on research, inviting them to engage in critical debate in ways that preserved their sense of professionalism, and yet also became part of their professional identity.

Webster et al (2012: 19) argued that:

> teachers often prefer the security of existing routines and practices … (which) may be even harder to change if teachers fail to see the relevance of reforms. The challenge is to establish the desired practices as defaults, perhaps by embedding some aspects into daily school procedures.

Debate can involve compromising and having to shift positions on ideas. Holly added, “this is something that teaching staff are rarely taught as they come into teaching, but a programme of debate is something that is likely to enliven staff and invigorate practice.” This implied that teachers should learn to withstand the buffeting involved in debate and relish the opportunity. Clearly, Holly enjoyed debate. However, this would require particular levels of trust and openness and recognition that things do not always go ‘your way’. My observations suggested that Holly facilitated all members of the group to speak without fear of consequences and that they enjoyed contestation.

I also noted that, in spite of the intention to be simply a facilitator, Holly was directing learning in ways that were under her control. So, this was not an entirely open process but one where ‘the expert’ directs activity. However, Holly acted to deliberately undermine this position at times and used humour and self-depreciation to indicate that she was also learning alongside the teachers. Furthermore, when asked about the structure and purpose of the work, Holly explained:

> I have a political stance that I am open with them about, that challenges always doing what the government tells them to do… I am trying to get them to see alternatives … I am trying to expand their imagination and the minds of the people they are working with rather than simply deliver the mass-produced curricula the government want them to follow.

Again, adopting an almost unconscious position of knowledge giver, Holly states that this is a particular political position which was argued to be justified as long as you are honest about it and allow those listening to you to mediate what you say with that in mind. There were moments where the groups became almost revolutionary as they got caught up with the excitement of ideas that spread around the group. Bill went on to acknowledge that:

> in the loosest interpretation of the term research, basically reflection and reading, can give them space and mechanism to think about whether this is okay, what can be done about it, what it means, it is a way of exploring ….

Morris et al (2007) argued, the knowledge we obtain from well-communicated research influences our professional practice, as a step towards achieving change. Holly indicated that research changes thinking and subsequently practice, and that greater awareness of issues, challenges, shortfalls and enables us to find new solutions. Further, Bill argued that through engaging in research the 'self' is always present:

> You may collect data from other people, but in the end, yourself is always in it. You collect data and you choose how to analyse it and you write the report to the company and everything … research is always about you … this is classic social science research.

Bill added:

> …if you don't have time to think then you are really not in the right job. And research is really a question of thinking …The world in general is not a big fan of this kind of reflective introspective stuff. But that of course it is because it produces people who know how to fight back.

In this way, Bill saw research as a political process that can then result in people who are challenging aspects of the ways in which 'we do things' and this can be difficult for those in leadership roles. It is interesting to consider whether teachers see this work as self-improving, practice-improving, or contributing to the wider school community. These are themes that can be traced through the discussions of the feedback I obtained from the teachers as well as the research leads, and the research commissioners.

Both Holly and Bill demonstrated a politically driven affiliation to critically reflective practices within education, coming from a perspective where they

believed that teachers' commitment to education was enhanced through engagement in research. It broke the isolation of the classroom and allowed teachers to explore ideas together and separately in ways that enlivened their educational commitment. For the university staff, teachers found in research a welcome venue to exercise some personal educational interest and be creative, inventive and at the same time critical.

4.2 INTERVIEW WITH THE RESEARCH COMMISSIONER AT THE PISCES TRUST

In this section I report the interview with the research commissioner at the Pisces Trust. She was also a co-Founder of the Trust and had acted as chief executive officer, stepping back from this position at the beginning of the academic year when my study began. This participant is referred to here as Tilly. I interviewed Tilly towards the end of the first year of this study.

4.2.1 Developing a professional learning community

When Tilly was asked why she supported getting teachers involved in research, she answered:

> in the Trust I am the initiator, I am the person that made a decision with colleagues … and said I think it is time for our Trust to start to do some action research that could potentially lead to accreditation but not necessarily have to … I was hoping it would release some time for staff to think about those things that challenge us in our daily practice and come up with solutions ...

Tilly appeared to see significance and value in research active teachers and was adamant that the teachers in the Pisces Trust should avail themselves of the link between the university and the school to engage in research that could develop their practices (see Hammersley-Fletcher et al, 2018; Husbands, 2015; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). Tilly elaborated on her idea saying:

> The link with the academic [Holly] has fed us with ideas that have challenged our own perceptions and also helped us to articulate our philosophy… so the link to academics is very powerful and very inspiring.

Tilly explained what Holly has been able to do:

> She has got to know the staff more and more. She has been able to make broader contributions around leadership development and sort of academic challenge …

Tilly also explained to me that she maintained good relationship with the university through her studies on a PhD programme. Moreover, through the engagement of the Pisces Trust with research in conjunction with the university and accredited work, they have had mix of experiences. The work that Holly was introducing was “always well received, we’re always asked by staff from all levels to invite her back to deliver research wrap up sessions, but we had some mixed experiences.” This note of caution appeared in relation to the accreditation tutor. Here it seemed that as Holly had been free from accreditation her practices were more experimental and accommodating, whereas Bill was having to pack in background information needed for accreditation and within a tight timetable. Consequently, his sessions were viewed as intensive and less active. Bill himself made reference to this tension explaining that with on-site students he would have a greater amount of time to develop the topic. He was also new to this approach to delivery, whereas Holly had extensive experience with off-site delivery.

Tilly thought that the availability of a research partner was:

> a mechanism for structuring the engagement of Pisces Trust teachers and staff in research … I am delighted by the way in which headteachers engage with each other now around what’s our purpose ... what I like with the action research and the Master’s work is seeing

> how fundamentally what motivates teachers to come to the profession is the same wherever you are and although that gets lost because of the pressures of policy umm the kernel of that remains but it can be released and fed and used.

These comments are interesting in that Tilly expresses a belief that all teachers have similar formulations of the purposes of teaching, and yet she also expresses the notion that such beliefs are lost under the pressures of teaching (see Godfrey, 2014; Kirkwood and Christie, 2006). So, she is expressing some of the benefits of this work as being about re-connecting teachers with the purposes of their roles (see Hammersley-Fletcher, 2013; Grace, 1995). She, moreover, believes that both the accredited and the informal routes are having this effect. It is interesting that Tilly articulates the informal research route as action research. Holly did not characterise the work as action research, maintaining that this approach had received a lot of criticism in academic literature as teachers 'playing' with research.

4.2.2 Critical thinking

Getting teachers research active was considered as inseparable to the work that teachers do. Tilly believed that research was:

> … the absolute heart of professional development because it is directed by the teachers' interests and concerns rather than the organisation's concerns. In the ideal situations those two overlap… it is a way of bringing schools' concerns, leadership concerns and interests into the same arena …

Tilly argued that the Trust's varied engagement with research combined to demonstrate a deep commitment to research activity across the whole school network. Tilly had a philosophy that she clearly and forcibly elucidated, and it was orientated around personal growth leading to organisational growth, linked to better teaching and learning. Tilly stated:

> … with all of our training and even in our shorter meetings where we discuss issues they will often include an element of research… or an academic article … so all our training days whenever we come together to do our planning they are always accompanied by some academic reflection, so I hope it is becoming part of the culture …

Tilly was also asked to consider the aspect of teacher voice and whether this had developed through this work:

> It certainly affected staff … it affected them in so far as they participated in the projects and some have expressed interest in doing it themselves. Amongst them is someone I was talking to yesterday who has taken on academic reading round the curriculum and I know that she has been to sessions … and so she has gone off and done her own thing …

For Tilly, the research activity was clearly feeding into strategic planning for the Trust and she particularly valued Holly's annual research report in terms of informing strategy. Nevertheless, there were many challenges that had to be overcome in facilitating teachers to be research active. These were described as follows:

> … the very schools that need it the most have headteachers who see research as an added extra and they don't have time, and actually they are the very schools where research could engage colleagues in solving some of the problems in their schools and so actually getting past leaders who don't see the value of research… some leadership teams have nominated people who encouraged teachers to go on the Master's and do action research and others have said that they have got too much on their agenda umm… and so yes we faced with this, but we went about it and said that the heads should actively seek to find participants because we were convinced that once we get beyond the leadership teams there will be staff who are interested and it is not appropriate that heads stand in their way.

Clearly, in this Trust heads were encouraged to adopt a pro-research stance. Holly had mentioned the same issue in the early years of working in the Alliance. In this case she had worked directly with heads on research activity and the facilitation of research in order to gain their support for teacher research. Holly argued that without this, teachers became frustrated by blockages in achieving their desired project recommendations. Newby (2010) believed that research provides benefits to teachers, practitioners, and policy makers in their quest for better understandings of the interplay between practice and intentions. Tilly was aware of the complexities of tying particular effects to particular activity, but nevertheless described a more thoughtful and reflective stance across the Trust since engaging in research activity. She did, however, note that the research:

> …is a motivator for those individual staff who want professional accreditation, so some staff are not so happy to make the effort to learn without accreditation, others are not bothered about the accreditation at all so it gives that option.

When asked about the pros and cons of accreditation she stated that:

> The cons are (accreditation) reinforces the notion that one should only bother reading something if it is going to lead to formal qualification and the pros are that this formal recognition of the efforts that staff put in which helps them and motivates them personally and helps them in their careers.

Moreover, when teachers and school staff engaged in research across schools, they were forming helpful relationships. This is an example of building communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1998).

The benefits of developing a research culture were significant in influencing school strategic development (Godfrey, 2016; Ball, 2013; Zeichner, 2003).

When Tilly was asked about her hopes for the future in relation to research, she immediately answered:

> I would like us to become a research culture and to have a continuous stream of colleagues who do both Masters and PhDs so that we at any given time have got a core of researchers who are influencing and feeding into the strategic direction of the Trust and who are contributing to the overall training development of colleagues.

For Tilly this work had a clear contribution to make that will enhance school provision and become part and parcel of what it is to be a part of the Pisces Trust.

Tilly explained that the Pisces Trust philosophy was based on engaging in research, and then seeing the benefits would engage staff in further study together with more teachers wanting to be part of such experience. However, some logistical issues hampered the progress of the accredited work and whilst the cohort that began were being allowed to complete the Master's programme on campus at weekends, future accredited work was shifting to a different university, although Holly's work continued as before.

4.3 INTERVIEW WITH THE RESEARCH COMMISSIONERS AT THE AQUARIUS ALLIANCE

In the Aquarius Alliance there were two staff involved in developing research activity and both were situated within the senior staff of the lead teaching school (one deputy head and the other assistant head). For the purposes of this research the deputy head and research lead is called Maria and the assistant head is called Norah. I interviewed Maria and Norah towards the end of the first year.

4.3.1 Developing a professional learning community

When Maria was asked how she got teachers involved in research, she answered:

> I first became involved with research and the university when I was working as a facilitator on a leadership programme with our local authority and then we were able to work in partnership with the university to deliver in a first instance alongside [Holly] … and we ran a programme that was related to Middle leaders and Senior leaders … there were taught sessions with [Holly] and other academic staff did sessions that she recommended. So that's where it began … It triggered interest and we felt that the thinking that [Holly] provided for us over time sparked a real interest in research and it was aligned with where we felt where we are travelling and where we wanted to be as an Alliance and a Trust... So [Holly] became part of our professional development at school and research became a huge focus of our appraisal system in school and developing our staff … we branched out with the support of [Holly] into … running things across a number of schools, so therefore impacting on research across a wider range of schools … we tapped into [Holly's] expertise... so we took you know a great many steps.

Holly reported that Maria had always believed in the value of research and in adapting practices but that this had intensified over their time of working together, with each sparking ideas in the other (Godfrey, 2016). The growth of a research culture across the Alliance was evident and symptomatic of how long-term involvement in research infiltrated even new staff joining these schools. Norah also commented that the more she engaged in research, the more she found research to be a means to extend her own learning. Both had assumed an identity as a research leader and were continually talking about its benefit for themselves as practitioners and for their colleagues in opening up new possibilities within teaching practices and structures, and in themselves as practitioners. Such a shifting of identity is clear in the accounts of Holland et al (1998) who believed that this shift

relates to textuality, power, identity and figured worlds. The production of a new identity continued to be constructed (and perhaps re-constructed) intentionally. Holland et al (1998) related the figured element of identity to the position of power or status that one has, which in this case was developing through research activity. Norah explained:

> We started our research journey when we became a Teaching school … we were already working with the university and [Holly] specifically on our leadership training programme. And we could hear through what [Holly] brings to the discussion, the rigour, the academic rigour that was needed to lift practice. So following that we engaged more with Holly in using her expertise to give a challenge to teachers, professional development wise, a challenge around practice using research, so that … moving reflection away from sort of narratives and moving that to more critical enquiry and challenging the norms I suppose really and questioning what we do and research has been a great vehicle for us to be able to do that.

Norah added that this work had “lifted the quality of dialogue we have as staff”. In this way Norah demonstrated the significance of working alongside someone who could challenge practice in ways that were acceptable whilst challenging. Maria charted the initial stages of engaging teachers in research:

> … initially [there] were discreet pieces of research, based on for example intervention programmes. What works and what does not work and the whole mindset … and that is still happening, but there was a huge shift … to research being integral to how our staff improve their own practice and I … think about this eco-system and this symbiotic relationship between research and practice …. We were very hooked on quantitative research data … we were enlightened as to the variety of other data we could gather and this really could impact really quite abundantly on practice. Staff … now talk about their freedom to try all things, to take risks and to be inventive and

> creative within their classrooms, so the whole shift not only in staff development but their personal well-being and morale has been a definite strength of this work.

After engaging in research, Maria had started to notice how research impacted on finding new ways of dealing with issues of concern to them, their colleagues, schools, parents and the school community. It was presented as a way of improving their practice and continuing to develop themselves as teachers and researchers: “this is enabling [staff] not just to tick those teaching standards boxes, but go beyond that and explore what works best for their children”. It was clearly important to arrive at a balance that allowed the schools to meet government requirements, whilst not seeing this as a restrictive barrier and moving beyond and outside these requirements to build a more exciting educational experience for children.

Maria also highlighted the importance of collaboration across schools:

> We now have schools going into other schools and leadership teams in schools are enabling and empowering staff from different schools to come in their schools and cast new perspectives and allow that to impact on their practice and challenges that you know they are actually relishing it, they are actually, they are loving this experience.

Thus, working with academics and exchanging expertise across schools create occasions where school staff are going into other schools and working with colleagues around enquiries seeking to promote new and creative practices which enhance the teaching and learning approaches of all involved. Norah also felt that there was a clear impact on staff, stating that:

> I can hear that staff are utilising literature to think more broadly about their own practice and the staff are wanting to challenge themselves more professionally … but I think it is a much more longer-term journey in some schools.

This was an interesting statement as it both celebrated the gains with undertaking research but also indicated the difficulties faced when they presented challenges for some schools and their practices. Norah recognised that it was a difficult task to ask schools and teachers to engage in work that could seriously disrupt some of the taken-for-granted activities. She saw this as a particular problem for head teachers. Norah added another interesting reflection explaining that through situating work in research and research literature this placed them in a more secure position to undertake innovative practices:

> We have always been very creative as staff, and we have always been able to take risks, that was something we have not been frightened to do, but what it enabled us to do is to anchor the risks in the research so that we do not look too maverick and too rogue (laughs) just grounding ... it has given us a broader horizon I would say too ... It's really given some robust data to the impact side of what we do as well as to the qualitative data around how we know it made a difference to our staff professionally.

Norah here is alluding to the fact that the school should not look too 'maverick', which given that she sees the research activity so positively is an interesting response to the prevailing external culture. She is describing a situation where you have to fight schools and leaders to convince them that this will provide long term benefits and at the same time meet the censorship of the external environment by appearing to play a more conventional game. As Norah stated: "… some schools say we do research. I say yeah ok! As if research is something that you can buy or get. It is a culture you create."

4.3.2 Critical thinking

Asked about the value of research accreditation, as opposed to doing research freely without accreditation, Maria responded by saying:

> ... it is a more extreme reward if you can say that ... it is very important in that staff receive the feedback in being positive, it is important in terms of encouraging them to move forward when they gain the accreditation, they feel the success, it is important for their wellbeing and their personal achievement, just like children. For me personally it is not important, but for my staff I want them to ideally have the intrinsic and the extrinsic.

What is interesting is that whilst Maria did not believe that it was necessary for her to gain accreditation, she thought that for the teachers who were at her school it was something that would motivate and encourage them, demonstrating that they have done well as part of their engagement in research. Yet, she later explained that accreditation is costly and argued that schools cannot afford to pay for all their teachers to have the accreditation. Also, Maria stated that "some teaching assistants here can't get accreditation because they have not got the qualification prior to that". Maria went on to discuss that the Aquarius Alliance benefitted from "the whole free approach" where they engaged in research without the constraints of accreditation and one where they engaged with experts to co-deliver research activity. There was thus a degree of conflicting discussion regarding accreditation. On one hand, Maria saw a lot of benefits to accreditation but also saw the value of non-accredited routes, which was the route the Aquarius Alliance were now engaged upon.

Norah had her own story to tell:

> I am going through my Master's at the moment, not as part of something I was paid to do but something that I always wanted to do for a long time and to me as a professional.

However, she thought that accredited research came with more thresholds and barriers to overcome and they wanted staff to go on a research journey without feeling that they had got to hit certain milestones. This had enabled them to explore varied methodological approaches and find something that

they enjoyed as staff that blended a more rigorous approach with a more ethical approach, as Norah explained: “The non-accredited side of it. …gave us the opportunity to explore without fear of getting things right or wrong.”

Maria indicated that the engagement of teachers in empirical research activity has had an overwhelming effect on children. She thought that the children were very much empowered in the school and they know that teachers are also learners. She added:

> Children regularly come back with the fact that the teacher is the learner and the classroom belongs to them, and they do talk about, “I ask my teacher a question, they can’t tell me the answer so we have to do our research,”… they don’t see that as negative at all, they know that teachers are just like anybody else…

Maria clearly valued the student-led learning environment where children, within their learning environment, conducted research, worked collaboratively and most importantly reflected on and improved their work and their thinking.

This was a research culture where everyone was encouraged to be inventive, creative and contribute to the overall learning experience, which is an ideal upheld by a number of authors (Furlong, 2015; William, 2009; Lave and Wenger, 1998;). This led to the enhancement of the capacity of schools through facilitating collaborative work (Darling-Hammond et al, 2019). Hence, when teachers develop a greater sense of efficacy to jointly solve problems of practise, they also develop a sense of collective responsibility. Norah explained that it is the deepening of staff experiences and thinking that led to changes that had facilitated learning at all levels:

> It definitely affected staff voice. When we first started our research journey we were taken aback, we found ourselves exposed to different methodology and approaches and that was the right thing to do.

Maria thought that their introduction to research had been spearheaded by Holly, who tapped into what the school was trying to achieve but not because they necessarily had the same beliefs:

> What we liked about [Holly] was that she was a loose cannon, it was WOW she puts in a thing that was a bit controversial from the start … we were not aligned in our thinking because at that time we were in school, on a journey, a journey driven by the government, by Ofsted, and then all of a sudden, this person is coming in and flinging questions and challenges us, that actually made us question what, you know, we are supposed to be doing in our school…

Maria made it clear that allowing people to say whatever they needed to say made the difference. She argued that Holly's understanding of the end goal on their research journey was crucial for success and for the enjoyment and benefit they have all had from research, but that this did not mean avoiding the controversial.

> … because you are in this conditioned environment and it is very politically driven, and she [Holly] probably cringed at some of the things we said because we are working under these constraints and conditions all the time but she never said that … understanding the pressures that these schools are facing, she has never been critical when she's seen us going down the route that was not ideal.

Maria argued that there were many obstacles that she had to overcome in facilitating teachers to become research active. There had been different reactions from different teachers and different schools. There was also some resistance to it through fear. Maria characterised this as fear of accreditation in the early stages (when the work was accredited), fear of project failure, fear of losing sight of government targets and fear of not being capable of undertaking the work. All of these she felt were addressed in small steps and through experience. For example, learning that project results always gave

you data and experiences from which you could learn. Moreover, there was the task of getting senior leaders to see the benefits of this work which had taken several years, where they learned through seeing the changes in practice and to their teachers. Maria pointed out:

> The attitudes of headteachers is something that [Holly] and I have worked on together to get them to see that sometimes it is ok to let go and allow staff to explore and bring back, not have to control everything and I am pleased to say that the place and the groups that we are working with now are very much, you know, see the benefit to staff and how much we enjoy that …

Maria wanted to see research as accessible and as something that they could use to develop ideas, reflection and practice. Hence, when school staff worked as a group, they supported each other's learning as they had opportunities to share their insights and provide constructive critique as well as observe various different strategies and ways of doing things (Barron and Darling-Hammond, 2008).

A consequence of undertaking research projects was that staff had become more challenging in a positive way, as Maria explains:

> You know I will be sat over here and staff come and put something in front of me. Have you read this, do you know I have been thinking about this, will you just have a quick look at the journal, I have been working with this group of children, where is this going on in my school?…

Day and Gu (2007) believed that teacher development is influenced by a number of factors that are not necessary inside the school. Teachers are influenced by their social connections, their values and beliefs in addition to their career stage. Norah and Maria described how staff had grown more confident and the school community had changed. Maria argued:

> … I have been given knowledge and experience that would never have come my way. I think when somebody says, ah .. 'you are doing an amazing thing here, and I trust you and I will support you, but you know what, I am not going to do it for you, but you have got to do it and you have to meet all these people who are going to shock the life out of you' .. yeah, it's opened up the whole door for me as a person, so the impact that I have had on staff and the climate and the culture of the school and the impact totally was due to my partnership with the academic on our research journey.

Maria's eyes filled with tears as she said this, and it was clearly an emotional moment for her. It was obvious that Maria sees herself as having experienced a profound journey in terms of engaging with research herself and as a leader of others engaging in research. This gave a sense of authenticity that went beyond the rationale raised by Illouz (2007), where markets influence emotion and identity and promote market values. Rather, Maria was emotional in relation to her changed sense of self, promoted through research activity.

The Aquarius Alliance appeared to focus on keeping its staff looking out as well as looking in which kept them thinking and questioning. It made them collaborate more on a shared focus. Norah gave an example of a research project that was going on across schools:

> Actually in 25 minutes we have a group of teachers … ten of them from across the school alliance and this afternoon's job is to develop this collaborative lesson study… this is a try out approach that enables us to work as a group. And it works on the basis that teachers have a knowledgeable other who comes and talks through the session to challenge the observation that happens and we are going to plan the lesson together and it will be delivered by one of the group … then at that point we will invite the knowledgeable other to come and lift our narration of the lesson to be a more critical enquiry of that lesson.

In addition, Maria talked confidently about using ‘agonistic democracy’. Holly, another academic colleague and Maria had been working on the principles of agonistic democracy in thinking about the work that was being undertaken in the Alliance. They were consequently developing traits of respect for multiple voices, an enjoyment in dissent and debate and a recognition that to move forward once has to sacrifice some long-held practices. These principles were being used to underpin the research programme during the year data was being collected. Maria clearly believed that working with university academics - she had engaged with presenting papers and was writing articles with Holly and others - had both enhanced her own thinking and also that of other staff. “It is knowledge where, the more you gain, the more you feel you need to know and explore, it makes you more humble ...”

4.4 CONCLUSION

The creation of a professional learning community within a school enables school leaders and teachers collectively to hold themselves responsible for the success of the students they teach, learning being a collective responsibility (Bush, 2019). From the feedback of Holly and Bill, as well as Tilly, Maria and Norah, I understood that schools were working together on empirical research projects and staff were making ongoing relationships across schools through the support session delivery. The research agenda was helping to capitalise on and keep momentum going with staff. It supported them to discuss ideas with headteachers and keep everyone thinking across schools. It was apparent that the research agenda for teachers was provocative as it required them to reflect on issues beyond the standard curricula and made them more questioning, more introspective and more able to promote discussions intended to disrupt traditional thinking patterns and support new insights into their working practices (Cribb and Ball, 2005; Sachs, 2001). It was also apparent that irrespective of whether or not they engaged with accreditation, the research journey itself was a significant importance. Moreover, they were all confident that research

played a significant part in improving the standards of their teachers and that this would ultimately enhance the quality of teaching and learning in their schools.

Such convictions appeared to be related to both their philosophy for learning as an experimental and experiential enterprise and in their own experiences of research as a facilitative and developing experience. In this way they had developed identities that were situated within beliefs in communities of practice and in shifting teacher identity opening possibilities for moving beyond conventional boundaries (Minckler, 2014; Knapp and Copland, 2006). Passion, one of the inherent characteristics for teaching and learning (Illouz, 2007), motivates all the people speaking in this chapter. Emotion and passion seem an important component that should also be considered in teachers' responses. It should be acknowledged that Holly, Bill, Maria, Norah, and Tilly were highly skilled in teaching and learning themselves and deployed considerable leadership skills to facilitate these research experiences for teachers. It was not clear whether such an approach would work as well with less enthusiastic leaders in key positions.

It is possible to see from the discussions above that politics plays an intimate part in such an enterprise (Freire, 1976). Whilst this may or may not be related to party politics, it is involved with the politics and ethical aspects of knowledge production. The discussions within this chapter also provide a foil against which I can look at teacher responses to being a part of such an enterprise, unusual in its scope and spread. Taking each setting in turn, I move on to explore each set of data with the responses articulated here in mind. First, over the next chapter I consider the Pisces Trust who, by comparison to the Aquarius Alliance, are new to academically led research. Further, they engage with a greater number of schools spread over a greater geographical distance which potentially adds complexity to the picture. Then in Chapter Six I consider the Aquarius Alliance which has a longer track record of research engagement, with schools situated geographically close together to see whether this more experienced group demonstrated any particular differences or similarities to the Pisces Trust group. I will not only

reference issues discussed in this chapter, but also pursue a wider range of questions after briefly exploring the context for each setting.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PISCES TRUST: A CONSIDERATION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITY AMONGST TEACHERS OVER TWO YEARS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an analysis of the data collected from 12 teachers in the Pisces Trust as they undertook research activities over a period of two years. These teachers were: Lorna, Gemma, Marion, Donna, Anne, Hattie, Dawn, Marlowe, Moira, Patricia, Tim and Gina (see Table 3.1). As explained in the methodology chapter, four teachers (Hattie, Dawn, Marlowe and Moira) decided not to proceed into the second year of the study for reasons of either work demands, health or pregnancy. However, I was still able to interview them and establish how they felt about research a year on from the start of the programme. In addition, Anne was unavailable in year two for interview when I arrived at the school due to unexpected additional school duties. She did however attend the taught sessions. Therefore, I interviewed 12 people in year one and 11 people in year two. In addition to this group, I interviewed two teachers, Rhonda and Dave, who had worked with the academic lead, in the previous year doing unaccredited research in the same Trust. In this context it should be mentioned that, where needed, interviews in year one will be referred to as first interview (See Appendix Four) and those from year two as second interview (See Appendix Five).

In order to contextualise the data presented in this chapter, it is worth briefly revisiting what a multi-academy trust (MAT) involves and secondly adding some contextual detail about the Pisces Trust in particular. A MAT is a group of Academy schools that are governed and led by a Chief Executive Officer(s) and a Trust board who supply the support mechanisms formerly delivered by Local Authorities. The Trust is funded through a ‘top-slice’ from the budget of each participating academy school (the basic budget allocated

to schools by government). Trusts and schools add to these funds through applying for competitive bids to undertake particular work and, to support the initial roll out, Trusts were allocated additional government funding. Once schools have been converted to academies, it is very difficult for them to return to state education (Bailey, 2013). The Pisces School Trust is made up of 12 schools (two secondary and ten primary) with one additional secondary school in the process of being adopted at the time of this research. The Trust covers a geography of almost 200 miles. The Trust is based on stated ideals (published on their web site but not cited here to protect anonymity) of upholding social justice through facilitating all students to access a broad and balanced curriculum. Their curriculum is not only focused on Government targets, but also on wider enrichment activities. The Trust has only taken on schools in areas regarded as socially deprived and who are rated by Ofsted as failing or in need of improvement. At the time of this research two of the Trust's schools had achieved an 'outstanding' Ofsted inspection rating, while eight schools had reached 'good'.

The Trust headquarters is an old industrial building, furnished with materials gathered from junk shops, skips, and personal donations from the staff and others. The rooms were full of old settees, antique chairs, chandeliers, paintings and prints, sculptures, empty bird cages and other ephemera, plus they had three resident cats. Teachers discussed how their schools had been encouraged to follow this lead and build environments that were quirky and full of visual impact to broaden the experiences of the children within them. Rooms in the headquarters were well-lighted and spacious, and the training room had a part open ceiling affording views into the upstairs open offices through windows. The Trust was funding leaders (at all levels), including aspiring leaders, to engage with academic endeavour that would educate them in ways that challenge and open-up traditional practices. This was intended to enthuse staff to adopt more experimental and creative approaches to educational practice.

I attended all centrally delivered sessions (at the Trust headquarters or school hubs) with the teachers, gathering focus group reflections at the end

of each day. The complexity with conducting focus groups is that a number of people talk across one another and comments come in fast succession. As a consequence, it is sometimes difficult to attribute comments to specific people and therefore, when presenting focus group data, names are not used. Instead, teachers' contributions in the focus groups are noted without reference to any specified teacher (See Appendix Eight). The study also references teachers' engagement with research and their work as researchers. For clarity such references include: teachers reading academic work and reflecting on its findings and implications for their own practices; teachers acting as participants in a Trust-wide research initiative and talking about what research involves; teachers acting as the instigators of their own research activity as part of the broader research initiative, developing their own interests and structural inquiries around classroom or school practices.

Whilst exploring the data, I drew upon the literature to highlight the contradictions, fantasies and paradoxes within which these teachers are working. The study exemplifies the complexity of research as professional development and the ways in which such activity can enhance reflection and reflexivity in teachers. The chapter begins this exploration in section 5.1 by looking at why teachers engaged with this programme and were interested in research activity in the first instance, utilising focus group data gathered in their first year of study and in particular at the end of their first session. Then there is an exploration of the semi-structured interview data considering the same questions in their second year of research activity. These data are structured into the key themes arising. In section 5.2, there is a consideration of the personal development that teachers report themselves to have experienced beginning with outlining teachers' beliefs about what being a teacher is for them. Then the chapter moves on to unpack teachers' perspectives on how their thinking and development changed through working as a group. In section 5.3, the focus shifts to teacher professional development and in particular the role that accreditation played. Following that there is an exploration of whether research is viewed as a form of continuing professional development. Section 5.4 unpicks the challenges that teachers have faced and the sustainability of their work, considering

what aspects of the work led to apprehension, what led to excitement and whether they perceived this work as something they would continue to do. At the end of this section, there is a brief look back at teachers' experience through the medium of their end of year presentations. In the conclusion, the work of this chapter is drawn together in order to argue that teachers increasingly value their research activity at both a personal and professional level as part of their professional development and that with support from schools this is a sustainable and enlivening activity. The chapter thus raises questions that inform the connection between these data and that of the TSA in the following chapter.

5.1 EXPERIENCING UNDERTAKING RESEARCH

As discussed in Chapter Four, the intention of the delivery team and commissioning staff was clearly about teachers developing in confidence, enthusiasm, and critical ability in a way that could be applied to all aspects of school educational life. This Trust wanted staff that would raise questions about practice. The data presentation begins by exploring why the teachers felt it important to engage in this research activity and what might present a barrier to engagement.

5.1.1 Reasons for embarking upon a research journey

Teachers gave multiple answers when asked about why they engaged in this research activity which included mentioning what they saw as potential barriers to such engagement. These aspects of their responses are set out in the five following sub-sections.

5.1.1.a Towards School Improvement

At the end of the first session with teachers, where the programme had been outlined and expectations set, teachers discussed in a focus group what they hoped to gain from their engagement in the programme. One teacher stated:

> For me … it's trying to see and research ways that we can better meet gaps with the schools' bench marking which is about embedding careers and marketability skills into the curriculum.

Clearly this response was orientated by external pressures for schools to engage in a relevant curriculum likely to be graded as successful by Ofsted and in order to meet external agendas around employment needs. Ball and Youdell (2007) explained that market pressures are placed upon schools to succeed against internationally acclaimed league tables. In the same vein, Gunter et al (2013) argued that neo-liberal agendas have focussed the success of schools on judgments around performativity agendas and meeting measurable targets for success. This has created new models of education, although as Husbands (2015) argued, such initiatives cannot ultimately succeed as they embody unrealistic expectations.

Another teacher in the focus group added, "it's making your time count". This emphasis on no wasted moments was a recurring theme in teachers' discussions. They clearly felt part of their social duty to occupy every moment of their own or the children's time meaningfully (a theme that I will return to in section 5.2). Asked about the qualities they believed that they brought to research, teachers identified flexibility, reflectiveness and being a hard taskmaster in relation to making themselves work "because you do want to be your best". The notion of 'being' or 'doing your best' was frequently expressed in the focus groups. The teachers seemed to feel that anything less than their very best was some kind of failure on their part and that they should expect nothing but the best from themselves. One teacher thought that:

> you do research because you want to do a good job and to do a good job you want to do it the right way. Some people say I want to get accreditation for it. I want to be famous for doing something or I want people to listen to me… that does not occur to me at all … I do not do research to get power ... it is not why I do it ... research is a natural

> by-product to education, to our need to have good standards in everything I do.

This statement encompasses a variety of messages about standards being linked to doing a good job, about power and wanting to articulate that this is not what is being sought, and the nature of research as something entwined within an educational process. A teacher present in a focus group stated: “it’s you can’t have a limit on yourself I suppose isn’t it, it’s about always striving to look for something else so that we, we do it with the children”. So again, here is an expression of always seeking to improve both oneself as a teacher and that children too are on this journey. This is a lot of pressure to place teachers (and perhaps their students) under and reflects, as Kirby (2016) suggested, wider societal demands. Biesta et al (2015: 624) also argue that

> There is an ongoing tension within educational policy worldwide between countries that seeks to reduce the opportunities for teachers to exert judgement and control over their own work, and those who seek to promote it. Some see teacher agency as a weakness within the operation of schools and seek to replace it with evidence-based and data-driven approaches, whereas others argue that because of the complexities of situated educational practices, teacher agency is an indispensable element of good and meaningful education.

Another teacher in a focus group explained: “our behaviour and everything we do from the moment we get up to the minute we leave our job influences all of those little people as well as our colleagues around us”.

These teachers appeared to be describing a responsibility for enacting particular performances in order to meet the needs of others. Thus, they in some way were presenting a fantasy reality rather than one that might reflect actual practice where teachers’ emotions and performance might vary from day to day. This appeared to lead to a high degree of self-recrimination where teachers felt themselves falling short of this ideal. A third teacher

expounds: “I think teachers and staff can be quite down on themselves as well ‘cos it’s like I wasn’t good today, based on like, that was awful, then you beat yourself up about it”. Berlant (2011) highlighted that people often continue to work within a system that is clearly not working, and yet were still trying and re-trying to make it work. Berlant (2011: 263) argued: “It is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working”. Here we see teachers trying to live up to impossible ideals with little forgiveness for themselves if they were working at less than their best.

Biesta et al (2015) argued that teachers bring particular beliefs and values to schools and over time build their professional knowledge, expectations and skills. However, they often find themselves struggling against an educational and school culture that is unsympathetic to these beliefs and experiences. There were some signs amongst these teachers that some of these strictures were being opened up to critique. In the focus group, one teacher added an interesting challenge to the other teachers in the room about what ‘better’ approaches might mean, arguing that:

> I think it depends how you view better? Better as in we’re better than you or we’re doing it in a different way, are we right we should do it like this, or better as in this is the optimal way for our school and our community… better might be different from school, to school, to school, so meaning not so much better, but best for us, a clever way of doing it.

This was a complex and thoughtful response raising an important point that teachers had, up until this point in this group, assumed, that they knew what better might mean. The notion of betterment as progress, or progress being relative, is important to consider and until that is understood as one teacher in the focus group argued, it is difficult to plan around and decide on how to approach being ‘better’. Moreover, for the same teacher it appeared to be important for teachers to relate notions of better to their own circumstances within their own school and community. Nevertheless, schools are often

encouraged to look at success, only in relation to national targets (as discussed by Husbands, 2015; Gunter et al, 2013; Ball and Youdell, 2007).

First year focus group responses were therefore demonstrating that teachers wanted to engage in research to improve their practices in classrooms, albeit recognising some of the complexities and differences between contexts. Research was directed at solving an issue as a means by which they could improve their teaching and, as a consequence, the experiences of children in the classroom. Despite this willingness to challenge themselves however, there were elements of the influence that school improvement literature had placed on teacher quality as a means of improving student performance (Pollard, 2010) visible in teacher responses. This may explain why Donna had stated in her second-year interview that, “research is all about the extent to which you can explore new ways, more advanced ways of maximising the opportunities for the pupils”. The notion of ‘maximising opportunities’ and being “more successful” (from Patricia) demonstrates teachers sense of their roles as one of a duty to their pupils to extend their learning and opportunities as far as possible. So, whilst I would argue that it was somewhat modified in year two, teacher rhetoric and the notion of pupil success was evident throughout the study, which was clearly linked to external and governmental expectations of schools that bordered on fantasy (Clarke and Moore 2013). Mouffe (2005) argued that there are challenges to this ideological fantasy and people are becoming more aware of its rhetoric. This became clear as the programme developed that teachers were asking many more questions about the nature of educational practices and wondering in what small ways they could influence practice within their schools. The teachers were developing an understanding that Trust values were facilitating them in being more experimental in terms of developing their own practices through research but they also were aware that they nonetheless needed to meet targets for improvement. This made them more aware of the tensions and risks that they faced. They were therefore wanting the research that they undertook to both support an expanded curriculum provision as well as help meet targets for improvement. They were also beginning to realise that research was not about providing a ‘quick fix’.

5.1.1.b Vocational Ethics

During the first year focus groups, one teacher commented that, "I want to develop my practice as a leader" (this was linked to how that teacher could then help take education for children forward) and this was built upon by another teacher who thought that doing research was:

> … about making a difference and that sort of, a lot of us we all got into education about making a difference. What I'm hoping to find out is that, how to make it better, and that can be communicated to different schools and then seeing that journey about building things where one school, it might not work in quite the same way that it might work for another school, it's about seeing that journey about how to make it, make it the best it can be, so that everybody, all the children are thriving and moving forwards.

This impassioned response indicated that this teacher had an assumption that all teachers held an underlying belief around a commitment to improving children's lives. This was an expression of vocational ethical purpose and appeared to be a widely held belief as there were many nods of affirmation of this opinion. Teachers are argued to be unanimous about their role in the classrooms to create the environment which supports and improves the lives of children through the focus they give to the whole child (Bullough, 2015). Asked about this focus on the whole child, the teachers indicated that this was true for themselves and perhaps most teachers, although they felt that they were seeing some people coming into teaching who viewed it as a career rather than a vocation and consequently sped their way through to headship with little understanding of children. There was a strong sense of condemnation of teachers who behaved in this way.

Teachers seemed anxious to demonstrate that committed teachers were ethically welcoming of opportunities to self-examine and look at practices to engage with shifts, and in year two interviews they began to demonstrate

that they were developing more questioning approaches. For example, Patricia mentioned that she had started thinking of reasons "why such a child is doing what the child is doing ... it [research] makes you more analytical but not in a derogatory way, only to be more positive and more successful". Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) and Guskey (2002) argued that it was the moral duty of teachers to challenge and develop thinking in both themselves and their students. These teachers clearly agreed with this. However, they still tended to tie notions of progress into externally set measures. This is an issue explored in more detail in section 5.2. These explorations were also focussed on very personal development and reflection as these teachers seemed unused to this level of critical reflection and were enjoying the process of thinking more critically and deeply. They saw the Trust as supportive of such development but, as yet, were focussed more on this as an individual or teacher researcher community of practice basis rather than one more strategically associated with the Trust. Towards the end of the study however, teacher researchers were beginning to talk about how the Trust was unusual in its support of such forms of professional development which they felt they would not be facilitated to engage with elsewhere.

5.1.1.c Professional Recognition

It became apparent that research engagement could be used to strengthen teacher voice. In the first year, focus groups, asked whether research is always about being better at something, one teacher responded:

> It is about making that change, making that difference, and having, moving the debate on as well because for my area of interest, there's a lot of noise about whether it works or it doesn't work and I want to try and persuade people that it will make a difference if we do it the right way, or in a particular way.

This was an interesting response as it implied that teachers needed to prove that they could make a difference to lives in order to persuade colleagues of the benefits of following their suggested direction. Another teacher

concurred. Hargreaves et al (2007: 64) reported in their investigation of teacher status that:

> teachers … felt subject to a reduction in public respect levelled at them; whereas once they were on a pedestal, their professional expertise was now more liable to be questioned. This was attributed to a general waning in societal respect towards all professions, as individuals became more informed and confident in their interactions with professionals. … Teachers, however, felt that this loss of respect was marked by a reduction in their authority, yet felt that the public unreasonably expected them to instil discipline, command respect and produce results with pupils in an education system which had diminished powers to give to teachers to deal with these problems.

Thus, it might be argued that through using research as a tool to build knowledge and expertise around ideas for change, teachers could reclaim some authority and persuade others within their schools that their professional recommendations were worth adopting. In her second-year interview Donna explained:

> All research is valuable because it is interesting to see other people's perspectives and values on things and it can sometimes … for instance, I read an article last night which might make me sort of think of a different approach. I said well that is an interesting view, I have never thought about it in this way. It sort of broadens your horizons and such. You do not necessarily have to agree with it, but it can quite often make you think of different perspectives and how you see things … it gives you confidence sometimes to take a risk within your practice

These responses encapsulated comments made by all of the teachers who were seeing benefits in exposing themselves to other ideas through reading and conversations, both with each other and with academics. Also, the issue of research activity in building confidence was raised in each interview.

Teachers were growing in their ability to talk about their research and ideas because they considered that they had built up an evidence base to strengthen their persuasive abilities. For Donna, academic research was “a security … in the sense you find other researchers have the same ideas.” So, she was using a body of evidence to support trialling new ideas in school.

The potential pitfall of relying on academic research was that this might lead teachers to rely on using others’ ideas rather than coming up with new ideas of their own. Kincheloe (2003) urged teachers to undertake research in order to be more effective in their classroom and also to facilitate them in challenging the methods that reduce them to mere promoters of a 'top down' system of education. Kincheloe also argued that the more critical the research that teachers engage in, the more it empowers their practice in classroom, in teaching quality, and in influencing others. This therefore may have implications for research activity over time, as continual engagement in research might then lead to greater questioning of taken for granted practices as Donna was beginning to see.

For Marlowe in his second interview, research was about finding “innovative ways to solve problems”.

> … those problems may not be the same this year as they were last year, to put them on a shelf, but these are still things in your repertoire … you do research because you want to do a good job and to do a good job you want to do it the right way.

Gina argued that she had always known that research was important, but had learned more in the second year about the specificities of conducting research:

> doing research using other epistemological approaches was new to me, whereas prior to doing the research we did in our last assignment, I was not sure about qualitative research ...

Gina had learned from research about how to be a good leader, which she was then practicing. Research had a positive impact because it made her look at leadership approaches from different perspectives. She gave an example of recognising that her experience of leadership in the workplace, before coming to the research programme, had always been based on a neoliberal agenda, and she assumed:

> … this is how all businesses and organisations function or should function, not knowing that this is a particular ideology if you see what I mean… yeah it made me think it does not always have to be the way I think it is…

Gina was expressing a deepening of understanding that led her to ask questions about where particular initiatives were positioned and what had led to this. This in turn had allowed her to make more informed decisions and alerted her that she could avoid simply following the current educational trends without question. Thus, research was indeed beginning to influence the critical nature of the approach of these teachers to their work. Cole, Simkins, and Penuel (2002) asserted the need for using a wide range of integrated practices in learners' professional development as central to transforming the learning process to students and teachers. This programme was offering these teachers a wide range of practical and theoretical stimuli to enhance their projects alongside varied opportunities to articulate what they were doing in response to this.

5.1.1.d Personal Development

The teachers in both focus groups and interviews felt that group work was an important way to support their personal learning. As one teacher in the focus group explained:

> I think it is useful if you work in sort of a group environment … you might have an idea in your head but you do not really know how to verbalise it or how to expand on it, but in a group environment or focus group you can, you can sort of magpie ideas from people.

This was received with murmurs of approval, the teachers agreeing that they had benefitted from listening to each other during the day. Another teacher was anxious to explain how teachers could learn from group feedback in ways that inform practice:

> I think I am very open minded, so I, I like to hear what people's opinions are if it's about me developing my practice or whether it's me watching something that someone else has done and going well, will that actually work, and trying it.

Group activity was viewed as creating time in busy working lives to pause and reflect, but concerns were raised about how this might be created when back in their own schools, facing a busy day. Their answer here seemed to be directed at working faster or 'smarter' in order to create more space to think, but this was also seen as problematic. They almost depended on others to create this time for them (for example through schools supporting them joining a group such as this one). Thus, in the research setting, whether at the school hubs or at the headquarters of the Trust, there were many opportunities for teachers to work and consider school life as a group in ways that were different to everyday practices. Here, research is seen as a legitimate activity fostering a level of shared reflexive activity that may not arise to the same extent in other group working situations. In this context, teachers were working in a community of practice to engage with research activities, with academics and on their own, to master research skills and either individually or as a group, share their research to improve practice.

At this point in the early focus group the teachers did not perhaps conceive of research as something that went beyond watching and trying out ideas. However later, for example Gina in the previous section, they had realised

that theory and literature were also helpful in unpacking practice. In her interview in year two Patricia was learning to challenge herself:

> We have just had a [university] weekend where we were looking at a specialist support project when we were going to undertake the next module. It is very much making me question myself on what I do on whatever basis … It is very much making me re-train my brain in regard to research.

Patricia indicated that the research programme was helping her to "re-train my brain". This is much more in line with the intensions set out by Holly and Bill in Chapter Four. Whilst Hattie had withdrawn from the programme, not enjoying the academic writing, she had however felt that she had continued to learn from the first year of research experience as time went on and considered herself to be more reflective and questioning as a result of her research experience. It seemed that formal accredited learning does not work for all and at all times. Dawn also found assessment demands difficult to deal with but again assured me of the personal learning that had taken place as a result of undertaking research. This was indeed true for all four teachers that had withdrawn from the formal programme. For example, whilst continuing with the course was impossible, Marlowe explained in his first interview:

> …I am constantly reading. I have always got an academic book, on the go … the first one … questioned how the brain learns mathematics from a neuroscience point of view and that was revolutionary … What I am trying to get to here is the value of research to me is very high and that it has always been intrinsically and that is how I do research.

Goodlad et al (1990: 261) argued that teachers need opportunities to build "knowledge of subject matter, opportunity to learn, time, space, appropriate curricula materials, clear instruction, and methods of measuring student learning progress". All the teachers felt that research had facilitated them to

do this irrespective of whether or not they were working on having their work accredited.

Whilst Tim asserted in his second interview that the impact that research has had on him was “still being formulated”, he valued his role as a research practitioner. He thought it important that teachers were given the opportunity to explore and share experiences in a rigorous context:

> I am still working on the idea of all those cultural capitals or social capitals … the idea is not just what you know but who you know… how you think and what you do as part of your ideas... (ehm) … to meet the people who are helpful and more experienced in research does enable me to formulate and push forward my own ideas based on what others might be thinking.

Tim thought that through talking to a variety of academics who were intellectually ‘challenging’ it became necessary to reformulate what you thought, or indeed ‘took for granted’, more carefully. Professional development has clear links to shaping practice and career progression as a social and personal process (Caldwell and Simkins, 2011). Tim, who was focussed on notions of cultural capital and how this could inform the creative use of technology in schools, had volunteered to give papers at conferences (including academic conferences) and was looking forward to receiving constructive criticism having every intension of continuing with his research journey. Research engages the learners as partners in their own learning and who then evaluate themselves as they learn. Tim was clearly embodying these links and enjoying the process of unpacking his practice and pre-dispositions. He considered himself to be growing a researcher identity.

Teachers here were making some movement towards self-challenging as a useful way of checking practice and as Cain (2019) argued, were willing to openly share and evaluate practices, but were still embodying some contradictions. Thinking about research as an emancipatory force is something that was advocated by Freire (1970; 1976) which becomes

important in challenging taken for granted attitudes. Hooks (2003) argued that research enabled the researcher to think critically and become freer to practice freedoms. Thus, with time and practice, the confidence to see, acknowledge, unpick and then question assumed links between educational quality and test results, can grow.

5.1.1.e Barriers to Participation

An issue that appeared to be of some concern to all the teachers was related to time, as one of the teachers in the focus group explained:

> Time is a big worry. I think if, if you are going to do it [research] really well, to the best of your ability, erm, I think time is a very important concern … I know the ideal is that you can balance this along with what you are doing, the research to support our practice erm but the time to actually do that writing up and time to spend on your own research …you need to have the time for you to have a real understanding of your own research so that you can move that research forward in practice and time is very difficult.

Here there was an acknowledgement that research should begin to form part of a process involving teachers' daily activity, but this teacher also saw the need for time to engage with a more detailed understanding, reflection, consideration and reformulation involved in such work. In the way that teachers applied 'being the best they can be' to their role as teachers, it seemed that they applied a similar expectation upon themselves as researchers. Leitch and Day (2000: 179) argued that "research has a critical role to play not least as a means of building the capacity of teachers as researchers of their own practice". In other words, research is important as it gets teachers thinking more critically. Given time and space to engage in research, teachers ultimately work towards changing, and reforming what they see needing improvement. Self-examination was apparent in the projects that the teachers undertook. For example, Gemma, used critical incident reflection to look at her approach to leadership and reflect upon

what she had learned that could shift her practices. Drawing on Holloway and Schwartz (2014) amongst others she argued that she had become more responsive and focussed, braver and actively reflective in her daily practice. In this way, as Tim had done in his work illustrated above, Gemma had integrated the ideas she learnt from the literature and from the research she had conducted within her current practice which made time issues easier to cope with.

Other concerns voiced seemed directed at writing assignments for the accreditation, an issue a number of teachers raised both in focus groups and in the interviews. One teacher in a focus group thought that time was simply about ones' attitude of mind:

> It is about your mind-set because I spent a lot of my life worrying that I cannot get things done, thinking that I'm a failure because I can't get things done but recently it's, it's changing that mind set.

Kirby's (2016: 4) work with teachers emphasised the assertion that "teachers reflect on their professional identity using teacher images in media as a stimulus in their narratives". Where such images involve undertaking a somewhat unreasonable remit of skills, duties and accomplishments then it is perhaps not surprising that some teachers feel overwhelmed and as if they have failed as teachers. This is a theme that will be considered further in section 5.2. However, here the teacher had taken it upon herself to re-think how she envisaged what could be achieved in any one day, seeing herself as the problem.

To summarise, there had been some shifting of thinking about the nature and relevance of research over time and with experience. Teachers have exhibited some sense of research as a means by which school improvement would be achieved. They linked this to pupils' outcomes and notions of teachers being the best they could be. Hence, they saw research as a way of challenging themselves and their practices even to the extent of identifying particular paradigms that may be influencing the way schooling is perceived.

The teachers appeared to be beginning to question dominant models of education and were instead focussed on issues that sparked their enthusiasms and gave them scope to develop a professional sense of themselves as working with the support of others, peers and academics, to build new communities of thinking and practices. All the teachers interviewed expressed an enjoyment of engaging with research activity, albeit some having decided not to pursue the accreditation route. This was in relation to having learned and embracing notions of uncertainty and the need to investigate further which had engaged them in thinking in new ways. The research staff had also offered expertise that the teachers considered had provoked them to question their own practices more (this will be pursued in more depth in section 5.2.2). Research was characterised as “breaking up the isolation of the classroom” (Marion). Despite the constraints and challenges presented by daily practice, teachers held onto a number of ideals about the role of teacher that appear to carry emotional weight and are explored in the following section.

5.2 BENEFITS FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to explore how teachers developed over the two-year research experience, it was important to discover what teachers saw as part of their role and purpose. Understanding this passion (and it was quickly clear that this was a passion) provided a background understanding that helped inform the research (see 5.2.1). It was then important to consider how bringing teachers together within this programme influenced their perspectives (see 5.2.2).

5.2.1 What it is to be a teacher

Asked what being a teacher involved, Gemma demonstrated a clear focus on children’s lives and learning:

> Being a teacher means a very busy life, being able to support children to achieve their objectives. You have to be born a teacher… (hum) It is hard life … incredibly rewarding … A teacher does a lot to children. A teacher teaches them, coaches them, nurtures them, and does the work of a social worker and applies to them what applies to the teacher's own children. The purpose of being a teacher is to be able to build up future generations.

Gemma appears to be reflecting Berlant's (2011) impossible drama. This is to say, as Berlant (2011) argued, people often try and make unworkable systems work as they find it hard to turn their back on accepted practice. This means that teachers often continue to work within a system that is clearly not working, and yet they continue to trying and re-trying to make it work. This reveals that teachers try to live up to impossible ideals with little forgiveness for themselves if they were working at less than their best. Gemma is presenting the teacher as all-embracing and one has to question whether this is a reasonable expectation that she has set for herself. She raises a number of interesting issues, for example the notion that one is born to teach. This appears to be a statement that indicates that one needs to have a drive to help and support children in order to survive in this demanding world. It also indicates that there is a degree of instinctive behaviour in teaching rather than it being something that can be learned. Stemler et al (2006) argued that there is more to teaching than instruction. There are strategies that can make teaching more productive, such as engaging in this research programme, but having the passion for teaching is the most essential characteristic of a teacher. This point of view was echoed by the majority of the teachers engaged in this work and half the teachers stated that teaching was a profession that they would not change for any other.

The demand expressed here is all encompassing because the teacher bears the burden of an unrealistic responsibility for all aspects of the child's life. Echoing Gemma's desire "to support children to achieve their objectives"

Lorna thought that her mission was facilitating children to achieve their various potentials.

> Obviously, a teacher teaches and helps children with life skills. (hum) A teacher is a social worker, a carer who helps children and is happy to see them achieve their potentials. It is important every child gets the best they can and feel part of the community.

So, in a similar way to teachers discussing their own needs to 'be the best they can be', here we see that they also need to support children to do the same. Hargreaves (1997: 18) considered that "pedagogical changes fail, when they do not engage the passions of the classroom". Thus, in engaging in this programme it was important to tap into this passion. Part of teachers' dedication to their profession was doing the best they could to help their students (Liston and Garrison, 2004). However, this may feed unrealistic fantasies of what it is to teach as discussed earlier and the pressure that this puts teachers under may explain why both respondents mention the notion of social worker as part of their remit. Such quotations from teachers are indicative of the responsibility they feel for the children in their care whether this is reasonable or even possible.

Donna also talked of teachers' responsibility to children saying: "it is not just about them learning and developing, working with their families their social dynamics, their behaviour their emotions … and then there is a lot more". When asked what does being a teacher mean to her, Patricia became very emotional (tears in her eyes – she also grabbed a tissue to dab her eyes) and said: "being a teacher means life to me". Patricia also linked the research activity to helping her "become a better teacher for the kids". This begs the question about whether such ideals are consciously considered as important to teachers in navigating practice, especially as it would seem that they are capable of implementing policy directives that may do little in terms of improving educational experiences. Further, schooling is not always educating people towards happiness and fulfilment. It could be argued therefore that teachers are to some extent, caught up in a fantasy or ideal

that is unachievable. Illouz (2009) thought that people often cling to what she called “hyperrationality”, which steers them and provides a rationale to follow the dictates of the market. This can even impact on their ability to express who they inwardly are. The market-oriented approach to life distracts and replaces people’s fantasies and encourages them to assume a mask that is not entirely their own. This means that such masks, being unreal, are likely to fade and disappear. In the first interview with Tim, he described how he wanted to be a teacher because: “The purpose of being a teacher is to get young people ready for adulthood … I want them to realise their potentials and enhance their opportunities to achieve that”. How then do teachers rationalise testing and achievement based on very particular choices of curricula?

Other responses were similar, but some introduced notions such as respect. For instance, in the interview with Anne, she explained that: “respect is important and having respect for children and working with parents together is very important. If teachers feel they are not respected, school will be a challenging place for them”. Here we get a sense of the behaviour management strategies that all schools are inevitably involved with. There are expectations about behaviours towards each other as there are in any community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Schostak (2017) suggested that the neo-liberal agenda dictates that people are managed to comply and this, as Gunter (2012) argued, is part and parcel of making schools achieve conformity under the guise of educational success. For De Lissovoy (2015), teachers are heavily monitored and under surveillance. In other words, education could be characterised as being about compliance and the narrative of teachers’ commitment to children seems to entangle them in this compliance, ‘comply or fail the children and lose respect’.

The debate in this section is not to undermine the good intentions of teachers, but rather to expose the idealism of the nature of teaching that most express a commitment to. It is an ideal that here had resulted in emotional testimonies about what teaching meant to the teachers, one bursting into tears during the interview whilst explaining the value she placed

on spending time with children and helping them develop. Few questions are posed about where ideals around child development come from and how desirable these are. If the picture of teaching is idealised, then it is what we should expect of our teachers that becomes an important question when thinking about research as a tool to develop their critical thinking. Next, I explore the ways in which teachers characterised their personal development in terms of working together as a group.

5.2.2 The Value of Working Together as a Group of Teachers

Early expressions about the benefits of working together in undertaking the programme were explored more formally in year two. Lorna expressed the opinion that:

> I think now we are in the second year, we feel more comfortable to share. Which is really nice and it definitely helped me a lot. I think I get some support from other teachers as everyone has the same ethos … we all work with each other and we are all from the same Trust. Oh and just to put it into perspective in terms of the research methods, it is so beneficial.

Lorna therefore thought that time was important to build the trust needed to undertake group work and also felt that it was important that the group shared an ethos. Fielding (2001) stated that working in groups helped shape the learning taking place for the people within it. Further, Hooks (2003) argued that working in groups bonds teachers together and strengthens freedoms in ways that celebrate the differences between them. However, this could be cast as group work being a way to maintain unrealistic ideals where these are reinforced by a group identity. Zeichner (2008) however, believed that reflection supported considerable teacher development and helped more critical questioning to evolve. The primary aim of research is for the researcher to find something that can help others, communicate with others and build on the knowledge that others have found (Walford, 2009).

Moreover, working in groups eases the isolation of teachers and makes them want to join groups or networks (Newmann and Welhage, 1995).

Moira believed that working and discussing research with teachers from other schools was beneficial, “their successes are going to be different to yours, but you need to look at the whole rather than what’s known to you”. Moira believed that researchers need their peers to test and evaluate their findings and thoughts, as people are not always ‘like-minded’. Moira thought that being guided by a mix of researchers, teachers and academics was helpful because:

> research doesn’t always go the way you think it is going to go, also if you get stuck, as you can easily come to that point, you get a set of data and a set of information but you don’t really know… you know what the data is telling you but you might not know fully and appreciate what the next step is going to be, so having guidance along the way is helpful.

This is interesting in the light of the view that:

> Research that is a thriving multi-headed beast with a life of its own, provides views of a world that is rich, varied, and complex in ways that the lone researcher or the traditional, positivistic social science research paradigm with its *a priori* questions and limited scope cannot begin to address (Alexakos, 2015: xvi).

A number of researchers, such as Cain (2019), Hammersley-Fletcher et al (2018), and Alexander (2008) among others believed that although teachers can do their research independently, the help of academics can give teachers’ research the rigour and depth it needs as academics are likely to sharpen the research that teachers do. However, Ellis and Loughland (2016: 132) argue that:

> Although academic partners did on occasion provide selected literature, teachers tended to only scan through this material citing they were time poor. Teachers tended to focus on the more practical rather than theoretical concerns. This might suggest that academic partners need to workshop the literature otherwise it is material that is simply collected and stored away by teacher researchers.

In this context, it seems that the nature of educational research, and accredited research and writing seem to be at times problematic for teachers. This may explain why in sessions I observed, discussion of the literature was built into the activities and the teachers enjoyed this. For example, Gina had really enjoyed getting engaged with literature through academic intervention:

> …through my assignment last year I learned about ways, paradigms and thinking about research, and I would not have known how to do that without having somebody who can explain to me how… having that somebody to tell you, 'you do realise that is new public management … you need to realise it is an ideology' and recognise oh ok I need to look it up…

Gina had a background in science and thus had looked at research from a rather different perspective than the one underpinning this research programme which had helped reveal a new way of working and of critiquing. Douglas (1989: 423) believed that neo-liberal literature: "confines itself to establishing that it represents a change in the tide without providing an explanation of why the change took place." Gina explained that she valued some dated literature as she had found it to be relevant to current circumstances giving her a sense of how patterns of practice had developed, thus addressing Douglas' concerns: "Literature provokes us to think and reconsider the problems we face." All of the teachers interviewed argued that literature had given them new insights into their own practices and provoked new ways of thinking about their work. Literature had become an important element in undertaking research. Moreover, they could see potential benefits

across schools where this work was shared across the organisation. For example, Gemma argued that “working across schools we learn from each other … share ideas instead of getting stuck … someone else might be able to help, I mean in collaboration”. I also discovered that following this research several of the teacher researchers were being used to support curriculum work in other schools in their hub areas.

Patricia reflected on how academic input could facilitate the process of reading and research:

> … not having someone to help with research shows you how important it is to have somebody there and we know how important it is to have a facilitator, like [Name] where we knew what we were doing and going to do before we left.

Moreover, Patricia saw benefits in considering the challenges in other schools:

> We think that the problems at school are just our problem and these are problems for our Trust and belong to the children who have the same background, culture and family income and challenges so on. It is refreshing to know that different schools from different backgrounds may have the same issues as we have … I heard that some of the children in secondary schools have the same problems and issues that our children in primary schools have…

This recognition of facing similar problems in schools, wherever or whoever they might be, is one that perhaps leads teachers looking at these issues to decide that the problems are not about school but perhaps about educational policy. In this way sharing ideas may in time lead to bigger questions being raised.

Dawn saw the potential of working across schools on ideas as that would increase the validity of your research and its reach and that it helped

crossing divides geographically as well. As such, one can have: “a bigger range of ideas … I have access to thirty children but if I was in a group and there were five of us this means there are 150 children”. Cross-Trust work can become a powerful set of data from which arguments can be made that may have an impact on policy or strategy. It was argued that when schools share data and experiences amongst each other, then they could have stronger arguments about how best to feed into the teaching and learning of the pupils in schools. Such sharing was gradually increasing through teachers visiting other schools within the Trust to collaborate on and discuss practice, although this seemed to be at an early stage. Also, the research group was bringing different teachers together and facilitating them in getting to know each other well. Kirkup, et al (2005) argued that data sharing amongst schools encourages good practice, provides a means for schools to compare their performances, and compare learning requirements. I wrote in my field notes, sessions were leading to teachers making arrangements with each other to visit, or even to suggest making contact with colleagues who shared a specific interest.

Anne considered the advantages of bringing together a range of voices as “even though they disagree with each other, people have different ideas… and research can be challenged”. Marion also enjoyed the networks and the ideas that teachers draw from each other saying that these bring:

> things you might not necessarily have thought about and also they might question why you are doing that and they might challenge you which in itself makes you think about the reason behind what you are doing and the avenue you are going …

Marion added that “it is important to have teachers’ opinions, but researchers’ ideas are quite refreshing as well [laughs]”. This reinforces the advantages mentioned by Darling-Hammond (2013) when academics work with teachers. Tim explained that the value of the support and advice from the academic support and from colleagues was significant. Having his ideas challenged is what gives him the impetus to go away and read about the

contested points, which he characterised as “really powerful”. Tim however admits that, working on cultural capital and Bourdieu with teaching colleagues is not of as much interest to them as it is to him. He also recognised on reflection that the implementation of the recommendations of research should take into account the varied cultures of schools and respect the various views that characterise the people engaged in and influenced by research. Research should account for the “practicality in the classroom and the emotional climate, race, gender, class, culture, equity, and inclusiveness” (Alexakos, 2015: 2).

Donna thought that group work acted as a motivating force in undertaking research:

> … I think some people work well as individuals, but support groups give you the confidence to continue… it is like a team and you do not want to let your team down.

Whilst Marlowe saw the benefits of working in a group, arguing that you can be invigorated and gain motivation from working with others, he was the only teacher who argued that:

> my best research is when I am not hindered by certain restrictions and I am allowed to problem solve in my situation rather than to try and prove a point to others … Group work has not essentially made me produce my best work although in a difficult environment I think the group work has helped to motivate me in difficult circumstances…

Marlowe believed that there was a danger where nothing in particular was learned. He did not at this point appear to agree with the idea that he would learn something even in this situation. He identified as more of a lone researcher and was also a teacher that had withdrawn from the programme. Marlowe was facing some problems within the school and was at this time looking for another job. He clearly saw himself as somewhat different to other colleagues which may explain this sense of being a lone researcher,

despite his clear enjoyment of the challenge that research presented for him. It was clear that he was given particular attention during session breaks and that he did interact in sessions despite his sense of isolation. Moreover, his input was valuable and useful within the group. He later acknowledged that he had learned a lot and it seemed rather that his discomfort with his school situation was playing out in his perceptions of undertaking this work. Understandably, within groups there may be some individuals who are experiencing stresses unrelated to the programme that influence their thinking at various point of the experience. Marlowe continued to attend and also engaged with his project for the entirety of the first year.

In this study academic facilitators helped shape the research journey the teachers were engaged on and developed skills within teachers that enabled them to be effective researchers. Burns (2015) professed the value of academic and teacher partnerships in developing research agendas, and in enhancing and enriching the work teachers would do if left to themselves. In addition, Hammersley-Fletcher et al (2020) advocate academics gradually stepping back to allow teachers to increase control over their own research development. Knowledge sharing in schools is moreover key to developing independent professional learning communities (Lave and Wenger, 1998) and here teachers had formed into a research community of practice. Much of the learning in this case was characterised in personal terms such as building confidence, seeing the educational environment more clearly and this helps to develop courage. Alexakos (2015) explained how engaging in research and authentic inquiry had the potential of ensuring that everybody benefits from being involved in research informing both the design and the transformation of practice through development of the person. Teachers working together across schools benefit from others experiences and insights, from mutual support networks that help them stay focussed, they share ideas, sources of information and challenges and this process gradually builds confidence to challenge themselves further. Moreover, working with research experts (whether in person or through literature) provides additional avenues to test out ideas and generate challenges to their thinking. As Eyal and Roth (2011) stated, where school leaders facilitate

teachers to be autonomous and self-directed, it supports teacher motivation and satisfaction. Marion felt strongly that the most important element of undertaking research was the changes that this made to the individual. However, what was less clearly recognised, other than through comments here and there, was the role that the Trust played in facilitating this work. Without their support perhaps some of the schools would not have engaged with research activity (such as Marlowe's school). It was the Trust's focus on this research agenda that facilitated all the teachers with time and opportunities to follow up on their research projects, the end of year celebrations being one way that the Trust emphasised the importance of the programme to the senior leaders of the schools, teachers personal development linking closely to their professional development, which forms the next section.

5.3 UNDERTAKING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The teachers engaging with the Pisces Trust were involved in both accredited research sessions with Bill and wrap around research sessions with Holly in year one, then in year two they were working with various tutors at the University together with continued wrap around sessions at the Trust with Holly. Cain (2018) characterised teacher's attitudes to research as ranging from "cautious optimism" to "strong enthusiasm". Consequently, this section considers how teachers were 'persuaded' to undertake the programme and how they evaluated accreditation and whether they perceived research activity to be a part of what they considered to be continuing professional development.

5.3.1 Engaging with accreditation

Asked what attracted them to the course it became apparent that there were three factors at play in teachers' motivations. Firstly, it was suggested to them by senior staff in the Trust or the School and it was seen as advantageous to engage with the programme. For example, Anne stated: "our executive headteacher let everybody know about the programme, I

thought I would like to do it to develop further". Hattie was recruited by a member of the Trust central team. Rhonda explained that, "I was then told that if I did a Master's degree, this would help me further". Rhonda also realised that she had not fully understood what she had committed herself to until the first session. She advised others thinking of doing the same thing to "learn and know what it is that you are signing up for first". Donna also argued: "when the Executive Head informed me that I should be involved in the research programme, I thought of the potential advantages of becoming engaged in research and I then decided to do it". There was an indication from these responses that likely candidates were targeted by management and this of course may have affected the nature of their engagement with the programme.

None of the teachers interviewed however, indicated any reluctance regarding the programme, in fact they tended towards a belief in the second factor raised, which was that research as a programme would benefit their teaching practices and would develop them professionally. Literature suggests that teachers are able to perform better when they are free to explore their ideas without the confinement of set agendas and targets, and this will ultimately have the same impact on the children they teach. Day et al (2006: xii) found that:

> [Teachers] identified a close association between their sense of positive, stable identity and their self-efficacy and agency – their belief that they could 'make a difference' in the learning and achievement of their pupils.

Rhonda outlined this point saying: "I want to facilitate children and help them to be creative and think differently". Notions of creativity were also highlighted by others in terms of the ideas that research could generate. For example, Anne argued that: "I think research is about trying new ideas of development and having better insight…".

The third factor raised was that accreditation provided some form of proof of capability. For example, Donna, Lorna and Dawn felt the accreditation was a way of ensuring that they had recognition for the work they had undertaken. It is interesting that accreditation holds such weight as a proof of competence and rather suggests that teachers feel that they need extra accreditation to 'professionalise' their role. Sugrue (2009) argued that the desire of teachers for accredited credentials was part of their desire for demonstrating an increased professionalisation of their learning. Arguably therefore accreditation is one way in which teachers can reclaim professional competence in an era where their work has been characterised as that of a technician (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2009). Three teachers were specifically indicating that the accreditation element of their work was beneficial. For example, Lorna, a teaching assistant with a degree in psychology, who by the end of the programme was moving on to engage in teacher training, explained,

> I like research and learning. It is good research because it is accredited and I'm doing it with a group of people. I was told about it in a staff meeting. I am a teaching assistant and I want to progress in my career. Research helps me … I mean to learn is academic and it helps my understanding of my job better.

Anne also explained that, "I undertook research because I was told it was accredited. It has influenced my decision to be involved in research". Donna also appreciated the accreditation.

Marion intimated that had it not been for the accredited recognition towards getting her Master's degree at the end of her research, she would possibly not have continued doing research: "I think I like to do things that are new. I also like to do the next best thing, so having an aim at the end of it is good". The school and Trust demonstrating the importance of accreditation acted as an incentive to conduct the research which she then thoroughly enjoyed. Moreover, the Trust was committed to paying the teachers fees until they

had gained the full Master's degree, which was a substantial commitment on their part.

Being challenged gave all of these teachers a strong sense of purpose and meaning. Most responses reflected a mix of factors motivating their engagement which included the accreditation element. As Marion stated: "I want to challenge myself. I want to research educating early years and beyond. My decision was partly due to accreditation, but more to better the environment and for my professional development". Indeed, Patricia had volunteered to engage with this research activity before knowing that it would also be accredited. So like others, she wanted to engage with research as she saw it as a way to improve practice but additionally saw advantages in gaining accreditation. Sugrue (2009: 379) also argued that "while formal programmes are highly valued, the informal contacts that they sponsor and create are even more highly valued". Gemma illustrated this point:

> …research enhances my personal skills and linked to school and the Trust, it gives you time to reflect and have useful conversations with the people involved in research which makes you have different perspectives.

Teachers were therefore keen to get involved with this work as they saw research as providing them with skills to overcome obstacles in practice, give them opportunities to work with others, debate and share practice and were also beginning to formulate this in ways that embraced engaging with challenges to their own perspectives and practices. Research in and of itself is not however a 'magic bullet' solving all problems faced by teachers. Kelchtermans (2004) argued that the ways in which UK education has come to be constructed leads teachers to the view that pedagogy is a construction of logical and ordered learning environments. Therefore, teachers can be tempted to see the work of the schools and the classroom as replicable and predictable. There are clear signs of this where teachers have notions that they can find a once and for all solution to challenges within the workplace, where this neglects to take account of the unpredictable nature of the people

who populate the environment. ‘One size fits all’ most certainly does not work reliably. “Seen in this light it is not surprising to find that pedagogical practice in schools tends to neglect the complexity of classroom life…” (Kelchtermans, 2004: 284). It seemed here however, that teachers had absorbed the notion that research would not necessarily provide answers, a point discussed further in section 5.4.

There were some who were not totally convinced by undertaking accreditation. For example, Marlowe was somewhat against the constraints of accredited learning:

> I cannot tailor-make an essay to make it sound fancy. That is almost a disenchantment of education because you can find it is this procedure, but when it gets very repetitive ..in the real world you do an action research but you are not confined in that you have to meet deadlines and some formalities. You can take that research where it needs to go… I am not saying oh I want to do it this way because it is the way …it is more like this is wonderful, it is fine and go for it and I think it certainly works in certain conditions and I want to share it to see how far we can go… I may have a great idea but how do I sell such ideas to someone else. That is the thing that has been difficult to me… It is almost marketised agenda.

We see a conflicted set of ideas here. On the one hand Marlowe would like to find new possibilities and try these out with colleagues. He realises that things may not work as expected in differing circumstances. He then talks about his need to sell his ideas to others presumably so that he is taken seriously. This is however marketised language. He then talks about this being a marketised agenda and goes on to implicate the University in this as an institution selling itself to the school market. To some extent these are recognisable representations of the state of current education. However, had Marlowe continued with his engagement it may be that, like Gina, he would have started to identify the political drivers behind terms such as ‘selling’ and been therefore more equipped to critique such ideas. A number of

researchers have believed that teachers “do not do theory and feel threatened by it” (Elliott, 1991). They believed that teachers disregard literature and only used their own experiences or what they researched to guide their classroom practice and that they considered research to be “alien to their experience” (Somekh, 1994: 373). However, this research appears to be indicating the opposite. Whilst it was apparent that theoretical ideas needed to be broken down and presented in accessible ways, after this, teachers were more than happy to engage with them. There was also a story here about teachers who do not get the recognition they would like or deserve (despite Marlowe’s protestations that this is not what he seeks).

Clearly, teachers were working with a complexity of motivations based around improving practice with children and gaining promotion opportunities and/or recognition. Rhonda pointed out that she found the academic sessions very theoretical, so the wrap around research sessions enabled her to access the theory more easily through putting it into practice:

> The research sessions [Master’s] I attended with tutors were quite strong, and highly theoretical, but the practical sessions were presented with tips on how to do this and that and the discussions with others, putting into practice what I have learned was new and interesting and as well it was an interesting challenge to me…So the practical research sessions have impacted upon me and made me think about new ways of approaching … teaching.

This is interesting to consider as this is an unusual mode of delivery, it being rare to have both accreditation and support for undertaking research running alongside one another. It also expresses some of the understandings of the challenges of embedding research at Trust level as they were funding this model. Rhonda’s statement indicates that there might be some benefits to this model, albeit more expensive. She does however explain later that she is not keen on writing for accreditation: “Oh, I feel my strength is in art, but writing and research do not particularly interest me a great deal. I want to put research into practice, to make it an action worth doing…” thus reflecting

Marlowe's argument. This raises some questions around theory and practice where teachers are clearly looking towards 'how can what I am learning be put into practice'. It is this attitude that has added to some criticism of teacher research. Holly however, argued that her sessions whilst based in practice, were underpinned by theoretical perspectives. As stated above and from my observations, this input was made more accessible to teachers through demonstrating its application to the reality of school life. McLaughlin et al (2004) argued that in order to carry out their enquiries, learners are led to acquire the knowledge they need for themselves. He asserted that practical work has a central role to play in education as better understanding is developed through practical application. Hattie was certainly an example of someone who learned from the practical application of learning and because this takes time felt disillusioned with accreditation that judges only based on written assessment and where this is based on a specific timescale for learning. Anne also raised issues around time that were directed at assessment deadlines:

> In a school you have your teaching role, for me as a Subject Lead and Assistant Head, these are my priorities. Ok it is exciting making sure (ehm) that you find the time to do it [research] .. there is a lot to do, but you need to make the time to meet deadlines.

One can sense here a tension between Anne's enjoyment of undertaking research and the pressure of assessment against the background of her professional role.

This section has suggested that teachers enter into accredited professional development for a variety of reasons that are intertwined and linked to their sense of professionalism, of professional duty (particularly in relation to pupils) and for personal development. However, the majority of the teachers in the Pisces Trust based group who were undertaking the accredited research seemed to have become caught up with the details and demands of the assessment rather than focusing on the learning taking place. This became apparent in my observations where in Holly's sessions she was

often asked to clarify how elements of the research skills being covered together with the material covered in the Master's sessions could be used to strengthen the written assessment requirements. This involved additional opening up literature to facilitate teachers to have a deeper engagement with reading theory. Also, at the end of Holly's sessions, discussions often moved into exploration of the assessments and what was needed to meet university requirements at the request of the teachers. It is possible therefore, that the assessment demands acted as a focus and distraction for them. Market models create cultures of uncertainty and thus encourage people to engage with education in a competitive model that demonstrates the superiority of one against the other in the market (Apple, 2001). Additionally, assessment driven education is largely assessed from ever narrowing perspectives and thus favour conformity to a particular view of what it is to be educated (Schostak, 2014). As such, accreditation may be acting to mitigate against some of the purposes of the research activity which is to get teachers excited about research. This is a possibility I will return to in the discussion of the data in Chapter Seven.

5.3.2 Research as Continuing Professional Development

The value of research as part of teachers' CPD was a point of discussion over many sessions and at each end of year presentation day. It was clear how much teachers had been motivated and excited by undertaking small scale research projects. Teachers were describing their research activity as clearly meeting their definition of professional development. That is, it added to their professional knowledge and experience and involved them in engaging with finding out about aspects of their roles within schools to the benefit of themselves, the children they taught and the organisation as a whole. They could talk comfortably and confidently about the literature and very supportively about how the Trust had facilitated this work. This means, as Lewin (1946) advocated, that when teachers engage with examining aspects of their own practice, it then impacts on the depth of their critical reflections. Indeed, Gina felt that the Trust was addressing elements of staff development that the Government was ignoring through facilitating this work.

Patricia stated: “I can definitely say I am not the same person I was last year. I am far more confident … doing my practice and in my ability to reflect and use the data to address a topic…”. Patricia also described engaging with a research group as “slightly daunting” but she argued that it was much more enjoyable, meaningful and valid as a result of this discomfort. The notion that research could be made accessible and could become part of normal practice was for Dawn a real break-through in her understanding. She realised that small changes added value to daily life and that one could incrementally make changes. Marion argued that: “the stuff last year we were doing with [name] such as epistemology, ontology, things like that, I do not fully understand that completely blows… my brain had fully burst at the end of that …”. Marion had honed her skills as a result of her engagement in this programme. She also noted that the school she had worked in previously had no emphasis on doing anything related to research: “There was no thinking behind what happens beyond the four walls and it all became very mundane”. Lorna expressed her admiration of the programme saying that:

> I think the CPD that we get offered here is ideal, because we could share it with other schools … imagine we are going to other schools in [Trust schools in the area] to have [subject] training, and I think you would not get that if you were not part of the MAT because there is no funding for it ... Everyone from every school has something to give which is nice.

By virtue of engaging in research Lorna was getting more opportunities to mix with people from other schools and beyond, which was providing teachers with “so much more opportunities, it is not what you have to do to meet the requirements, it is what can we do to actually make you practice better.” So, Lorna characterised the opportunities offered by the Trust such as this programme, as offering ways to enhance teachers both as a professional and as a team. She saw this as unusual. Such recognitions

were beginning to ensure that all saw the advantages of working in a Trust prepared to actively support research.

Donna characterised research as somewhat daunting and overwhelming but knowing that it is relevant in her work has helped her a lot. Donna also explained that the extent to which teachers benefit from undertaking research relates to how far they are driven and motivated to gain from research:

> …and where they are at in their careers, because you expect somebody who is new to teaching and qualifications - they need time to establish themselves as class teachers for the things to become embedded for them, otherwise taking that next step can become completely overwhelming.

Donna felt that the philosophy of the Trust challenged current trends for 'one size fits all'.

> … if you have been in education for as long as I have you will understand… if you are thinking when the government is talking about closing the gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged, we still have CPD for all.

This is an interesting political point made by Donna which seemed to suggest that she thought government had simplistic solutions around 'closing the gap' which led to uniform CPD being offered across schools. At the same time, the Trust were trying to engage teachers as individuals to work in different ways whilst still addressing some elements of this issue, given their social justice remit. It could be argued that 'closing the gap' is in itself a neoliberal driver of change. The market agenda for schools and treating all schools the same, is indicative that such a call is far away from the realities of school life. Ball and Youdell (2007) emphasised that neo-liberal agendas have made schools in England compete and raise their education results, by adopting whatever means make this possible.

For Hattie, research opportunities like this were something from which her colleagues would benefit:

> if teachers knew what was happening, they would really be interested and that might change their practice, ehm … I think something like this would be easy for the Trust. I think the research paper you and Holly write could be shared across the Trust and outside the Trust.

Hattie had outlined in her interview that she had not yet been given access to any of Holly's research reports (these were reports from interviews separate to this work) but, was aware that Holly had undertaken interviews for several years across the Trust. In conversation I was aware that Holly had presented her reports to the Pisces Trust and then to senior leaders at annual leadership residentials. Clearly there were some problems with heads and senior leaders not then sharing the report with staff and this raises questions about why this was if the reports were designed to make an impact on schools. Perhaps senior leaders felt that the messages were for them and that they were not appropriate to share with staff which raises some questions about how information is handled within a hierarchical structure of the Trust. It seemed a shame that the Trust, who were supporting research activity at a number of levels, were clearly meeting with some lack of understanding at the level of the senior leaders in schools who did not appear to see the importance of sharing such information. I do know, however, that this issue was being directly addressed by Holly at a forthcoming heads residential where she would be challenging the senior leaders to be more transparent with the data in these reports. Elmore (2006) argued it was incumbent upon schools to collaborate and share knowledge in order to improve their practices. In fact, one of the key dimensions for successful leadership is improving the conditions for teaching and learning in schools and building relationships inside and outside the school community (Day and Sammons, 2016). Hattie was clearly annoyed and was also sceptical about whether she would see what I had written about my research which she regarded as "really pointless" if it wasn't shared. There are ethical

dilemmas tied into working with teachers who then do not get to see what has been written about them. I was conscious of my duty to report back to teachers from my study.

Moira thought that the Trust could benefit from a lot of additional cross-trust work around the curriculum: "I am not aware of any cross-school work that is going on at the moment. That may well be ... yes I know the Trust Art festival and Charity work across the schools ... but I am talking about curriculum-based sharing." The notion of sharing curriculum innovation was one of the expected outcomes of the Trust engaging in this programme as they hoped that over time, as more teachers got to know each other across schools with a focus on teaching and learning, such sharing would become part of the everyday practices of the schools. There were signs, as I have previously noted, that this was beginning to take place. Gina offered some insights into the rationale for the programme as she saw it:

> Compared to the government agenda… I see that staff on the one hand feel they have to gain these qualifications to move up the professional ladder which is all quite understandable. On the other hand, I get the impression from the Trust that they have a more holistic approach and reasons for staff to do the research because they feel that staff can generally support students better … the Trust look at the destination of children rather than the result … and teachers are more important to the Trust. The government agenda looks for straightforward answers … but I do not think it is as straightforward as that …

An understanding of the profound difference research could make to the individual was echoed by many undertaking this academic research programme because teachers realised the difference that becoming part of a research community was making to them. Fielding and Bragg (2003) asserted the importance of creating researchers in schools, students amongst them, and the advantages research would bring to them as organisations and as individuals. Whilst they might not have seen

themselves in the first year of this research as teacher researchers, teachers were clearly identifying themselves as more open, more critically reflective, more questioning of practice. By the second year they were seeing themselves as research active teachers. In other words, they were teachers who read literature and could identify issues in practice that needed investigation. Furthermore, they could instigate appropriate forms of research and data collection to enable them to comment upon and change practice around the issues identified. Lave (1991: 65) concluded: “people … do learn and do come to have knowledgeably skilled identities of various sorts” when they participate in communities of practice. Clearly, this was a Trust that was prepared to facilitate teachers with time, academic support and with spaces for discussion that was allowing teachers to develop teacher researcher community identities. Moreover, my research indicated that these teachers were shifting in terms of their identity and were in the early stages of ‘figuring’ themselves as researchers (Holland et al, 1998).

5.4 CHALLENGES AND SUSTAINABILITY

For the Pisces Trust and for the University staff, the engagement of teachers in research seems prompted by the demands of education. The desire to have teachers thinking ‘outside the box’, exploring their own ideas and coming up with new ideas modified in line with the research they engage in is viewed by Tilly (Chapter Four) as opening opportunities to explore new arenas and potentials. It is hoped that teachers will feel the need to sharpen their practices and challenge themselves, their knowledge and ideas, plus the established curricula that they teach. From the previous section we saw that teachers wanted to develop their critical thinking, reflecting on issues that were not initially part of their thinking. In this way, teachers felt more able to meet the demands of education. I was interested first to examine what concerned teachers about this journey and whether research activity was something that teachers would recommend to others. Second, I explored what support networks the teachers valued throughout this

experience. Finally, I briefly consider the end of year celebrations where the teachers present the results of their research experiences.

5.4.1 Recommending Research to Teachers

Teachers seemed on the whole to be embracing the engagement with research activity on offer and saw it as sustainable. Tim wanted to tell teachers who felt cautious about engaging in research within his school:

> If you feel apprehensive then hopefully by the time I finish, I can support you, then we can recruit others to do research…. Happily, it is an amazing opportunity to contribute in a way that enables us to reflect on our collective experience. I get a positive vibe from this. If I inspire one of the children who I work with to do something amazing then I feel my duty is complete.

This is interesting as Tim was clearly expressing this as an achievement in terms of shifting pupil activity to do 'something amazing' which draws the narrative back to the original expressions teachers' made about the purposes of research. Lorna told teachers who were thinking about engaging in research to do it and then she reflected:

> Definitely do it, although time constraints matter, but doing research helps in my day to day job. Research helps with your actual job and allows you to communicate fully with others and research other groups and their experiences and perspectives.

Others also felt that as they began to gain familiarity with undertaking research that they could blend this into their everyday experience so that it was not an add on to their day that was time consuming or as matter of resentment or compromise. Instead it could be part of planned activity conducted as part of the work of teaching and as an asset to it. For these teachers it allowed them to think more critically and to reflect more often on practices that had thus far been taken for granted.

Rhonda, a teacher who had attended the non-accredited programme the previous year, had some frustrations as her research results did not say what she had expected them to say and she had been worried about presenting these results to others. However, once she had undertaken her presentation and explained her data and the reasons for her conclusions, she had experienced a lot of support from the audience. “People know that you have to listen to the data, to what the data tells you, but you might not get your own way. This is not a failure but a different way of looking at things.” This was an important lesson for Rhonda that had remained with her and had made her open up to possibilities that gut feelings or expectations are not always correct. It was also important to her that the community of teacher researchers had supported her. Gemma stressed that:

> Draw strength from doing your research and from other people who have done it and managed to succeed in doing it while they are doing their jobs. I recommend it to others to keep learning and challenge what they do.

Gemma was also drawing on a community to aid thinking and processes of critique which linked clearly to notions of communities of practice where mutual support and inspiration can be found and which keeps one actively engaged. Wells (2002: 202) argued that building a community of inquiry, a community of practice in which learners work together in groups on related inquiries, who meet regularly to review and reflect on their activities and the progress that has been achieved, provide ideas that have: “contributed to the forging of a common understanding”. So not only is the community useful as a resource, but it also helps develop commonalities of understanding which add to the bonds between individuals within the group. In this way it seemed that the teachers engaged in research were forming communities of practice across schools where they had relied on each other as a resource and for guidance.

Anne, conveyed that she would always recommend research as it is “about trying new things not getting stuck in your ways.” This notion of self-reflection and development was strong amongst the teachers engaged in this work. It may be however that they have absorbed market ideals about constant improvement and development alongside the notion that continuing same practices was somehow a negative thing to do. As Donna, pointed out that:

> You have got nothing to lose, you develop your skills as a practitioner, you will always do it. I recommend it. I think it will improve you as a practitioner and educator. Research provides you with new things to draw on and everything to learn and try again and again.

Teachers can feel accountable for meeting targets at the expense of their professionalism (Larsen, 2010). This, as Gunter (2011) envisaged, has created a culture that colonised the professional practice of teachers. However, research could provide new energy and new ideas, but it may also confirm practices that were already in place.

Anne also spoke about her enhanced ability to lead changes that came as a result of being involved in research. Dave, who had undertaken the non-accredited programme led by Holly in the previous year, argued that, like Rhonda, his research had not produced the answers he was looking for, but that he had learned a great deal from it around how better to communicate with colleagues across different schools, “and this had enabled me to be a better leader knowing how to communicate with people and understand their needs”. He felt that engaging in research had helped him reflect on his own performance more openly and recognise that his lack of communication skills had caused issues for his project. He also reported that, as a consequence, he was really enjoying working with others this year and believed that research could open up new potentials within staff. Moreover, he and Rhonda had continued research activity beyond the activity undertaken with Holly. There was something being expressed by the teachers about learning new skills in handling colleagues and others which led them to see themselves as having developed new leadership skills. Therefore, the

teachers were arguing that undertaking research was a valuable approach to thinking about practice in schools, that it was something that developed your skills and that aided student learning and also that it opened up possibilities of building a new community of people to draw on. For example, Dawn looked at truancy as part of her research. She visited other Trusts and schools and identified staff willing to co-operate with her to develop school provision. As a result of her work school exclusions had dropped and attendance had improved. So, Dawn was seeing identifiable benefits for the school, the pupils and for her own practice. With this in mind, I was interested to know what support mechanisms teachers had drawn on through this experience.

5.4.2 Reflections on Support for Research

Heyler (2015: 8) posited that learning through reflection is critical in work-based learning: "Reflecting on learning achievements can empower the learner to make intelligent decisions about how to move ahead with their learning needs … People instinctively reflect on events, perhaps to better understand what has happened and make sense of it." Teachers make a huge emotional investment in their professional development which Day et al (2006: 12) comment on explaining: "because of their emotional investment, teachers inevitably experience a range of negative emotions when control of long-held principles and practices is challenged, or when trust and respect from parents, the public and their students is eroded".

So, we begin to see that this is a journey that teachers do not enter into lightly. All of the teachers at some point mentioned the difficulty in balancing home life, work and study. It is easy to dismiss such views in attitudes such as "if they really want to do this they will find time", but it became clear this was a very personal investment for teachers so this commitment also had possibilities for negative consequences should they fail to achieve their accreditation. Moreover, teaching is an emotional profession and emotions play an influencing part in shaping teachers' identities and their personalities (Zembylas, 2003). "More attention needs to be given to the importance of the

role of emotion in understanding and developing the capacities for reflection which facilitates personal, professional and ultimately system change." (Leitch and Day, 2000). Emotions are the necessary link between the social structures in which teachers work and the ways they act. Barbalet (2002: 4) posited:

> Emotion is provoked by circumstance and is experienced as transformation of dispositions to act. It is through the subject's active exchange with others that emotional experience is both stimulated in the actor and orienting of their conduct. Emotion is directly implicated in the actor's transformation of their circumstances, as well as the circumstances' transformation of the actors' disposition to act.

This research programme involved exploration with academics working alongside the teachers. In some ways the trust developed between the teachers and Holly around undertaking research helped negate some of the difficulties these teachers felt when they were opening up practice to scrutiny in ways that demonstrated the importance of trust within the group. Teachers were also building research and study support networks, some around their connections external to school, such as Patricia who said:

> My boyfriend is good with literature review. He is an academic. He helps me with my research. There are also friends and colleagues who support me academically and with queries. I also get support network from friends and our tutor at [the university].

Patricia was clearly making use of a variety of people and their expertise to support her along both her accreditation journey and through developing her research expertise. Donna also found the help she got from her family and friends crucial for her engagement in academic study: "I have some of my family members helping me in doing housework and shopping to allow me time to work, also some do my proof reading". Others explained that they gained research ideas and academic support both from the school and the Trust. Marion stated:

> I have drawn on support from my boss, the Executive Head, through them discussing my proposal with me and also, I had support from my husband, my voice of reason. We also have a little support network. We are three teachers doing the same programme...

In Marion's case her support seemed well rounded in that she was able to check her research thinking against that of a number of other people and develop her accreditation skills alongside others on the programme.

All of the teachers seemed happy to engage in research as long as it did not overly interfere with their main professional and familial duties. Nevertheless, this did not mean that they were uncritical of the programme offered. Marion mentioned some issues about the way it was conducted and handled despite an overall sense of progress:

> The course has been good, although there is a long time between sessions [accredited]…. (sighing) a little more time on the assignment is needed and academic writing needs to be looked at (shaking head), hubs and sharing ideas through research is very useful... I think the sessions have been challenging and there is a lot to cram in such a space of time….. Oh yes, and the research sessions [wrap around sessions] have been stimulating and they made me always keen to start, and I have changed as a teacher. Research has had a massive impact on me, my performance, time management, and action research.

Marion's assessment of the research course she was involved in was therefore multifaceted. She was very happy with the outcome of research, but the logistics of the accredited element of the course, the way the course was organised and delivered needed reviewing. She argued that some of the accredited delivery had been very functional and process driven which was difficult to absorb and not very exciting. In contrast the research sessions were more hands-on thinking about how theory can shed light on practice.

She went on to reflect that undertaking research projects “does not take a huge amount of time, but you have to have the enthusiasm to do it, and then time can be managed”. The course, she argued, had a positive impact upon her and had changed her as a teacher. Patricia also explained: “as expected the research has a lot of different elements of what is expected … (pause) a lot of information to pack in, in a short time. We are overwhelmed by that but it is ok.” This was not the first time the notion of being overwhelmed had arisen. Teachers are clearly working at full capacity and therefore taking on additional work was a challenge particularly where this work involved writing assessments. This was an interesting issue that is compared to the TSA group who are not undertaking accreditation in the following chapter.

Anne saw the wrap around research support sessions as interesting.

> It makes you think of things in a different way ... (ehm) explore issues differently, learn from other people’s experiences. Some of the sessions have been challenging making me think it is about developing in me, the belief that I can do something to change … (pause) as my perspectives and the way I look into things have changed a bit. I am now a bit more inquisitive, wonder whether it is doing other things. I try to apply what I learn to other issues I encounter.

Lorna added:

> I think the research sessions [wrap around ones] have been great, [Holly] and other tutors during the hub days and discussions with other teachers, networking, it is really powerful. I have been learning different methods of research, different phrases, concepts and writing exercises … Through communication I have learned so much from research and it influenced my thinking.

There was a general consensus that the provocations offered as part of the wrap around research course had caused teachers to pause and re-think

some of the taken for granted assumptions that they held. They realised that they were being made more aware of what was happening and to think about why things were happening as they did. Donna explained how the ideas gained from the research support sessions had become part of family time with her discussing the new ideas she is encountering at home.

The teachers were therefore indicating that they drew on the whole range of resources available to them and that they were developing as teachers and changing in terms of how they saw their work and the work of the school having gained a more enquiry-based mode of thinking. It can be argued that when teachers opt to join any form of CPD they are in fact aspiring to change their practices, modify them and find something that suits them. Schostak et al (2010: 71) described CPD as being *"aspirational"* and individually based, not necessarily *"run by any agency"*. In other words, Holly and Bill were acting to facilitate such shifts rather than control them or constrain them through applying too much scaffolding. Nevertheless, the accredited route did present some constraints that a few found difficult to embrace mainly involved around the constraints of time to write and the format within which their experiences should be recorded. It is possible to argue that learning had taken place irrespective of the accreditation. However, for others the accreditation was an important way of recognising the work they had undertaken. In this way, CPD helped teachers to gain knowledge and engage in change to improve self-practice and reflection (Schostak et al, 2010). As Hattie explained, research gave her the legitimacy to do what she thought was right in schools, as long as she could demonstrate evidence that learning had taken place to support her argument.

5.4.3 Celebrating Research - looking back

At the end of each year of research the teachers were encouraged to present their work at the Trust's headquarters to both Trust staff and the senior leaders of their schools. Each presenter had fifteen minutes to present their projects and five minutes to discuss their presentations through

questions from the audience. The value of celebrating the drawing together of a piece of research was something that both worried and excited the teachers. The warmth of the reception and questions that they had from colleagues and senior staff alike gave the research group a sense that they had done something considered very worthwhile. In observing these presentations, the excitement and enjoyment each teacher had in relation to having taken part in this activity was clear. They were engaging and enthused about their various topics, they were using academic terms while making these accessible to colleagues. Further, they demonstrated an understanding of how the literature that they had been reading could be used as stimulus for raising questions and as a challenge for current 'taken for granted' practices. They also demonstrated good understandings of the methods they had adopted and raised ethical dilemmas as part of their presentations. The teachers had been careful in their selection of relevant material, literature and data, to make a well-reasoned and well-argued case which was clearly impressing the senior staff present.

Marlowe celebrated what he referred to as the 'outstanding projects' undertaken by colleagues talking about how they had all taken responsibility and were in charge of their own research. He advised teachers: "If you don't feel flummoxed by it …it is important … it is nice to share and it is almost the final reflection and being a presentation it forces you to do it with preciseness."

Gina was very impressed with the presentations from colleagues and believed this demonstrated just how much they had all developed during the programme in their thinking and innovation. She pointed out that all of the presentations discussed what they were going to do next which she saw as having engaged teachers in something that would live on in these staff. One teacher mentioned in a second year focus group that once one gets the research bug, it is hard to give it up or stop. After Lorna presented her project at the end of the first year she explained:

> it is nice to show what you have learnt and to show each other what you have learnt … I mean this is really nice, and anyone who wants to know more about the bit of research I presented can speak to me, but actually we all gunna learn something different because we are all doing something different, but I think it is really nice, although it was slightly nerve racking (Laughs) but it was definitely worth doing and I advise everyone to do it ..I am excited to do it again (Laughs).

Marion thought that in the end of year presentations in front of colleagues, headteachers and others, where they were given the opportunity to critique what they heard, it was quite a daunting experience. Nevertheless, she felt that this offered the opportunity to showcase what they had learned. The teachers wanted colleagues to see what they had achieved and how useful it was. “Following their own agendas for research and enquiry, rather than those of the school or policy makers,” (McLaughlin, et al, 2004:6) facilitated teachers to accomplish something that they saw as useful and applicable to others. Moreover, throughout their conversations and interviews they had talked about research as ongoing activity. They had already outlined new ideas to take forward after my involvement in this work. It seemed this was a sustainable model for getting teachers research active. This would however require ongoing support from the Trust in promoting the value of such work, facilitating continued time for teacher researcher community formation and in garnering support from external experts. In this way the early development of a more research active culture will have time to become embedded in the everyday work of these schools.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided considerable evidence to suggest that teachers were engaged with undertaking research. It indicated that teachers began with an interpretation of research that was focussed on problem solving in terms of classroom practice. It was also clear that teachers felt the pressure of gaining good results for their students, for meeting all student needs and

for growing them as useful citizens who would have positive life chances. It also became obvious as they gained experience, that teacher's notions of research were growing in sophistication. They began to acknowledge shifts in their own thinking and the need to be more open. The reflections from the previous non-accredited students included here seem particularly pertinent and suggest that reflections on the research journey become clearer over time. Here both acknowledged some disappointment with their own research outcomes but then acknowledged that valuable learning had come from this. Each had also achieved promotions since undertaking this work. They put this down to some extent to becoming more flexible in their thinking as a result of their research activity.

Another important issue raised by this data is the acknowledgement of the community of colleagues in the group as resources and sounding boards. The activity and input of the academic staff was expressed as very supportive of deeper learning and stimulating them to think more clearly. Moreover, the teachers saw their research activity as a very effective part of their CPD. They talked very warmly of the Pisces Trust's unusual level of support for such work and that they had not experienced this level of support elsewhere. Meaningful learning, was uncomfortable but rewarding, based on a complex mixture of factors that offered up different challenges at different points in this process. The teachers, whilst nervous, also valued presenting their work to others and feeling that their efforts were appreciated by senior leaders. This perhaps demonstrates the isolation of teachers who often undertake work and change that does not receive this level of attention. Teachers clearly enjoyed recognition of their efforts. They were also boosted by the feeling that others could see the value of their work.

It was also an emotional journey orientated for the teachers around an emotional job involving their commitment to children. Greenberg and Baron (2000) state that unless teachers understand and appreciate that there is a need for change to the system and way of doing things in schools, they would not be in favour of changing the status quo. Teachers here were working in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1998) acknowledging

their shifts in thinking together around the need for change. Notions around communities of practice are developed further in Chapter Seven. Other key factors in their journeys orientated around their rationales for undertaking this work and despite some being reluctant, they had found the programme to be exciting and engaging if harder than expected. The teachers were at the same time anxious about the extent of their commitment and how this would fit into their daily work together with a concern that they might 'let others down'. This had not appeared on the whole to dampen their enthusiasms for the research activity although they had become somewhat fixated on meeting the assessment requirements particularly nearing the time assignments were due to be handed in. This raised issues around the accreditation agenda which needs further exploration. Having said this those who continued with accreditation appeared excited about gaining a qualification and recognition, a driver that had appeared to get stronger as they progressed. They were also stimulated by the readings and activities involved. Those who did not continue doing the accredited course also saw the value of academic literature and research activity in stimulating thinking.

In all cases teacher identity appeared to have shifted to a greater or lesser extent to include research as part of their approach with those continuing the work into the second year having developed slightly more sophisticated notions of what it means to be a researcher developing agency in line with notions of figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998). This notion of figured worlds and identity is developed in Chapter Seven. All the teachers were talking about how this activity would inform their future practice. However, there were struggles between demands around their teacher identity and their research identity. This was easier in some cases than in others and this seemed somewhat dependent upon the senior leadership and culture of the school within which they were based. In other words, the practicality of undertaking the role was more challenging in some settings. It was also clear that teachers were battling with themselves in terms of having to think differently and perhaps let go of long held ideas about how schools should function. Seeing all the activities around them as dependent on potentially

arbitrary decisions, perhaps made with no educative thought behind them, open to discussion was quite an unsettling experience.

In Chapter Six, I look at the contrasting setting of the Aquarius Alliance where the teachers have had a longer history of engaging with such a journey. This will provide a foil against which I can reflect more deeply about these data and draw out important aspects of the work to discuss in the discussion chapter (Chapter Seven).

CHAPTER SIX

THE AQUARIUS ALLIANCE: A REFLECTION ON RESEARCH ACTIVITY AMONGST TEACHERS

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Six presents an analysis of the data collection conducted with six teachers from the Aquarius Alliance. Data from the research commissioners at the Alliance was presented in Chapter Four. The teachers were: Shirley, Peter, Stephen, Brenda, Molly and Esme (see Table 3.2). The number of teachers present in the research sessions amounted to19 in total and the interviews took place at the end of year one (see Appendix Five).

The chapter is designed to facilitate comparisons with Chapter Five, once again picking up on issues related to the value of research, the value of group work, the value of academic input alongside research as CPD and its benefits to individuals as teachers. A significant difference between the contexts is that in the Aquarius Alliance they are following the unaccredited part of the research programme only. A Teaching School Alliance (TSA) is a collection of schools where a lead ‘outstanding’ school (as identified through government body inspection) gains ‘teaching school’ status on application to the government and can then provide other schools with professional development activities that are paid for by the participating schools and from some government funding to the Teaching School. A teaching school is likely to be applying for additional funding grants for specific pieces of work that add to their ability to lead school development along lines that are of interest to the group of schools as a whole. The budget that the teaching school holds must be accounted for and the partner schools have a voice in developing the school improvement agenda. In some cases, particular schools ‘buy in’ to particular activities. In this case all the schools were

contributing financially and by providing staff with time to this research development programme.

The Aquarius Alliance is made up of nine schools (one secondary and eight primary schools) centred around one Teaching School in the North of England which holds a responsibility to develop the practices and leadership skills in the other schools. The Lead school has a strong track record, having been judged on three occasions as 'outstanding' by Ofsted and is firmly rooted in a philosophy of staff development through critical challenge facilitated by undertaking research activity that crosses school boundaries. Moreover, the Alliance targets teachers in order to develop their enthusiasms, skills and their ability to challenge both their own practices as well as the practices of others. As a result, the lead school has attracted a mixed range of schools (in terms of Ofsted outcomes) from the same locality to join together in order to contribute financially to a series of research and leadership development activities that were (at the completion of my research) entering their eighth year. The lead school research commissioners (Maria and Norah) played significant roles in developing the research activity programme working in close association with the academic research lead (Holly). This work had begun some years previously with an accredited Master's programme delivered by Holly at the teaching school, but as the costs for that were increased, the accredited study course was dropped in favour of the learning that was taking place.. After three years, the group moved to a non-accredited, university supported, research development programme, which made this an interesting example to contrast with the Pisces Trust. A range of staff were writing academic articles with Holly and were presenting at academic conferences. The venues for the development sessions were mainly based at the lead school's training room, but also moved at times to other schools. The main training room was light, if a little noisy, and had a lot of posters on the walls from previous developmental activities reflecting staff views and opinions of and about education. This environment was a more typical schools and was not as visually arresting as the Pisces Trust headquarters.

As a consequence of the Aquarius Alliance's engagement in non-accredited research, this chapter highlights the significance of undertaking 'research for research's sake', as the teachers engaged on this programme were those whose main aim was to learn and improve their knowledge, be up-to-date with what is happening in their field, as well as to learn how to conduct academic research and to make use of other people's research. The partnership between the university academic and the Alliance's teachers was designed to pave the way for the teachers to become independent researchers who could subsequently undertake quality research work on their own. Holly, moreover, invited occasional academic guests to lead a part of a session and to share their work with the group.

This means that that teachers are cast merely as 'appliers' of others' ideas. This perspective fails to acknowledge the mutually beneficial elements of partnership between school staff and academics which were operating in this study. During the period where I gathered my research data, sessions took place involving cross-school research groups consisting of a teacher research lead, a teacher subject-expert and a teacher new to research, all of whom would work in one of the Alliance schools where the teacher new to research was based. Moreover they would focus on a topic selected by that teacher. They were tasked with acting democratically together to share ideas, conduct and analyse research and then make decisions about practices to help the teacher, based on a model of mutual respect. I revealed how collaborative research partnerships affirmed shared beliefs about the value of research activity. Also how, as it grew, what Norah described as a 'maturity model' of research, emerged for all the schools involved. The same structure adopted in Chapter Five is followed in this chapter in order to highlight the similarities and differences between the two groups, beginning with questions around the purposes of research and moving through an examination of the aspects of personal and then professional development, then looking at challenges and sustainability before reaching the conclusion.

6.1 EXPERIENCING UNDERTAKING RESEARCH

In the Aquarius Alliance the intensions of the delivery team and commissioning staff (laid out in Chapter Four) was one of freeing teachers to undertake research that interested them as individuals. The Aquarius schools used their engagement in research as a way of launching discussions and debate that were based on constructive criticism and investigating issues arising from their discussions and practices (Brown and Flood, 2018). During this particular research cycle, work involved research active staff (who had previously worked with Holly and Maria) together with subject specialist staff, in supporting teachers to address issues identified by the teachers themselves. However, the subject experts were placed in research teams outside of their usual subject expertise so that they would need to think about how their subject pedagogical knowledge might be translated into thinking about a different subject. In addition, in order to carry out their project, they also had to listen to the opinions of others delivering the subject. Crowther et al (2009) explained that when appropriate, leaders should allow others to take over facilitating the tasks, as this would reinforce the idea that facilitation is about the group and not the leader. Hence the leader, facilitator, should be egoless and prepared to share the ideas and issues of concern with the teachers. To address this point, research activity was focussed around notions of ‘agonistic democracy’ (Hammersley-Fletcher et al, 2018). In other words, teachers were applying theory to better understand themselves and their research development through a consideration of engaging with plurality of voice; contesting all contributions on a respectful basis; and learning that to change practices they must sometimes relinquish long established ways of working. Holly also invited the heads to one session to talk with them about how to facilitate this work in their schools and to help them to gain an understanding of agonistic democracy and what was being asked of staff. Sessions were focussed on a consideration of research literature, on employing a variety of research approaches, on attempting to level any sense of hierarchy that might exist

within research teams and on considering together what data may be saying about practice. Appadurai (2006) argued that teacher research is a way of promoting capacity building and that this was a goal envisaged by the research commissioning team through research enhancing the voice and confidence of teachers. There was consequently a strong message about empowering the classroom teacher in this process, examples of which are given later in this chapter. All those interviewed had previously attended at least one year of research induction led by Holly. The data which are presented is drawn from semi-structured interviews from six teachers of the 19 that attended the programme sessions.

6.1.1 Experiences of this research journey

Lave and Wenger (1991) advocated that people may learn more when they place themselves at the centre of a learning community. In attending sessions at the Aquarius Alliance it became clear that the majority of teachers knew each other well. They were a welcoming group and clearly had a good relationship with Holly. Sessions were lively and engaged, teachers readily asked questions of Holly and each other, demonstrating enthusiasm for the projects that they were undertaking. They also shared reading and experiences with the others in the group. Everyone contributed to the discussion albeit some more frequently than others. There were a range of experiences of the research journey and at interview these teachers often referred to work that encompassed several years of activity. The following subsections present teachers' key experiences of research.

6.1.1.a Subject Expertise

Su and Wood (2012) argued that subject expertise is not sufficient in itself to make an effective teacher. Learning that helps people work and understand better can be more valid than knowledge they acquire from subject expertise. Maria the Aquarius Alliance lead was convinced of the need to shake up normal practices within the Alliance and challenge some of the prevailing assumptions around leadership and power. As a result, and in liaison with Holly, Maria decided that it would be interesting to challenge subject leaders

by placing them in research teams outside of their subject expertise. Molly, now an experienced researcher, argued that this year's focus, putting non-subject-expert teams together to solve an issue outside of the expertise of the team, appeared worrying to some heads. They believed that subject experts should lead the research groups. Nevertheless, Molly explained that these non-expert groups had come up with refreshing ideas to solve problems, in ways that had proved extremely valuable that had convinced the heads that this had been a worthwhile strategy. For example, Esme an experienced researcher worked with a group that developed the notion of sound walks as part of staff induction. This was a development from work with Holly and drew on Gallagher et al (2017) to provide a powerful technique for introducing new members of staff to school culture through a series of carefully planned listening activities.

Brenda an experienced subject leader explained that placing experts in areas of non-expertise had forced them to gather around the table as experts in pedagogy with knowledge about how children learn, rather than as curriculum specialists. However, Brenda stated that it had proved difficult for her to stand back and let others undertake the work in ways that they preferred:

> I guess tensions for me I can see from where I am sitting, I can see where things should go but that does not necessarily mean where they have gone. That can be a little bit frustrating I suppose. The teachers that I am leading on this research are less experienced and obviously I am more experienced, and I know the way to go and that is what it is about, empowering them. So, I am quite a control freak. It is difficult for me to take that step back.

It is interesting that Brenda believed that it was possible that she had a better answer in terms of the research project development, but at the same time she recognised that the point of joint work was to allow others to develop skills and find their own ways through research activity and therefore she needed to facilitate this to happen. This indicated a tension within Brenda

between reverting to notions where one is the lead and directs the work, to a new position where one needs to allow things to develop in ways that one may not be entirely comfortable with. She was clearly experiencing a conflict within herself and drew on theories of agonistic democracy to explain these tensions, discussing her need to recognise plurality of voice and the need to give up elements of leadership to facilitate the possibility of something new taking place. The seemingly unconscious reference to herself as the leader however indicated that she had not, as yet, fully understood her own role within a team of equals. Brenda had moreover allowed the group to progress in its own way, trying to conquer the urge to redirect efforts, but this too did not recognise her role as an equal member of the group with a right to voice ideas on an equal basis to others.

Stephen, another subject leader, believed that research had an impact on his professional identity and referenced the sessions with Holly around stepping back from taking a leading role in the group:

> It made me reflect on my leadership style. I would say … I can be quite bossy, not on purpose, but directive, whereas the research we had with [Holly], encouraged me to be a little bit more democratic in terms of how to lead people … it made me more willing to take risks and try things. Furthermore, research has made us more able to create and invent. Research has also confirmed what I know already, the idea of being open-minded to change, I think definitely it changed my understanding of what makes a good leader and obviously being a teacher enthusiastically engaged in research, and open-minded to that has been really eye opening to me.

The notion of letting go of power so that Stephen was open to new possibilities was an important one for those staff used to taking leadership positions. This allowed Stephen to see new possibilities for learning. He was engaged in a project looking at developing the depth of writing skills across secondary and primary schools. The triad had engaged other staff on the project each working with small groups of pupils. Writing skills improved over

the term of the project with further work planned to continue this development. As a team, Stephen argued, that they had gained a deeper understanding of pedagogy, having the courage to try new approaches and had built confidence that evened the hierarchy of the relationships across the staff involved. The project had led to the engagement of children as mentors, staff development activity, and a policy and practice review amongst other things. Notions of agonistic democracy had allowed the team to examine their working practices more candidly and led to them challenging each other in ways that facilitated rigorous debate.

Esme thought that teachers in general were known to be "very controlling", and when she first started doing this research, especially open-ended research,

> it was really scary, so for me it [research] helped me to overcome that, and not be as controlling (laughs) in the classroom, and outside and I think it is a very empowering thing, so I can say, I'm doing this because I've either read some research or I want to give this a go because I want to undertake some research at the same time.

The programme was not designed to consider leadership specifically, although Holly did argue that it was, in less explicit ways, all about leadership. Neither was the focus of my questioning around leadership. But for those with leadership positions, the work was providing them with some challenges. Stephen felt that he had made a shift in his understandings and had seen implications from his research experience in how he might behave in leadership roles as well as recognising the importance of staying open-minded. Brenda too was shifting her position although still had some steps to take in fully understanding her new position. It was clear however that this challenge to leadership roles envisaged by Maria and Holly was having a powerful impact, accomplished through a focus on a piece of literature used to underpin practice. This moreover highlights the depth of the shift in understandings needed from school leaders in order to facilitate staff to

direct their own learning and activities in meaningful ways. Consequently, teachers can sustain their engagement in research.

6.1.1.b Inducting staff into research

Tarrant (2013) advocated making schools places of research which facilitate teachers and hence the school becomes an area for research and reflection. In the Aquarius Alliance it was clear that teachers were being inducted into both research in their own schools and to expect to undertake research across the Alliance. In other words, as to some extent in the Pisces Trust, this programme was facilitating teachers with opportunities to undertake research in a variety of settings allowing them to deepen their underpinning understandings of how different staff receive and employ their ideas for practice, offering exciting new possibilities for developing practice where schools are grouped together. For example, Molly was utilising some of the research skills that she had developed through sessions and was introducing a group of local authority NQTs to undertaking small research projects based on their own classroom practices, comparing these to observations they had conducted in classrooms led by more experienced teachers. This work therefore was not only benefitting the Alliance but also having an impact on Local Authority school staff. Molly explained that because of her research journey she had been given the chance to work with different people from different settings, so she in turn helped and supported other teachers to do their research in their own schools. Her research in other schools had given her a huge breadth of experience that had aided her learning. It seems important to highlight that this model is not one of schools in competition with one another but of schools, and in particular of teachers, working to offer support to others on a reciprocal basis. Esme was involved with colleagues within the Alliance and also in hosting some of the research investigations that the NQTs across the local authority were undertaking:

> So as part of that I … was working with a number of teachers from different schools across [Alliance] on research approaches, (ehm) which was absolutely fantastic and like I say at the moment I'm also

> working with a number of teachers on an NQT project which is research-based linked to the [local] authority so that's where our kind of research aspect has come in.

In each case where teachers were working across schools, they seemed to be enjoying undertaking research. It appeared to be expanding their knowledge and experience and giving them plenty of ideas to pursue, which was translating into a palpable excitement. During sessions the group laughed and enjoyed challenging each other. They were also taking a pride in drawing on a combination of their reading and research to make recommendations to wider groups of teachers. Like in the Pisces Trust there was a clear engagement of emotion in this activity.

6.1.1.c Research shifting teacher perspectives

Chi, et al (1994) thought that self-monitoring made teachers elicit self-explanations that improved their learning and understanding. Thus, research helps teachers to self-assess and monitor their understandings (Black et al, 2002). However, Alexakos (2015: 2) writes that teachers have always been told that "their classroom knowledge does not count in generating educational theory and educational policy. We are told teachers' knowledge is too subjective, too idiosyncratic, too localized". Teacher research that is valued by mainstream educational policy makers is not the kind that is interested in teacher or student empowerment, or that explores inequity in schools or social justice. They are instead focussed on why students did not do well in tests or in learning topics, and "the stated, or unstated, intent is … to shift the blame to the teacher as if teaching is merely about teaching the content" (Alexakos, 2015: 3). For the Alliance and the Trust leads, the purpose of research was to raise challenges for practice in ways that allowed teachers to become more innovative and knowledgeable about possibilities in education. As a consequence, these groupings of schools encouraged teachers to ask questions of the educational environment within which they worked. Clearly some focus on test results was inevitable but these teachers demonstrated practices that went beyond this and challenged them to more

carefully consider and question their educational philosophy, position or opinion.

Peter was a teacher that had previously undertaken some Masters' work and was in a school that had just entered the Alliance. He thought it was important to explain that research challenges teachers to look beyond the answers that they think they want:

> The most important thing that stands out for me in understanding research is when you are after answers that fit your ideology, it's a self-fulfilling prophesy when you get the answers that you are looking for. This is contrary to why you are doing research. Doing research means getting you to identify ideas, extract ideas and challenge them … you need to be open to other ideas and not let your background or the background of the research dictate how you interpret and what you make of the data you collect …When you start actually listening and opening your mind, it is actually listening, impartial listening, it is fabulous.

This notion that you needed to go much deeper than simply conduct work that supports your own opinion is an important one and gets to the heart of the debate about teacher research. Peter had developed a clear sense that research was about questioning the status quo and the prevailing ideologies. This demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of research mirrored by many of the teachers throughout this study. It is important as it demonstrates that teachers are willing and able to challenge professional norms given the right support and encouragement. Peter really enjoyed research activity and seemed to have taken to heart the ideas behind research that meant challenging one's own preconceptions.

Molly discussed research as a mechanism for sustainable change in a person, which will then have an impact on a class or a school because of the climate such change creates. She thought that through research one can empower people to change:

> For example, the NQTs [newly qualified teachers] I am working with at the moment, … probably wouldn't realise that actually they are gaining the knowledge and the understanding and instilling a belief in themselves that they can make a change and it is worthwhile, and that is bigger than what the actual change is … it is more than what it is happening day to day...

That change could be bigger than the individual, was the way in which Molly explained how she saw research activity as infecting the whole school community where others would see the effects of change and want to emulate that in their own classrooms. Since this data collection, Molly has gained a position in senior leadership, which she attributes to the wealth of experiences she had gained from her engagement in research.

Research also had an impact on Shirley's professional identity and informed her practice. She argued that research

> … made me think a lot deeper into why I am doing things and to question things and to look at tensions, because when I started my research everything was black and white, but the more I engaged in research the more I knew about the policies that were set by the government and you just go ahead and do it, but now actually working with teachers, I am now asking let's look at this, why we are doing this, and what's the value of that, and why this is published … before the research I would have taken it face value and followed the new publications that tell us we all need to do this, we all need to do that. The research allowed me to stop and think and question … look at the tensions and question it, and not be afraid to do that, and look at who the winners and losers are in all this.

Shirley felt that her critical awareness had been raised through reading academic literature and through engaging in debate where Holly played 'devil's advocate' and made them as a group justify their opinions. They were

also encouraged to work on analysis individually and then together comparing notes to discover where different members of the team might come to different conclusions about the same data raising questions for them to consider. In this way Shirley was beginning to realise the possibilities of flaws in arguments and the need to examine everything in the light of her own educational perspectives. Like Gina in the Pisces Trust, Shirley understood that policy was made as a result of applying particular perspectives to education and that this may not be the best way forward in terms of educating children. Consequently, she thought it unwise to take any policy given to schools at face value.

Clearly the learning that the teachers were gaining from engagement in research was having a marked impact on their identities, sense of worth and thoughts about how to approach change in schools. They were becoming empowered rather than being led by policy. What is interesting about the Alliance data, compared to that from the Pisces Trust, is that the focus is rather different. In the Trust there was a lot of discussion around how research could benefit children and help teachers 'be the best they could be'. In the Alliance the focus was more on themselves as change agents and of being changed as practitioners by the process. This demonstrated a clear sense of purpose, confidence and belief in themselves as knowledge and practice creators. This was allied to growing their skills in facilitation, working across teams, questioning the impacts of policy initiatives, questioning each other and in finding their own answers. This could arguably be positioned as a self-confident set of responses which may reflect the greater experience within this group of research. It seemed important to look in more detail at these developmental aspects.

6.2 BENEFITS FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Aquarius Alliance teachers identified themselves as teachers and researchers perhaps having had a longer history of research development than in the Pisces Trust. Asking the teachers of the Aquarius Alliance the

same questions asked to the Pisces Trust teachers, the intention was first to explore their identity as a teacher and then at how they identified as a group.

6.2.1 What it is to be a teacher

Day et al (2006) believed that the professional identity of teachers was closely related to meeting the expectations and demands that were placed on teachers. It was not therefore surprising that they reported: “One in three teachers did not have a positive sense of identity” (Day et al, 2006: 4). Stevenson (2007: 236) argued: “Pedagogical processes are not conceived in terms of teaching the whole child but rather in relation to the technical delivery of subject content and the achievement of pre-specified learning outcomes.”

This is an interesting observation in consideration of the argument developed in Chapter Five that the teachers reported themselves as focussed around child development but may indicate the influence of the market on practice. The impact of research on the personal and professional identity of teachers is well expressed by Craig and Fieschi (2007: 3) when they argue that “[t]eachers’ professionalism is becoming increasingly personal – teachers’ ethics rests on a foundation of personal idealism and are regulated by personal conscience”. Clarke (2009) pointed out that teacher identity is not a fixed one and it is subjected to policy makers’ decisions and judgments. However, what is interesting about this research is the extent to which teacher identity was also not entirely fixed around policy directives. In other words, both subject and child focused positions may be experienced in addition to external requirements related to inspection and testing. The research programme in the Aquarius Alliance appeared to be shifting teachers away from more technicist versions of teaching, towards activity orientated around exploration and discovery that both the teacher and the pupils could be involved in.

For Peter, what makes a good teacher is someone who inspires the children to achieve their ‘true potential’ and this, he argued, can be enhanced through

undertaking research. For Peter research was encapsulated as an empirical and critical exploration of practice that would facilitate him to challenge his own and others thinking. He does not explain what he means by true potential and such statements have some resonance with those made by teachers in the Pisces Trust around teachers helping children to reach their 'very best'. Such statements seem 'taken-for-granted truths' that are rarely examined and that are very deeply embedded in teacher rhetoric and which express the fanciful world of teachers (Holland et al, 1998). It represents part of the socio-cultural framework and practices that people adopt without question and may be something promulgated within teaching communities of practice. Research, for Peter, moves teachers beyond this position:

> I advise teachers to think for themselves … I ask them to make their own minds and come up with informed decisions … I advise teachers to do qualitative research and hear what other people are saying. This is my favourite kind of research, hearing what other people are saying. My relationship with teachers and colleagues has changed as a result of engaging in research. I feel I am thinking more freely … I am getting my own ideas … I have got a lot to give.

Interestingly, Peter felt that it can be difficult to move outside of the norms of teaching and take risks. This is perhaps an indication of his awareness of the possibility of becoming trapped within fixed ideas about what a 'good education' looks like, alongside expressing his reservations about 'the conservatism' of teaching, as he described it.

Brenda confirmed Peter's opinion that the research teachers were doing had an impact on their professional identities:

> I am still taking the research as encouraging the expert to share their knowledge … I tried to be very inclusive and make sure that everybody has a voice and that everybody listens to each other and that everybody is empowered and I think for me going to the research lectures that (Holly) did, it gives some sort of multiplicity of voices …

> you know for me that gives me the chance to reflect on how I am doing things working through the reflective journal. First, I was oh that did not go as well as I thought, but actually I am being encouraged to reflect on my practice as a facilitator and a coach.

Brenda references agonistic democracy in this discussion through considering plurality of voice. All the teachers interviewed were embedding the article and questions related to it in their self-reflections. Further, as indicated in the preceding section these teachers were intertwining their personal development with research activity all of which has implications for the professional that they believe themselves to be. It seems from these data and that from the Pisces Trust that teachers may fall into cultural routines. Nevertheless, the research processes appear to help teachers to challenge some of these taken-for-granted practices. This issue will be revisited in section 6.3. Teachers in the Aquarius Alliance were engaging in presenting their work to other schools, presenting at a variety of practitioner and academic conferences, attending academic discussion groups and seminars, and talking about their work. These activities attracted attention. They also saw research as intertwined with the work of being a teacher. A variety of academics had also been visiting the lead school to talk about their research journey. In other words, engaging in research was opening up new opportunities for the staff involved who were thinking about themselves as teachers who were also researchers and this was drawing attention from the academic world.

6.2.2 The Value of Working Together as a Group of Teachers

Wenger (1998:149) argued that identity and practice are interrelated: “Developing a practice requires the formation of a community whose members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants”. The Alliance had a clear community of research practice which was influencing practice in all of its member schools. Teachers are recommended to adopt “a ‘researcherly’ disposition” (Lingard and Renshaw, 2010:27) where teachers should by necessity be both teachers and

researchers. This disposition was becoming apparent in the Alliance teachers who were taking the necessity of examination of practice for granted. BERA / RSA (2014:10) have ascribed key aims to teacher research including: shaping debate about “the role which research-informed teacher education plays in promoting school improvement”; informing policy “by making recommendations to develop the relationship between research and teacher education”; and influencing practice through developing approaches “to connect researchers, teacher educators, teachers and others”. Clearly the Alliance were meeting all of these goals. That is to say that teachers should have “the habit of mind to engage with research – both as consumers and producers – to improve their practice and contribute to the knowledge base on teacher education” (Tack and Vanderlinde, 2016: 1). However, Holly was clear that producing a tick-list of qualities that made a teacher into a researcher was not what the programme was about. Instead it was geared towards encouraging activity that involved teachers in critically examining their practice through using literature to support their thinking and in experimenting with ideas in practice from which they learned, whatever the outcome. As in the Pisces Trust, all of the interviews conducted with staff in the Aquarius Alliance mentioned the value of working in groups to extend understandings and knowledge. This was how they supported a researcher mind set and explored issues of practice and how this might be disseminated.

Esme emphasised that working in a group was important for sustaining research activity. She thought that research had a more positive impact when one was doing it alongside friends and colleagues who have the same interest “so that when you come across a tricky part… so it might be something you want to question or do not quite understand, you can ask and support each other in that”. In other words, it was helpful to work in a community of practice. It was this network of support that kept teachers focussed and interested in the research being undertaken. Esme also considered that one gained a form of ‘kinship’ with one’s colleagues that crossed school boundaries creating bonds where one teacher wanted to continue working together and challenging other teachers to think differently

about practice. This was very similar to the data coming from the Pisces Trust, but they did not as explicitly link this to arguments about the sustainability of research as Esme did, and this may reflect that, by comparison, they are newer to undertaking research.

Esme also outlined some pitfalls, explaining that:

> I think the negative part is making sure that the people you are working with have the same understanding as you, it can be a little bit frustrating if maybe you are working with people who are a bit more negative towards it, (ehm) and you are trying to be positive and bring them along on the journey, but that can be an obstacle that you have to think about how you do it, on the whole I would say it's far more positive to work as part of a group than negative.

This comment indicated that reluctant teachers may have been recruited to undertake research, but also that they can become convinced as the work progresses. This again indicates that sustainability of research activity is reliant on engaging staff in positive attitudes of mind which was discussed in section 6.4. Esme went on to say that working and discussing research with teachers from other schools affected her research approaches and thinking. She believed that:

> working in one school, teachers can get very much looking inwards, even with a research head on, and once you are on that track it's hard to sometimes look out, whereas when you are talking to people from other schools doing something similar, it's like 'Oh I've not tried that, I might try that' or 'we've found this', and sometimes it can be completely different, but that's really, really powerful to share.

In other words, for Esme the research interaction across other schools was of key importance in helping teachers recognise the limits of their thinking as had been indicated in the Pisces Trust also, although unlike Pisces, the Aquarius Alliance was working with schools who did not necessarily share a

set of overall organisational values. Esme thought that mixing staff across schools, where all observe different practices and outcomes, presented them with the potential for powerful conversations and for broadening their experiences. It is also possible that over time such sharing and movement of staff between schools leads to the development of some commonalities of thinking. Nevertheless, it seems that a couple of schools had chosen to leave the group prior to this work as they had felt uncomfortable with practices being questioned and believed that they could not free up teachers to engage with this work. Therefore, the schools remaining had a clear commitment to this agenda of research.

For Peter, he stressed that he did not believe in one person doing research based on her/ his ideas alone and then expect other people to follow them:

> How do you ever do influential research if it is one person that is leading it and it is based on their ideas? Perspective is really important. The perspective of an individual based on where a person is at …

Peter was demonstrating how he valued the ideas of colleagues. However, it did not seem to occur to him that research could involve discussion of all kinds even where one person is leading it alone. Nevertheless, Peter's point about the benefits of working together to negotiate thinking aligned with the data from all teachers interviewed from the Alliance.

Brenda recalled the most pleasurable experiences she had while engaging in research were the opportunity to have professional dialogue and the opportunity to see others taking ownership of research. She felt that research activity was gathering pace and that teachers were gathering confidence in sharing their own ideas:

> What I noticed was at first they were a little bit defensive in terms of you are looking at their own work and saying have you tried this and what do you think of this .. it is quite defensive. Actually, towards

> middle and end that became more open and better … I think it is about building trust and building relationships to some extent.

This echoed Esme's point about dealing with reluctance but also that concerns reduce as trust in the process develops. Brenda argued that research was about empowering teachers, encouraging them to have self-confidence in using the ideas of others and sharing their ideas with others.

Molly explained that in her academic conference presentation, instead of doing the paper and presentation on her own she worked with other teachers in a symposium organised by Holly where she felt supported by the other staff presenting with her. Molly and three colleagues had challenged their academic audience to get into their local schools, find out what was going on and lend their support in getting teachers research active. Further, she believed that teachers should be regularly sharing the outcomes of their research projects with academics. Molly argued that teachers did not have easy access to research articles, were not automatically provided with time to research and that their professional knowledge was underrated by academics and that this needed to be addressed. Here Molly, with experience of academics and research conferences, was confident to challenge. She argued that unless teachers and academics worked collaboratively, this problem would not go away. Nevertheless, despite difficulties these schools were remarkably good at finding research articles to support their empirical investigations.

This Alliance was intent on building not only a community amongst teachers, but also a community of teachers and academics. In this programme the teachers were clearly identifying with one another and engaging on a joint venture where they learned from each other as well as from the research activity itself. They were interested in academic literature and had decided to jointly explore one particular theoretical position across all projects. In considering agonistic democracy they were directly addressing the inclusion of all voices, treating all with respect, engaging with the notion that they may have to 'let go' of particular practices and beliefs to move to new practices

and engage with debate. This was an interesting and unusual way to take research activity forward across a group of schools representing some bravery on the part of their school leaders. It was also a learning practice where new participants needed to be inducted, and it was important to develop trust and highlight the benefits of what they were doing. The next step was to consider how they saw this work in terms of professional development.

6.3 UNDERTAKING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the Aquarius Alliance some had originally worked with Holly on an accredited programme, but the Alliance had moved away from accredited provision which was argued by Maria and Norma in Chapter Four to open opportunities for more freedoms in deciding how to take research forward. This practice therefore provides a contrast to the Pisces Trust which is interesting to explore. It was also important to consider whether this group thought about research as part of their CPD as the Pisces Trust had done.

6.3.1 Thoughts around accreditation

For Lave and Wenger (1991) the success of the engagement in research lies in the ability of people to cope under pressure and the tension they experience is fundamental to their work and learning. As we saw in Chapter Five, accreditation tended to lead to pressure on staff, some of whom coping with this more effectively than others. Shirley explained that engaging in Masters research with Holly in the past had led to a promotion. Shirley had really enjoyed going back to learning after 12 years and explained of her accredited work:

> … personally, I am very proud that I achieved what I set to achieve. To be honest when it all started, I was engaged in research to see where it will lead me, to better my practice, but all the hard work and the encouragement from the people I work with, all steered me towards you may as well do your Masters … I managed it. Now

> looking back, I enjoyed the work … I found it more challenging, it made me think and question things more. It was nice to think about what I was doing and why I was doing it...

Shirley had clearly enjoyed and benefitted from undertaking research and accreditation and recommended it. As with Pisces Trust staff the sense of achievement in gaining a Masters' was clear. Shirley further explained that for her, she did not have children which made undertaking accredited research easier. She argued it was more problematic for other staff as one has to give time to undertaking research beyond that of teaching: "once started, I started enjoying it more and the more I did the more I liked it. And even when I got my Master's I said what can I do next?". For Shirley, accreditation had added to her professional standing and got her interested in research activity.

Molly thought that accreditation had value, but was something that they always struggled with, or wondered about in terms of its feasibility.

> On a personal level it is neither here nor there … if it is not accredited you can make it more personalised … but more widely I think people are worried about it. But I don't know if that is necessarily the right thing.

Certainly, in the Pisces Trust teachers had exhibited a lot of worry around undertaking assignments to the extent it became a large part of their focus, but Molly did not see this as a necessity. She also had completed part of a Masters in the past with Holly. Peter mentioned that when he qualified as a teacher, "I liked to do things based on evidence not based on opinions" although he thought that this was not always possible and sometimes evidence can be misleading. He was very influenced by his family history as "my mother was a lecturer and my sister has done a PhD and my brothers have Masters". Like Shirley, he had an opportunity to do a Master's module, and that had "triggered something" and he had "really enjoyed it". The enjoyment seemed related to undertaking research rather than gaining

accreditation. He liked the process of working with colleagues to find something out about practice:

> ...everything I do now I ask myself would I enjoy it? Would I have trouble in doing that? And I usually ask myself would I get job satisfaction, would I get bored, where will I get my satisfaction from. And I would like to have an impact. Yes, I do like to have an impact on people. Yes, the impact is to inspire people and help them too, especially young people.

Unlike Shirley, Peter had withdrawn from the programme explaining that when one had a trauma in one's life, one either succumbs to it or one can escape from it and get stronger. He explained that he had an experience that was traumatic and had opted to spend more time with his family rather than spend it studying. He argued that the main tension with accredited work was related to workload. So, like those in the Pisces Trust, issues around time and workload were factors that persuaded him not to engage further with accreditation although he wanted to continue with empirical research. The research-only route suited him better: "I still enjoy research… I am learning and I am loving it. It is a new me, myself as a free thinker".

Stephen thought that research had made him a new person, and that was why he would continue engaging in research:

> I don't not know how, whether accredited or not, but I will continue engaging in research. I think it is really, really useful. I think it should be available to every teacher, but there should be different time to do it, may be at night, may be giving them the time out, to allow teachers for instance to have the afternoon to attend research sessions and so on.

The issue of being facilitated with time was a regular refrain from Stephen who valued research as identity changing but needing organisational support to facilitate it. He clearly thought that this would be time well spent. This is

interesting as in the Pisces Trust the conversations about time seemed largely focussed on accreditation and time to fit in assessment work. Here, however, we see potential issues around the time offered to Stephen to undertake non-accredited research. This issue was discussed in section 6.4.

Esme did not look at research for gratification and certification. She considered research as a means of allowing teachers to step in and be qualified to shoulder leadership responsibilities.

> For me I'm probably saying the wrong thing here, for me [reward or certification] is not that important because for me it's about how it's [empirical research] helping me in my job, more than anything else. I'm not bothered about, I don't want a Master's, I don't want to take that route in my career anyway, so for me the research is more about improving me as a leader and me as a teacher.

This is an interesting perspective as it aligns research activity with improving the self and accreditation as a vehicle for advancing your career. At some point in all the interviews, teachers mentioned that research had enhanced their leadership skills. Research was characterised as an empirical process that involved negotiation, sharing ideas and communicating well, listening, decision-making, leading and following, working as a team and these all appeared to enhance skills that they could use in other situations. Teachers in the Pisces Trust had also mentioned leadership skill development some gaining promotions as a result of their research. Other than Shirley, the issue of accreditation was not something that the teachers interviewed had strong opinions about and they were more focussed on enjoying research and saw accreditation as something that could add an extra burden, although it was perhaps something they may pursue at a later date. The Alliance leads had commented that some people were undertaking Masters qualifications as additional work through their own arrangements. However, they were clear that for the purposes of this programme, being tied to accreditation would limit their ability to devise their own approaches to research as an Alliance, for example the focus all were placing on agonistic democracy and working

in cross-school triads during this data capture period. Moreover, they felt that they had power in their relationship with Holly and were able to negotiate provision in line with what they wanted as a staff across the schools. The implication of this is that involvement in accreditation took that power away. Holly reported to me that they had always worked together to try and make the accreditation fit the needs of the group but that this had not been an easy task because of university requirements.

6.3.2 Research as Continuing Professional Development

The learning that teachers get from research may be enhanced when they work in teams constructing an identity that is expressive of the group or community itself (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This was something very much at the heart of the Alliance research engagement. Mandernach et al (2009) argued that research provokes critical thinking, which is in turn enhanced through instructional strategies that promote active learning. Teaching quality is thus enhanced through the development of research-based skills and knowledge (Godfrey, 2016; BERA-RSA, 2014). The partnership between Maria, Holly and Norma was undoubtedly acting to develop these facets of research. As part of the agreement in joining the Alliance, schools had such expectation. However, the engagement of teachers in research should be facilitated through senior leadership approaches as Coldwell et al (2017: 7) stated:

> In the most highly research-engaged schools, senior leaders played a key role, acting as intermediaries and facilitators of access to, engagement with and use of research evidence for staff in their schools. To do so, they often had direct access to research producers and were familiar with key intermediaries like the EEF … and other reviews such as the Cambridge Primary Review … They were confident in judging the robustness of research quality.

Further, Price (2019) argued that research can be used to change the culture of an organisation from the bottom-up and the top-down. This initiative had

started as a top down process in the Alliance but was rapidly becoming more bottom up.

Brenda believed the Alliance had established a culture which valued research because those who had engaged with research activity over time had all learned from their engagement. She argued that not all schools were like that or had the same forward thinking. Thoughts about being in an organisational group of schools that facilitate such work being unusual was also expressed in the Pisces Trust which indicated that something about the setup of both groups worked very well. Holly argued, in a similar way to Brenda, that this was to do with the open-minded support of key leaders in each and without whom this could not have been organised. It also seemed to be partly orientated around the ways in which Holly was encouraging teachers to engage in research that was part of the success of the programme. It was clear that she was well respected and that the senior leaders in both settings trusted her to direct and lead the development. Brenda also raised the notion of taking risks which again was something highlighted in the programme delivery. Holly was at pains to explain that not all research would be comfortable or work out well, but that things would always be learned from the process that could be refined in future work. For Brenda that was always going to be a tension particularly at senior leadership level:

> You have to have your senior leadership and your governors have to buy into it in order to give people the time and the permission to try out new things, because sometimes things do not work, you know it is about taking risks, isn't it? Being given that permission.

So there was a clear need that all senior leaders understand and support the research programme in order for it to work. Esme considered research as a stepping-stone to any future work as it made you think more broadly and thus she saw it as part and parcel of professional development. She thought that it had opened her eyes to the power and significance of research in all areas of education. She learnt from research that:

> … it either gives you the confirmation that you are doing something right, so then you can say why you are doing that … or it can change your thinking and your direction, and that's very powerful. So, it's not always that you are going to do some research or read some research and that changes your point of view of what you are going to do, but sometimes you can say yep that just confirmed what I am doing is right for my children.

In contrast to Peter, Esme was assuming that research would be about challenging the norms and that sometimes it could just confirm practices already in place. It seems that both positions had value as confirming weak practices is not what research should aim to do. However, it should also be able to confirm practices that are working. Esme saw the professional development potential of research for the teachers joining the Alliance as invaluable. She thought that research activity gave her a different view and a different twist on doing things. In contrast she believed that government agendas were based on:

> filling [teachers] up with knowledge and information, do it this way, do it that way, whereas actually what we want to grow is independent thinkers and teachers who want to explore things, want to take things in different directions but they need to understand how to do that and give them different opportunities to do that.

In other words, research has freed teachers, in Esme's opinion to really engage with education in a thinking manner so that they can critique, adapt and change practices that they see as problematic. It is interesting that an image of education as filling empty vessels with knowledge, that has been used to critique teaching and learning for pupils, has been utilised by Esme to raise concerns about teacher development. Esme argued that, particularly with younger teachers, being part of the Alliance has helped them towards being independent instead of telling them "you should be doing this in English you should be doing that in Maths". The notion of questioning policy

appeared more regularly across all the interviews in the Aquarius Alliance than in the Pisces Trust, so again this might be a reflection on the time engaged on research. Also taking a more political viewpoint was encouraged in both cases by Holly as she asked them to question everything before they acted. This had a definite influence on the ways in which the Alliance was looking at all aspects of educational practice including examining carefully advice from academic literature. This means that research becomes a gateway to critical engagement with all practices.

Molly mentioned that in the research sessions she had been attending she had come to know quite a lot about research. She had tried to make use of the research methods and methodology as well as the literature reviews.

> I was relatively open-eyed to it all … generally teachers are busy and subject to somebody coming in to sell their product as CPD generally as ‘this will fix all problems’ to them … Teacher CPD is not always great. (laughs) You quite often see things you have not necessarily wanted.

Molly thought that she benefited hugely from the research development that she had been part of:

> I think even teachers who have not necessarily bought into this as much as I thought, they have when they reflected on their personal experience and how they have changed and how they felt empowered and re-energised to go and have a go at doing different things because they feel that they are trusted by their Headteacher.

This theme of trusting teachers to examine the problems that they identified and find solutions through research was a significant driver in the Alliance.

This was not a programme offering a quick fix for practice problems as it involved longer term and deeper shifts in understandings, which, as Holly argued, resulted in cultural shifts that could change organisations

dramatically. Indeed, Molly stated that: “schools are now buzzing”, and “teachers have become research-orientated… this bug has also been transferred to children… everybody talks about research and whether or not something was researched or not”. Molly also argued that whenever something new was introduced, staff wanted to know what evidence lay behind the idea, so was it based on literature, had someone tried this out. Moreover, it was clear to see that the teachers were reporting marked shifts in their identity, their ability to question and they were experiencing a growth in their love of research. There was a powerful sense of teachers learning journeys and shifts in perspectives which was leading them to think more strategically. This may be a partial answer to why leadership potential was growing around this agenda.

6.4 CHALLENGES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Many of the comments from teachers indicated that their perceptions of research as a process that is engaging and consequently sustainable were a marked feature in the Aquarius Alliance. It is therefore worth considering both the challenges that teachers faced and the factors they saw as important in achieving sustainability. As with the Pisces Trust, it was interesting to know whether teachers would recommend research to other teachers, what their opinions were about the support they had received or needed and to reflect upon their research experiences thus far.

6.4.1 Recommending Empirical Research Activity to Teachers

Schön (1983: 68) considered the reflective practitioner as one who can “experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique”. Thus, for Schön being in a situation where one is unsure allows learning to take place. The aim of engaging teachers in research, seeks to take teachers beyond a simple form of reflective practice which Rushton and Suter (2012: 2) warn against, as it is not enough in itself. They add that we should not be tempted to think that reflective practice is the holy grail that can be taken as “a cure-all for improving all teaching and

learning”. In other words, not only do teachers need to reflect on their practice but they need to deeply understand it and then consider alternatives. This has implications for changing the ways teachers think about their practice making this a more active and thoughtful process about what works and maintaining the flexibility to adapt and change when it proves necessary to do so. However, shifting taken-for-granted perspectives, as Ringmose and Kragh-Müller (2017: 174) argue:

> presupposes self-reflexivity in the sense that one is able to differentiate what goes on in one’s own self from what goes on in others. Without a self-reflective attitude, there is a risk that one takes one’s own perspective for granted and becomes ‘blind’ to what children and other people are trying to express from their own point of view/perspective.

Nevertheless, research activity in the Aquarius Alliance was providing teachers with a vehicle to examine some elements of their practice. Teachers indicated the strength research brought to thinking through or questioning government agendas. Such questioning was also encouraged in taught sessions.

Esme saw engaging in empirical research as something exciting and wanted teachers “to give it a go”, as she found it quite empowering:

> [research] does give you that, that power to question and that power to think well why am I doing this, is there a reason, am I doing it just because the government or the LEA [local education authority] tell me to, and so I think I have come to value it a lot more and that’s why I’m really keen on encouraging NQTs and people who are still quite vulnerable in their careers to try and develop their research approach as well.

This reference to vulnerability, especially for those new to teaching, was because Esme believed their underlying pedagogy was still forming, as was

their educational philosophy. Hence, they would be more vulnerable to being instructed, without necessarily questioning the thinking behind any activity. Esme also thought that teachers needed their confidence and their educational stance strengthened in order to do this. For Esme this was what research did and was why she valued it so highly.

Brenda argued that research practice makes teachers more confident and gain expertise in their subjects, because they are doing things that are evidence based, and they know such things work. “I think also that gives you that power back, contrary to government-led education actually we need to drop that back and we say as teachers working … it is our profession and we know what to do and how to do it”. Of course, it is open to question whether teachers always work on the basis of evidence and it might be argued that a lot of practice is so much a part of what a teacher does that they do not always see what practices they are adopting without question. Nevertheless, Brenda saw research as a means by which teachers could take responsibility and ownership of their work and make carefully evaluated and considered decisions about their practice.

As with all those interviewed, Shirley explained that she recommended engaging in research to all teachers, however she gave a warning that teachers should not take it lightly: “as long as you are willing to do it, do it, but don’t do it half-heartedly, it will not work, but do it knowing that you will do a good job”. Shirley pointed to significant elements of holding a research identity. She outlined that teachers should question everything, take time to reflect, think about alternatives, discuss with others and try out new ideas. This however needs leadership support to facilitate staff to undertake such work, a theme that will be taken up in the following section.

6.4.2 Reflections on Support for Research

For teachers to manage their research agenda, schools should make a space for them to do their research as comfortably as possible and reflect on their practices (Smylie, 1994). Both the Trust and the Alliance were

attempting to provide such support. Darling-Hammond, et al (2009) thought that the professional learning teachers engage in could be singled out as an important factor for improving the quality of education and thus needs support. This does depend, as McRoy et al (2012) thought, on the availability of funding, school leadership understanding their role in growing research in schools and establishing or sustaining research partnerships in schools. In both the Alliance and in the Pisces Trust, Holly was playing an important role in establishing the notion of such activity being supported with teachers being given time to engage, senior leaders supporting staff projects and with schools seeing this worthwhile activity to contribute to financially. Cain (2018) argued that academic literature and academic input can have a great deal of influence on shaping the way teachers think about their practices. It can open up possibilities not previously considered, develop teachers' understandings of evidence and its uses, encourage teachers to experiment and raise their ethical awareness. Holly argued that it was important that schools understood this.

Esme stated that academic literature and input had a significant impact:

> I think over probably the last five years … what I am reading has changed, so in the past I wouldn't necessarily be looking at academic literature outside the *TES* [*Times Educational Supplement*] or general things, whereas now I will look up literature normally that's linked to things that I am driving within school…

She added that the value that an academic facilitator brings to both the school and teachers undertaking research:

> … is vital because again you need that outside person … Because again I wouldn't know the techniques or have been introduced to those, I probably you know would have been narrow minded about it, whereas having someone to come in and question and challenge you, although uncomfortable at times, that's good (laughs) because I think we all need to be challenged in our thinking…

Esme was seeing advantages in having an independent colleague to work with whose perspectives were not wrapped up in a deep knowledge of the school but who could provide an insightful but neutral alternative perspective. However, it would be possible to assume that over time that neutrality could be compromised, and Holly was clearly well known within the Alliance. Nevertheless, she did bring knowledge of a different context.

Molly too argued that teachers need the support of an academic, particularly at the start of their journey, because otherwise they would not be confident about what they were going to look at or "what we were going to do about any of it". An important consideration for Molly, in working with academics, was how accessible the academics and their ideas were to teachers:

> … because they do think sometimes it can be quite complex and difficult when you are trying to get your head round a million and one other things … it has to be made meaningful and seen as purposeful so this is going to directly impact and not just doing things for the sake of doing research, and making it real to your classroom.

The need for impact can be a tension and as these teachers have explained it can take time before it can be seen. Thus, convincing teachers to engage in such a journey involves a 'leap of faith'. This is perhaps why Holly talked about her ability to build trusting relationships fast with teachers. This seems to be a necessary skill in order to engage staff in the first place after which as they gain confidence and skills, it then becomes part of practice and a self-generating activity. All interviews carried similar views on this point.

Molly had some concerns that whilst she believed that research activity was crucial to school life, she was also aware that headteachers were often looking for quick returns on money committed to such enterprises. The returns referred to were cast in the light of the demands placed upon schools to show improving results. Molly explained:

> For some it was their first experience in research, they did not have the benefit others did of being able to say you know I can tell I promise you in twelve month time you will realise that you have learnt even though you still feel you haven't. When you look back on the journey and the things that you ask them now, they would see the value of it, but again it comes back to that, you don't see the value until you are out of it. And I think that is hard to get across to people, until they have that experience of research. There is a certain amount of some headteachers bought in more than others and some struggled even though they said they were okay with it.

Molly was totally convinced that research led to school improvement but that the effects took time to materialise. This may be a year later or even after that, but she was adamant that school improvement would take place and it was about schools having the courage to take the risk. There did not seem to be the possibility that critical engagement may not lead to improvement in her thinking and as reflected in the previous section, Holly had potentially guided thinking in this direction. It could therefore be suggested that teachers were idealising research activity as always productive. However, notions of learning something from every piece of research is not the same as impacting on test results and scores.

Esme acknowledged a potential negative side to undertaking research if things do not go as expected, especially if one is new to research and excited to think that one could prove an idea one has had correct and the data says something different:

> …it could be really exciting, and when you do undertake the research, you think … oh maybe it wasn't as, such a positive outcome in the end (ehm), but then it's using that to move on, but I think at first it's especially in the early years it can be disheartening, because you want it to have an impact, (pause) like most of us, you want something straightaway, and you know I think you learn that research does not always do that (laughs).

So, Esme was explaining that instant success is not always predictable and that “even where the research does not give you what you expected you can still learn from it and move on, but this takes some maturing in terms of undertaking research.” Whilst echoing elements of Molly’s point this adds an important element as often in schools research has been presented as something superficial that can help prove something quickly when in reality research is a complex mix of factors and needs longer term activity to provide longer term solutions.

Brenda argued that one of the most challenging things with research is time management. Organising meetings amongst people in different groups and different schools in separate educational locations is always a challenge: “it has been a challenge but the nature of the people who are engaged in research… the people I have been working with tend to be quite positive and have a can-do attitude”. Time has been raised before and in both group settings and clearly has links to the priorities that research is given in schools and how this is then supported. Holly had explained to me that she had spent time with teachers helping them to focus on research that could be integrated into their daily lives and which had relevance for aspects of their practice, allowing them to reflect upon and enhance or change what they were doing. In this way she hoped to both lower the burden on time and enhance their excitement about their involvement. Stephen too believed that he would always do research but,

> The main thing is time. I really like it when I do it. But sometimes it ends up being low on my priorities, if I have got a really busy agenda and I know that there is something I want to research, but I end up not doing it then because of my classroom work. That is the main concern. However, in the back of my mind I know that research is useful and I find some time to do it, but time is not always helpful all the way.

Stephen is adding to this notion of support from leadership teams by also identifying that it is about his own priorities. Senior leaders need to be able to support staff with managing such agendas if they are to work within schools. There is always unreasonable pressure placed on teachers for their student achievement. Stephen experienced some frustration, as when research is rushed, he felt it to be of less quality and he believed that it needed to be good in order to convince others of its value or the value of recommendations drawn from it.

Stephen thought that the research sessions given by the research lead, coordinators and facilitators for the Alliance are “really useful, but you do not have that all the time”! Similar to the Pisces Trust, teachers valued time in sessions as an escape where they could think. However as soon as they were back in schools the daily workload demand tended to place them under pressure. Despite this some staff had begun to build in research as a part of their daily routine and thus saw it as part of being a teacher. For example, Molly was doing a lot of work around literacy, spelling and reading. Discovering that children loved to read in areas outside, or where it felt homely and comforting which had implications for the spaces provided for children to read that were easily remedied.

It was interesting therefore to consider what might be different with those who found this more challenging across both Trust and Alliance settings. One commonality seemed to be the teachers that raised this issue most often were located in the secondary school phase and thus under demand from both the schools and their subject department. Another potential commonality was that there appeared to be demands placed upon them by senior leaders that distracted them from their research despite the senior leaders apparent support of research. This then indicates that for some leadership teams, research is an ideal rather than an essential part of practice. This may indicate that the work Holly undertook with head teachers and senior leaders to gain their support for research was not always as well supported or understood as she hoped, particularly where schools were facing difficult external pressures.

Peter expressed an alternative pressure arguing:

> I disagree with a lot of what is happening in school, and the government agenda and how we do things. I am a bit of a free spirit. What I found is people tend to follow and ignore their own guts and their own opinions and that is a big conflict for me.

Peter was indicating the potential for problems when the school as a whole (or government) are not in tune with teacher research activity. Peter explained that he did not fit in at school, which resulted, by the end of this project, in his resignation. It was also apparent in his discussions that he was facing internal contradictions, some of which were about his reassurance that he was a good adviser and knew how to undertake research and challenge colleagues, whilst at the same time demonstrating some shortfalls in his own practices in terms of communication with and acceptance of other colleagues. In other words, whilst he loved research, his life was becoming increasingly difficult and he explained that he proposed what he saw as more radical ideas for practice to the school than the school was prepared to work with. Of course, as an outsider to this situation it was not possible to gain all perspectives about what was happening, but it is possible to deduce that this discomfort and tension was very uncomfortable for Peter. Nevertheless, one of the most pleasurable experiences for Peter was "watching people change". He said that he loved doing the cross-school research "seeing every person knowing what they are working at and how they are changing".

Peter's story had similarities with Marlowe in the Pisces Trust. Both teachers had felt undervalued and that they were not given the space and freedoms they needed to apply their research in the ways that they wished to use it. Both were working for newly appointed headteachers. Research was for both an experience that led to them feeling constrained by educational practice which they characterised as anti-educational. Peter and Marlowe's commentary made it clear that research activity can have negative implications for people where it makes them more aware of the constraints

within which they are working. Both were sensing the discomfort of being unable in some circumstances to undertake work that they enjoyed, and thought would improve practice. These constraints were conveyed as being to do with the political landscape and related to the leadership of schools. What was however interesting was that neither teacher had a negative impact on the research activity as they both fully supported it. Holly could see the potential value that these teachers had to offer, but also recognised that there were other issues going on. She explained that she had a limited ability to address issues between staff and headteachers other than to mention this as something in need of investigation to the commissioning staff. This also has implications for the ethical practices of research and for academic researchers developing research in schools. As Holly argued, heightening teacher awareness of the educational landscape can bring conflicts and disagreements to the fore, but her principles grounded her in a belief that opening people's minds to other possibilities for practice was something she felt to be of crucial importance and she also explained that she does highlight the potential discomfort of research for teachers when they embark on this work, but accepted that this did not mean that they fully understood the reality of this in their future lives.

Molly made a linked point when thinking about how they wanted to persuade other schools to become part of the Alliance:

> You get buy-in from some schools and there are those which get it [research] and want to be involved, but actually sometimes the schools which might be more reluctant to join can benefit from it the most. We need to look at things in quite a different way!

It seemed possible to add to this list and suggest that some schools say that they are interested, but the reality of practice is that it is not well supported. For Esme demonstrating the benefits for practice that come as a result of research is key for sustainability.

Molly argued that: “I go into the classroom, I speak to the teachers in my phase [key stage], they do not see it as research, because they are constantly doing it”. Molly thought reading literature, undertaking research projects and developing practice as a consequence of this activity was self-sustaining and indicated long-term benefits from engagement in this type of work. She explained that they look at research literature in their staff meetings. Molly also believed that they were at a point where they had become a model for others. The question of sustainability was raised a number of times and there seemed to have been several aspects developing that the teachers were arguing as making this work sustainable including feeling supported by others such as colleagues and academics, being able to share their work widely across school and academic groups and working in teams that help gather momentum. Clearly the support of school leaders was essential and that everyone involved had a clear understanding that research was a long-term activity and not a ‘quick fix’. This involved insightful commitment to research as a way of working that is integrated into the job of the teacher. In other words, it requires a shift in teacher identity to that of teacher researcher.

There was overall no question that the Aquarius teachers were really enjoying their involvement in research activity. They were explaining that they had learned a lot and for some they had engaged in research sessions with Holly and Maria for several years consecutively arguing that their learning deepened with each new iteration of the programme. Some had enjoyed past accredited work as they felt it was a form of acknowledged achievement not unlike those in the Pisces Trust. However, there was support for the freedoms offered by the non-accredited work, and this allowed them to explore their own interests and work-relevant enquiries which appeared to be important especially in circumstances where there were many demands on their time. It was also interesting to note that whilst there were very few male teachers in my sample in either this or the Pisces Trust setting, the males did all mention the difficulties of workload, difficulties in convincing senior leaders of the importance of their work and pressures on their time. Whilst this study is not investigating issues related to gender and

the sample is too small to establish trends, this was nonetheless interesting to note.

6.4.3 Celebrating Research - looking back

The commitment of the schools to research was represented in the role school leaders have in influencing the professional learning and development of teachers and the creation of a learning culture in schools (Robinson, 2011). As with the Pisces Trust, the end of year celebration was a way of examining the culture and impact of research on the schools within the organisation. For the Aquarius Alliance the day was made up of central activities and development, plus presentations and a market-place display of projects. Holly had invited some academic colleagues to engage with this work and provide feedback. Whilst this was a significant opportunity for staff to celebrate their achievements, one school that had recently joined the Alliance expressed some reservations that the lead school was a predominant force in the Alliance and that this might overwhelm other schools within the group. It was interesting to observe that this opened a wide range of frank debate that allowed all schools to share their perspectives, which in itself indicated something about the research culture that had developed within the group. Debate continued throughout the day focussed on teacher research projects the teachers having focussed their research around aspects of agonistic democracy which led them into interesting discussions around negating power in their triads, listening to everyone with respect, and the process of letting go of past practices in order to engage with new ideas.

All the issues around the sustainability of the research activity became apparent in this event. All staff were talking about next steps as were the school leaders. They were all caught up with the excitement, a sense of achievement and a feeling of comradery. However, added to this was a sense that school demands were awaiting each of them on their return to school. Some school leaders were disappearing for phone calls from time to time, they were still managing their schools despite being off-site. Under

such circumstances one might have expected others could take over for the period of the conference, something the teaching school had arranged for themselves. That some senior leaders were feeling indispensable and under pressure might explain why they transferred some of this pressure to other staff in ways that could potentially block some research activity. Senior leaders also focussed on how this work would add to their school reputation and profile. Most saw this in its widest sense taking pride in being a research active school, whilst others were more focussed on the fact that they had noticed a small upturn in particular test results. This seemed somewhat related to the length of time schools had been associated with the Alliance, those of longer standing being more relaxed about the research activity. In other words, as schools extended their experience of undertaking high quality research, they became aware that this was a long-term investment that made a real difference to teacher attitudes and approaches. This in turn would have a benefit for children and educational processes. Maria and Norah had a huge impact in developing this agenda with the support of Holly. Having witnessed teaching staff presenting their projects at their annual conference and others in the group presenting at an academic conference, their excitement and the sense of purpose was clear. These were schools with staff wholly committed to their research journey.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated both similarities and differences to the preceding chapter related to the Pisces Trust. We can see that the Aquarius Alliance appeared to have somewhat more fully formed ideas about research and its benefits. They were arguing that there is a self-sustaining element to undertaking research that comes over time and with growing confidence in undertaking research. They had reached a point where they wanted to engage with academic conferences and writing. They also demonstrated a confidence in articulating what research was all about and a sense that this was not always well understood by others. They showed a clear understanding of the journey that teachers would need to engage in to

become convinced of the value of research activity and accepted that this was not always an easy journey for colleagues. Alliance staff were also clear that their research activity had added to their leadership capabilities which in turn had led in some cases to promotion. They were also pointing to the ways in which they were developing as practitioners who question and reflect on everything they undertake. This, in some cases, led them to have to take a deep breath and stay silent to allow other voices to be heard.

We can see some common elements between the Trust and the Alliance in terms of struggles against various tensions. These tensions include the extent to which leadership is facilitative of research. In each case we saw the struggle of one male teacher who felt under supported and misunderstood and where the knowledge and skills built up were not perceived as being valued. In both cases, these teachers had resigned their positions. There were also tensions around the time that undertaking research can demand and the effort needed to be committed to doing a good job of research. The knowledge of what a ‘good job’ might look like seemed sharper in the Alliance than in the Trust. Another common element was the sheer enjoyment expressed, particularly at the end of the year in terms of their reflections on the research journey. These were experiences that had clearly shifted their perspectives and self-knowledge as well as influenced their identities as teacher-researchers. Not one of them voiced a thought that research was not worth engaging with despite some negative experiences and frustrations. More complex was their evaluation of engaging with accreditation or not. For those that had undertaken research it was clearly a valuable experience. This was however couched in both settings as something that afforded them recognition of some kind. It gave them status and added some formality to the appreciation of what they had achieved perhaps linked to career progress. For those for whom this was less important, the research journey had provided them with confidence and voice that appeared less needful of paper accreditation to be appreciated. This may reflect the attitudes of the senior leaders in each organisation. The Trust had engaged in accreditation at the request of a Trust leader and thus was considered within the Trust as important. In the Alliance, this was

deemed excellent if individuals wanted or held such qualification, but it was not seen as the driving force of their activity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> Quality teaching is not an individual accomplishment, it is the result of a collaborative culture that empowers teachers to team up to improve student learning beyond what any of them can achieve alone. (Carroll, 2009: 12) [2]

7.0 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters have explored questions concerning the thoughts and reflections of cross-school groups of teachers engaged in research activity in two different settings. In examining these settings it is possible to draw some conclusions about: the effects that length of engagement has on research activity and whether research becomes a part of teacher identity; the impact that research accreditation might have on teachers engaged in research; the influence that academic and collegial partnerships make in establishing a culture of critical engagement with ideas; and the impact such engagement has on teachers' professional sense of identity and confidence. In order to explore these ideas, it was necessary to reflect back on the aims of this study, which were conducted to answer the following question:

How might engaging school teachers in research activity enhance their levels of critical thinking and what do they perceive as its impact on their practices?

The aims of this research were*:*

1. To examine the ways in which teachers regard the nature and role of research in education.

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2 Tom Carroll (2009). The next generation of learning teams. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(2), 12.

2. To consider the influences on practice that teachers identify as a result of engagement in research activity.
3. To identify whether the involvement of teachers in research activity enhances their critical perceptions around their daily working practices.
4. To investigate how research activity might lead teachers to argue that they have experienced sustainable shifts in their educational approaches.

Thus, this thesis addresses what the teachers in this study see as the role and nature of research, examining how this may go beyond what has been characterised as poorly conceived and unconvincingly constructed teacher research in the literature. In doing this it is important to consider the extent to which teachers are able to engage with more critical approaches to practice. Moreover, the thesis seeks to build knowledge about how research activity may contribute to sustainable shifts in teacher identity and agency and the extent to which this might be sustained. It also presents insights into how teacher researchers are figuring themselves and their world within the context of a multi-academy trust and teaching school alliance, and into aspects of their work that produce new knowledge for the field of education. In order to combine consideration of literature with findings from the research data, it is necessary to begin this chapter by taking each research aim in turn and examining the responses that develop understandings related to these questions. In doing so, the study takes account of the ways in which socio-cultural theory with its concepts of communities of practice and figured worlds aid understanding of these data sets. Thus, the study takes account of locating and understanding teachers' work and identity within the wider political and marketised agendas driving schools. Hence, data have been related to issues of practice within two communities of teacher-learners, recognising that the responses to each aim cross and re-cross the boundaries between them. The study also considers aspects of agency and shifting identity through examining how teachers develop multiple identities which may or may not be in tension with each other. As such there is an exploration of whether teachers are self-authoring or re-figuring themselves

through this work. Finally, there is a presentation of the key findings from this work and an outline of the contributions this research makes to knowledge, as well as adding suggestions for further research, based on these findings. This chapter therefore discusses the ideas, conclusions, and contributions of this thesis with regard to teacher engagement in research, and in particular how cross-school and cross-phase research might be undertaken in ways that can benefit our education systems.

7.1 TO EXAMINE THE WAYS IN WHICH TEACHERS REGARD THE NATURE AND ROLE OF RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

In thinking about the process of learning, Jarvis (1983: 67) believed that “the reason for participation does not always lie within the learner, but in the dynamic tension that exists between the learner and the socio-cultural world”. Thus, there is a relationship between the individual and social processes of knowledge construction. Cain (2018) and Gore and Gitlin (2004) argued that the engagement of teachers in academic research is multifaceted. It has the potential of providing useful learning but may also provide dubious outcomes particularly where, as Dudley (2015) argued, teachers jump into action before understanding or considering fully the value of what they have discovered. Moreover, teachers might value recommendations by others that were made on the basis of research without fully critiquing the quality of the research or how recommendations made would impact on educational practice (Nicholson-Goodman and Garmen, 2007). Nicholson-Goodman and Garmen went even further when they asserted that when teachers were told that an idea was “research-based”, it meant to them that it was better than their own ideas and as such it undermined their authority and self-confidence. This section of the chapter considers the ways in which teachers from two multi-school settings valued research as professional development.

7.1.1 What senior leaders expected from research activity

In terms of the Pisces Trust and the Aquarius Alliance, the senior leaders had expressed a clear vision of education as an interactive and iterative process with adults and pupils having freedoms to make choices, allowing them to explore beyond policy constraints and achieve both individually and collaboratively. This had driven them to form a strong alliance with a higher education provider and in particular with Holly as the academic research lead. Tarrant (2013) suggested that schools should facilitate teachers to be reflective practitioners, and in order to do so, should facilitate research and reflection. In addition, they should facilitate teachers to learn from each other as well as extending their ties with teachers from other schools, universities, and research institutions. In this research study setting, the senior leaders in both school groupings did this not only to extend individual learning, expecting a knock-on benefit for the schools but they also valued the strength of individual voices. As a result, they expected teachers to develop ideas and ambitions related to elements of school strategy but they also wanted to develop both a group identity (as a collection of schools) alongside preserving individual aspects of school identity. They wanted to make use of data gathered from real scenarios played out in classrooms and staffrooms to inform wider practice and facilitate all staff to develop, reflect and work together, irrespective of whether they had chosen to undertake accreditation. As Gemma, a Pisces Trust teacher, argued:

> I have acquired so many ideas from my exposure to research in this group … I am applying what I learn to my classroom and I can see a remarkable difference. I have learnt more about teaching and research methods and I am finding it very useful to research a subject and deliver it to children and they are enjoying the class more.

This work appeared to be meeting the expectations of the senior leaders.

7.1.2 Dealing with market forces

Furlong (2015) argued that both teachers and students flourish in research-rich environments, as these are settings where self-evaluation and improvement are more likely to exist. This can be challenging in an environment where in general schools are in competition with each other. In order to survive in a market-led economy one has to offer quality plus value for money. This principle has been applied to schooling in England not only in relation to parental choice over schools but also in terms of a wider offering of school types. This has led to an extensive intervention in school life with market practices being privileged (Robertson, 2009; Apple, 2001). Such an educational philosophy has had serious effects and consequences (Giroux, 2002). Chitty (2014) argued that the education system in Britain has focussed on the expansion of academies and free schools, reviewing the curricula, qualification, and methods of assessment, stressing the importance of examination over classwork. Moreover, being part of a market force: “Every teacher needs to improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better” (William, 2012: 3). Thus, teachers are engaged with an ever-present agenda of improvement.

It has become apparent in the data reported here that teachers were highly aware of this environment. There was repeated use of phrases about ‘being the best I can be’ (for example Tim, Pisces Trust). Teachers also demonstrated a strong concern about failure and the desire to gain the expected results from their research (for example Stephen, Aquarius Alliance). Holly, the Academic Research Lead, talked about her need to reassure teachers that they would learn from their research irrespective of whether or not they achieved what they set out to achieve. Therefore, teachers need courage in undertaking research as it is never without risk in relation to presenting the researcher with data that can contradict or challenge expectations (Alexander, 2008). Dave and Rhonda (Pisces Trust) both explained that they had felt that their research had failed to produce what was intended after a year of research, but on reflection they argued that

they had learned a lot about leading colleagues, about themselves and had both gone on to develop in terms of promotions and new research directions that they described as successful. As Bill, the Accredited Research Lead argued, “Research gives you the incentive to explore”. Thus, it is important to overcome some of the barriers linked to taking risks in a market environment.

In this context, Qvortrup (2016) argued that teachers do not need to be told what to do, they need to be given the means to better judge their practices. Perhaps this should also state that teachers, trying to survive in an era of target-driven market-led education, also need to be given the confidence to believe that they may have good ideas about their own practices. Research is a potential route where this can happen and all the teachers in this study referenced the boost they had experienced in their confidence. However, in order to involve them in this journey it was important to set some criteria for engaging with research and, as teachers are very used to systems of setting targets and measuring progress, this work was largely focussed on qualitative data approaches. Moreover, research is never a finished practice or process, because there will always be new findings and ideas, and these tend to lead to other cycles of research. However, undertaking research through engaging in discrete projects with timelines and cut-off points is helpful in allowing researchers to see specific goals at specific times and to be able to celebrate what has been achieved (Somekh, 2006). The research programme that these teachers engaged in had accomplished exactly this and as Shirley (Aquarius Alliance) stated, this: “motivated them [teachers] to continue to do more, know and try and to challenge themselves”. In other words, having end points was essential for teacher motivation but this did not mean that undertaking research came to a halt.

The argument here is that neo-liberal market-led ideologies were at play in the ways that teachers talked, engaged and reflected on research. Narratives of market ideology were present in many of the statements made by teachers although there were examples, such as Gina and Tim (Pisces Trust) where teachers were becoming more aware of the wider political

ideology and the possibilities that education can be conceived of in different ways. However, teacher engagement in research was influenced particularly at the early stages by narratives about improvement in teaching and learning practices that would subsequently act on student data positively in terms of test results. Teachers thus needed to be convinced of the value of undertaking research, which then led them to value research highly and to predict that it would continue beyond the scope of this data collection period.

7.2 TO CONSIDER THE INFLUENCES ON PRACTICE THAT TEACHERS IDENTIFY AS A RESULT OF ENGAGEMENT IN RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Where groups of schools characterise themselves as learning communities Felner et al (2007) argues this is likely to stimulate positive outcomes for teachers and students. As such, there is a good rationale for engaging in research activity where this is designed to heighten critical reflection and the trialling of new practices, and where this creates communities of practice designed to benefit all. In other words, teachers who form into communities of practice can act together to benefit their whole community. Within an alliance or a trust, schools agree some levels of common purpose which link them together and within which they share goals and aspirations, and this was certainly the case for the Pisces Trust and Aquarius Alliance. In the case of this study building such a community was the key driver and support that teachers identified as important to their engagement in research.

7.2.1 Forming Communities of Practice

A community of practice utilises discussion, criticism, opinions and the exchange of ideas using a common language to transfer what they learn to others (Wertsch and Rupert, 1993; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, collaborative forms of learning provide learners with the means to support knowledge development (Briner, 1999). Lave and Wenger (1991; 1998) explain that communities of practice encompass groups who share the same concerns or have the same or similar passions for what they do, who work together over time and who want to do well.

Thus, communities of practice embrace the learning involved in everyday work and experimentation (Eraut, 2004; Kwakman, 2003). Collaboration is moreover deemed necessary for the success of research in schools (Ewing, 2007).

Over the period of this research, teachers had developed collective ways of seeing themselves and each other, as they were working as teacher researchers, and becoming more active in their social environment. For example, Donna (Pisces Trust) explained: “I believe we always need to guide each other”. Stephen (Aquarius Alliance), Rhonda and Gina (Pisces Trust) had explained that they liked to use what they learned to influence the practices of non-researcher colleagues. As teachers’ skills develop, they gain appreciation for their contributions, so others become inspired to join the group (Wenger, 1998). Not only were the teacher researchers developing as a community, but they were also moving beyond this to encourage others to develop some of the skills that they were developing themselves, with the potential of drawing others into the community or indeed of setting up new topic specific communities of practice.

Teachers invested themselves in the work they did, so that their profession became part of their identity, sense of fulfilment, or even disappointment as we have seen with Peter (Aquarius Alliance) and Marlowe (Pisces Trust) who left the profession after both expressing disillusionment. In the Alliance Trust, it was clear in the interviews that teachers found research to be an enjoyable professional development activity (i.e. Esme, Aquarius Alliance) and a mechanism for increasing their standing and influence within their community, both at the school and Alliance level (i.e. Shirley, Aquarius Alliance). Here research was talked about as a natural part of daily activity to the extent that all new staff were inducted into undertaking qualitative research projects, as were visiting groups of newly qualified teachers for whom the Alliance offered a developmental programme. Teacher researcher identities appeared to be integrated into what it was to be a teacher and into the setting of both individual schools and of the Alliance. In the Pisces Trust, research was a much more recent activity and spread across a wide

geographical distance, so whilst teacher researchers were regularly brought together, they were more isolated when back at their schools. This made research across schools more difficult to undertake (although a few were located more closely together, and hub identities appeared to have formed). However, these teacher researchers appeared to hold to a range of identities that remained more separate than in the Alliance. For example, they assumed identities dependent on where they were and what they were doing. In the research group they saw themselves as a teacher researcher, but there appeared to be a fragility in this identification once back at school where they re-adopted their former roles associated with the school that they worked in. Consequently, they more consciously switched between identities according to where they were and what they were focussing on. Nevertheless, there was evidence that teacher researchers were influencing their schools and, in particular, the Trust.

7.2.2 The influence of emotions

According to Rawolle (2013), the school and its structures determine the way in which teachers feel about themselves and about the students they teach, which then affects the teaching and learning approaches adopted. In the discussion of the data there is an argument that teachers build confidence in developing their own practices through experimentation and critical examination of their work in liaison with externally provided support and activity. The teachers interviewed in both school organisational communities became emotional when asked about the purposes of teaching. It became clear that teaching was a highly emotionally engaging profession. Furthermore, the community of teachers interviewed expressed their engagement in research in terms of its benefits for pupils.

Teaching has been cast as a caring profession, motivated by the teacher's sense of moral responsibility, as well as being a promoter of universal standards of knowledge and the discovery of truth (Kostogriz, 2012; Beattie, 2009; Hargreaves, 2009). Nevertheless, if teaching just relied on good intentions and benevolent feelings, Mockler (2011) argued, assessment based on knowledge and pedagogy might suffer. However, as Butler (2017)

stated, while teachers took for granted that caring and support were crucial for effective learning, they did not wish to compromise learning and achievement. In this study, although the teaching community talked about the trials and tribulations of their jobs and, at times, their significant workloads and responsibilities, in their conversations they often repeated the phase “but I would not change it for any other job”. This teacher researcher community of practice was clearly underpinned by an emotional as well as professional commitment to teaching and students. The emotional seemed never far from the surface in teacher discussion and seemed to drive them towards making connections with others in communities of practice. They drew comfort and support from their engagement in shared experiences. These were teachers who talked passionately about their work. It would of course be interesting to know whether those teachers who had not engaged with this programme would have talked in the same way, as it is possible that the emotion and passion shown in this teacher research community was in fact what led them to engage with this work in the first instance. Durksen et al (2017) argued that emotion and collaboration provide the motivation necessary for the development of teachers’ professional learning. In this case some of this professional learning was underpinned by accreditation.

It was apparent in the data from the Pisces Trust that the challenges posed by accreditation had emotional implications for teachers. They placed importance on accreditation by a body external to the school as a means by which they demonstrated their worth to themselves and their community of practice. Some saw accredited research as an incentive as “it makes people work” (Lorna, Pisces Trust and Bill, the Accredited Research Tutor). This view was challenged by Dawn (Pisces Trust) who thought that “accreditation is not so much an incentive, but it is an added bonus”. Coldwell (2017) noted that the engagement of teachers in research was related to their career stages with those anxious to progress seeing research as a way forward. Certainly, many in the Pisces Trust believed that the accreditation gave their work greater status within their schools. Lorna added that “I enjoy working with people and the challenge of accreditation”. This was then a community of practice that valued accreditation. However, Peter (Aquarius Alliance) who

had previously engaged with accreditation, expressed his opinion saying that "it makes me stressed and ratty".

For those teachers in the Trust who did not complete the programme, they were at pains to explain why they were not continuing and assured me of the ways in which their research efforts would be continued either then or in the near future. Moreover, for those who found aspects of accreditation challenging, the reasons for finding it difficult were expressed in emotional tones, setting the demands of the assessment against the other complexities of their teaching and personal lives. This suggests that working in a community where accreditation and research activity were valued, it was important for these teachers to rationalise why they were not continuing in their compliance with the wider group. In Chapter Five the argument was that accreditation assessment did become something of a focus rather than the content of the research sessions or their needs related to the school or their practice. Moreover, whilst it focussed teachers on deadlines and writing, it did not seem to influence the quality of the research undertaken and presented in comparison with Alliance staff. All were using literature, all were conducting projects that could benefit school improvement. In the Pisces Trust the four cases of withdrawal from the research programme were linked to the pressures of undertaking accreditation assessment, with eight gaining 60 credits, four of these continuing study in order to complete the full Masters accreditation. Since the completion of data collection, Holly has continued working to support research in the Trust, with a variety of staff, only a few of whom are also engaged on an accredited programme. This of course raises questions around the pressures that assessment regimes can place upon teaching communities who may otherwise enjoy and benefit from research learning programmes, which is perhaps not surprising in the marketised context of schools.

By contrast in the Aquarius Alliance, although some had engaged with accreditation in the past and had viewed this positively, all were experiencing a non-accredited research programme and the discussion expressed emotional excitement about the energy and flexibility that the freedoms from

assessment in this programme provided (Research aim 1). This may also indicate that schools relax around notions of needing accreditation as they gain experience of research activity. Stephen (Aquarius Alliance) went so far as to suggest that engaging teachers in research should be compulsory, as it gave teachers the space to think. In other words, non-accreditation provided a relaxed way of engaging with research driven by personal professional interest and that added to their workplace professional knowledge. As Norah stated, research was "[helping] me for my professional development and [giving] me food for thought". Darbyshire, et al (2018: 446) argued:

> Every learner is entitled to teaching that is informed by the latest relevant research… Every teacher is entitled to work in a research-rich environment that supports the development of their research literacy and offers access to facilities and resources (both on-site and online) that support sustained engagement with and in research.

This link between emotions, research work and accreditation raises some interesting challenges. For example, it seemed that the emotional energy and engagement of teachers was focussed around issues of accreditation where that was taking place. Conversely, where accreditation was not part of the programme, emotional engagement was focussed more strongly around research activity, whilst both groups demonstrated an emotional commitment to the role of teacher. However, even here there were differences, with the Pisces Trust focussed largely on what they could give to pupils and how they might extend pupils' life experiences. Whereas, in the Aquarius Alliance the focus was more on developing themselves as thinkers and practitioners, which they believed would then have an impact on pupils and classrooms. These differences were in some cases subtle but nevertheless worthy of comment.

7.3 TO IDENTIFY WHETHER THE INVOLVEMENT OF TEACHERS IN RESEARCH ACTIVITY ENHANCES THEIR CRITICAL PERCEPTIONS AROUND THEIR DAILY WORKING PRACTICES

The development of skills and knowledge leads to teachers taking control of their own learning (Benson, 2001). In addition, social and cultural factors shape identities and emotions, and these can influence and shape the identities of teachers (Zembylas, 2003). In engaging with their teacher-researcher community, teachers in this study were given the opportunity to stand back, discuss with others and reflect on their practices and observations. The teachers interviewed clearly appreciated being able to discuss their ideas both with colleagues and academics. It was a route by which they could stay up to date and think about wider practices, thus addressing the concerns levelled at teachers that they undertook work that focussed purely on the practical matters and tended to affirm current practices rather than challenge them (Alexander, 2008; Ellis and Loughland, 2016). Teachers here were demonstrating that they wanted to work in more critical ways.

7.3.1 Critical thinking

Wilson (2009) argued that research gives teachers the opportunity to explore theories and concepts of knowledge, engage with activities that make tacit knowledge more explicit, allowing teachers to develop new knowledge and subject their ideas to critical scrutiny. For example, Peter (Aquarius Alliance) talked about the need for teacher researchers to look beyond normal expectations, and Tim (Pisces Trust) talked about how he had benefitted from being challenged and how this had supported him in exploring theoretical perspectives in more depth, particularly in relation to Bourdieu. What is clear from the data is that whilst teachers refer to this process as daunting (i.e. Donna, Pisces Trust, and Esme, Aquarius Alliance), all felt that they gained a lot from engaging in more critically orientated activity including kinship, enjoyment, confidence, expertise and a variety of perspectives. This

was also true of the teachers in the Pisces Trust who had not continued with the research programme as they argued they had benefitted in terms of such things as leadership expertise, promotion, critical thinking and experience. All expressed their intentions to continue as teacher researchers.

The discourse used by teachers can indicate issues around power relations (MacLure, 2003). For example, people in the same profession can talk with each other in codes understood straightaway by those who share this profession. However, this can exclude or distance others without access to such information, leaving power in the hands of those who ‘understand’. In a market-led system, holding access to information that not all can access, may provide some with competitive advantage and it was possible to see a small element of this in the data collected. In the Pisces Trust, for example, Tim talked about how his deepening knowledge of Bourdieu was more difficult to talk over with non-research active colleagues as they would not understand. In the Aquarius Alliance, Molly discussed the issue that some headteachers did not understand the research journey and needed to be convinced over time, hence setting herself up as having greater knowledge and therefore power in relation to the research journey. Brenda also regularly made reference to herself as more experienced than others. Danaher et al (2000) observed that we see ourselves and make judgements about ourselves in terms of the power of the knowledge we acquire. However, in general teacher researchers were working together in sharing expertise and critically examining their experiences albeit learning these skills by degrees. For example, Stephen had realised the weaknesses of his approach to leadership and now valued the inclusion of multiple voices as an added strength to his skills. Additionally, Brenda (Aquarius Alliance) had begun to gain some awareness of the position that she adopted in groups and was beginning to combat these tendencies.

7.3.2 Developing agency

Teacher agency is “the capacity of the professional educator to effectively apply appropriate professional knowledge, skills and understandings, and

dispositions in professional practice contexts” (Turnbull 2005: 207). Teacher agency allows teachers to engage in research as a means for change and make a difference by exercising their power (Urrieta, 2007). Brindley and Crocco (2010) found that there were many challenges to teacher engagement in research, but they needed the empowerment offered through research engagement as they could make a difference when their voice was heard in their schools. This implies that teachers will need to develop critical thinking skills in order to unpack and redesign the ways in which they work with others. One’s agency refers to one’s ability to make the change and influence it. To be operating within a figured world, the activity of figuring both one’s self and one’s world involves agency. That means for the teachers in this study, to be considered a part of figured worlds they must be active in figuring themselves and their world through innovation and improvisation. Clearly, for Stephen, Peter and Marlowe, the extent to which they are able to do this is questionable, not through their own activity, or lack of it, but because they were working in an environment which they felt did not facilitate them with the freedoms to do this. However, for others this was more apparent.

Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2009) attributed the power of teacher agency to the continuing learning and making a difference through improved practices. However, the argument here is that teachers must be viewed as agents of change and not as tools that needed improving. Holland et al (1998) viewed identity in terms of social learning. In this way the teacher asks himself/ herself the question “who am I in my work” and “what am I connected with”? (Kelchtermans, 2004; Holland et al, 1998). Next the teacher starts asking himself/ herself the question, what should he/she do at work to make things better for the children? (Hoekstra and Korthagen, 2011).

Research activity should be understood as part of teacher professional development that facilitates them to be agents of change. In this study, teachers were the activators of their research and consequently their learning was “authentic” (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Through conversations with their peers, leaders and academics, teachers found

themselves empowered, as they became more and more aware of their agency to make change, their confidence boosted by the shared vision they had with their peers. However, lack of time and a high workload can frustrate teachers in achieving their research goals (for example Stephen, Aquarius Alliance), but this can be alleviated by senior leaders planning research activity into school life and by teachers building research into their daily activity (for example Moira, Pisces Trust and Shirley, Aquarius Alliance). It is interesting to speculate whether, had Marlowe (Pisces Trust) remained with the programme, his agency would have grown as his learning extended and he may have had a greater ability to convince senior leaders to support him. For example, the teachers remaining on the programme were able to put together forceful arguments made on the basis of their own research findings, combined with perspectives from academic literature, to persuade senior leaders of the efficacy of their ideas. Alternatively, Marlowe may just have been in a community of practice that was set on retaining its conventions and not interested in agency and shifting identity.

Teacher expectations tend to evolve when teacher agency is activated (Campbell & McNamara, 2010). Cooper and Elton-Chalcraft (2018) argued that research gave teachers the motivation to investigate and learn. The teacher researchers in this study were increasing their agency by learning to strengthen their critical approach with arguments developed from the literature and their own research. Thus, Dave and Tim (Pisces Trust) and Molly (Aquarius Alliance) talked about how they developed and gained promotion as a result of engaging with research. Molly was encouraging teacher research colleagues to actively engage in ‘figuring’ their new spaces for innovation. Tim (Pisces Trust) was engaging with wider communities outside of the school in academic conferences because of the strength of the arguments that he was developing around his research. Esme (Aquarius Alliance) was likewise engaging in academic conferences and adopting new practices based-on the research programme which she was using with all new staff joining the school and with newly qualified teacher groups. The argument here is that teachers gained agency because they were becoming

critical researchers who believed in their ability and their right to participate in decision making, exercise choice, and affect change.

7.4 TO INVESTIGATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH RESEARCH ACTIVITY MIGHT LEAD TEACHERS TO ARGUE THAT THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED SUSTAINABLE SHIFTS IN THEIR EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

Within a socio-cultural framework a ‘figured world’ encompasses our social and cultural construction of the world. As argued in Chapter Two, teachers create and are created by their world which encompasses many challenges and tensions (Solomon, 2012; Lave and Wenger, 1991/1998). For this research these tensions influence teacher identity as they attempt to negotiate the expectations they set for themselves as teachers, the expectations set by their community, their school and wider organisation and, for some, by those who are accrediting them or engaging them in research. Further, it is then of key importance to establish whether such changes and negotiations are sustainable.

7.4.1 The teachers figuring their worlds

Fairclough (2013), Brown, Lan and Jeong (2015), and McShane (2016) argued that the influence of research lay in its basis in the incorporation of critical analysis, policies and their effects. This view of research demonstrates its potential to disturb and disrupt taken for granted approaches, raising questions about how to figure or re-figure the world in and around the researcher. In addition, Clarke and Phelan (2015) asserted that teachers’ intellectual autonomy should not be ignored and should be considered part of the ethical and political nature of their work. So, in schools it is not only important to take account of the expertise and opinions held by staff, but also a moral imperative. Moreover, Brown and Flood (2018) argued that discussions become more critical and political, the more research literature is read and the more research is undertaken. The teachers in this study were being given opportunities to explore their potentials and see what they were competent at, what their beliefs were, and what inspired them (Lasky, 2005).

Urrieta (2007) suggested our figured worlds are intimately tied to concepts of identity, allowing space for agency in the form of improvisation and innovation. Therefore, in engaging in research activity that fosters innovation, it is possible to argue that this in turn fosters agency on the part of the teachers engaged in research activity. It was clear from this study that teachers viewed their ability to act as agents of change as an important aspect of making research sustainable. In constructing this world, however, teachers were reliant on the cultural resources available to them and at a time when market logics dominate this could explain why teachers drew on narratives related to school improvement, attainment and assessment. However, identities are not fixed as people constantly change and adapt their identities to fit with the worlds they inhabit. In this case engaging in research activity could therefore be expected to influence teacher researcher identities in an ongoing negotiation. We know from comments made by, for example, Stephen and Brenda (Aquarius Alliance) that leadership carries with it some sense of agency in terms of the ability to advise and direct others. However, as we have seen in the data sections, this research activity had acted to disrupt such practices and both Stephen and Brenda were amongst those who commented on the challenge that this posed for them in terms of withholding their own power in order to facilitate the agency of others. Nevertheless, at the same time other staff, including Stephen, Peter (Aquarius Alliance) and Marlowe (Pisces Trust), raised questions about how their agency was being perceived and not being fully facilitated by their own senior leaders. Marlowe stated: “I want to do all these things and these are going to be important for the school, but the school does not understand me, the school does not want me to do it, the school doesn’t let me do this”. In other words, they were acknowledging that their agency to figure themselves and their world was being impeded by the wider school identity which was largely controlled by senior leaders. For Peter and Marlowe this meant that they felt that their research interest was not sustainable in this environment and was undervalued and they left teaching. In other words, the activity of developing reasoned and informed arguments based on research activity and literature to persuade senior staff of the efficacy of new ideas was more

readily accepted in some schools than others. In this scenario senior leaders have greater influence in figuring the world of the school than was offered to the teacher researchers. Thus it is possible to argue that in these cases, whilst teachers are part of a community of practice, they are not able to figure their own world in ways that build its sustainable potential unless given permission by school leaders.

In the Aquarius Alliance there was however, a prevalence of teachers who figured themselves as teacher researcher, which involved an across alliance identification with research. This was evidenced in the ways in which the end of year celebrations merged research project work, professional development, academic input and critical reflections together and the ways these were also used to inform a variety of school groups from school senior leadership teams to the teacher researcher activities. This also attested to the virtue of having built a research culture over a number of years that fed across schools into cross-school research teams. It was clear that research activity went beyond only those teachers interviewed and that these were experienced staff who asked searching and critical questions when brought together. In the Pisces Trust the end of year celebrations involved senior leaders who were clearly impressed by and supportive of the work of the teacher researchers. School senior leaders were likewise supportive at these events but were in the early stages of fully embracing their teachers' research journeys across all schools (for example Marlowe). This may be influenced by the situation regarding inspection outcomes of these schools which were all under pressure to improve rapidly. As a consequence, it appeared that not all leaders understood that research was a complementary activity in the improvement story rather than a distraction from it. The notion of this group as a figured world was thus more aspirational than actual at the time of this research. Nevertheless, identities did appear to be evolving throughout the period of this research and more leaders were offering support to teacher researchers over time. Moreover, Holly was able to use some of her data gathered from the Trust in development sessions as a stimulus for such a movement. It was also noticeable that the schools were developing a greater Trust identity as school environments were shifting

towards a more individualised, quirky and 'home-like' presentations of their school, that sat in line with Trust expectations. This appeared to be a Trust in the process of figuring itself, in an attempt to move from a community of many practices towards a new figured world. Teachers could therefore see possibilities opening up and a wider Trust environment that was encouraging initiative based on engaging in research practices. Alongside this, the group of teacher researchers were working towards figuring themselves in this fluctuating environment. All were clearly enjoying this development and even Marlowe, despite difficulties with workload, felt that teacher researcher was the identity he wished to adopt.

7.4.2 Sustainability

These teachers were engaged in multiple communities of practice and this can make it difficult to understand exactly how people are reacting and interacting within particular communities (Roberts, 2006). Clearly in this study teachers are part of a teaching community of practice, a school community of practice, a Trust or Alliance community of practice and a new community of teacher researchers. In addition, there could be challenges for communities of practice where these acted as vehicles of compliance, adhering to externally created 'rules'. For example, Van Lier (2008) underlines the initiatives that teachers take in terms of their self-regulatory and agency related motivations that make them feel responsible for the outcome of the action they adopt and implement, which can act to regulate them. Ingleby (2012: 125) related the rise in interest in communities of practice to "the prevalence of educational initiatives that are based on bureaucracy and professional standards". Communities of practice could thus become a way in which teaching professionals work together to achieve the demands set by markets and who self-regulate through shared practices. In this way teacher emotions and loyalties to their community encourage them to comply rather than challenge the 'taken for granted'. Consequently, notions of communities of practice lack some consideration of agency, because they ignore the political aspects of how power plays into knowledge creation and dissemination. Therefore, they have a tendency to conserve

practices rather than challenge them. This makes arguments about the extent to which teachers in research communities are able to develop agency, and an ability to change the community within which they work, an important consideration for this thesis.

The teachers reported here appeared to find research an activity that allowed them to explore, get excited, and within which they could escape from many of the daily concerns of teaching. It gave them something to challenge their minds and work towards (for example Lorna, Pisces Trust). In the Aquarius Alliance in particular, there was a sense of revelling in the joys of undertaking research and that this was now an embedded part of their practice. Teachers were moved into a different world, the world of research. This, by implication, had a significant influence on how they saw themselves as teachers. So, in using agency in figuring and/or re-figuring their world, teacher identity seemed to be shifting from that of teacher to that of teacher researcher. This in turn shifted how they saw the world of schools and the wider Trust and Alliance groupings. Thus, their understandings appeared to broaden beyond the borders of their own school. Whilst all argued that this work was sustainable, albeit with a need for school leaders to act to facilitate brave and courageous practices, time appeared to be an important factor relating to the extent to which such practices had become embedded. Thus in the Alliance, research was an assumption within the role of teacher, whereas this was more of an aspiration in the Trust, but one in which they are clearly committed to accomplishing. This also begs a further question about the role of academic support. This was seen as hugely beneficial in both settings, despite Holly explaining that there we less support for her over time in the Alliance. It remains to be seen whether schools could act completely independently of academic support. However, there were so many voices arguing that the external viewpoint, the access to theory and the challenge that this brought with it, that lead me to believe that it is a crucial part of the dynamics of this journey.

7.5 KEY CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The key contributions of this thesis sit within three major arenas of thought.

1. The study shows the potential of academy trusts and school alliances in the UK, which are relatively new structures, to create a culture of research and teacher researchers within a group of schools.

2. The application of an emotional component to the formation of identity (Zembylas, 2003; Clarke, 2020) alongside figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) in the context of academy trusts and school alliances is novel and shows how the image of teacher researcher is ethically appealing to the participants in the study. This helps them invest in the project.

3. The study illustrates the types of steps academy trust, alliance and other school leaders might take to develop teacher researchers as an element of school improvement that can also benefits teacher identities and their sense of personal satisfaction.

Moreover, the ethnographic nature of this research is unusual in relation to recording the research activity of teachers over a two-year period and this, together with looking at the workings of this initiative, make the study undertaken unique. The thesis highlights the potential for such school groupings to work with research as tools for professional and school improvement. Moreover, the research activities are perhaps unusual within the field, uncovering rich data related to fostering a professional shift from identities of teacher to that of teacher researcher. As a consequence, this thesis offers a timely contribution to the field.

7.5.1 Sustainable shifts in teacher researcher identities

I have demonstrated that teachers in both the Pisces Trust and the Aquarius Alliance welcomed engaging in this research journey as both challenging

and enjoyable (Cain, 2019). Getting involved in research projects engaged teachers in unpacking academic literature, in critiquing practices that they had ‘taken for granted’, alongside experimentation and trialling new ideas. Unlike previous research initiatives in schools, this process was deliberatively connected to teachers educational philosophies and values by the academic research lead and consequently became an emotional experience for the teachers involved. In other words, the figured world of the teacher researcher engendered within the study resonated with an inspirational and emotionally based ethics of education. Holding on to a focus related to educational improvement allowed these developing teacher researchers to consider their personal opinions about what worked well with pupils in informing thinking, learning and the curriculum offer. They were also able to check their thinking in relation to the views from both school and academic colleagues, and against academic literature. The teacher researchers were engaging in projects that, whilst modest in scale, were offering ideas to colleagues and crossing school boundaries.

This thesis has discussed the fantasies associated with teacher ideals in relation to their practices and a market agenda (Clarke, 2020; Berlant, 2011; Illouz, 2007). However, this study found that these fantasies were important to teachers in giving them motivation and a purpose which made them see their roles as valuable. Much of the emotion ridden interview discussion was orientated around a sense of purpose and offering something to their community. It appeared therefore that where research offered opportunities to build on this sense of worth, it was welcomed as a means by which they could move outside of some of the perceived constraints imposed by custom and practice. In other words, fantasy was a useful hook, that enabled teachers at a later point to engage in unpicking such attitudes of mind more critically. This was greatly enhanced by teachers working together in mutual support offering both challenges and ideas to each other. Thus, having a community of practice around the teacher researcher was a clear way of offering a more sustained engagement with research. One challenge around fantasy and reality was expressed when some teachers articulated their discovery that research did not always turn up the findings that they

expected. In such cases, despite an initial sense of disappointment, teacher researchers went on to realise that the process of research was more important than the outcome. They had learned that unpacking such fantasies was important in redirecting the realities of practice. It was through undertaking research that they had learned a lot about themselves, about how to work with others and about how to open their thinking to new possibilities. In other words, they were learning to figure themselves and their world. All of them wanted to continue their research journey and were convinced that research activity made them better teachers, one going so far as to argue that it should be a compulsory part of their job. So, teachers were stating that they had 'experienced a sustainable shift in their educational approaches'. The role of academic support here should not be underestimated. The academic role was acknowledged by the teacher researchers interviewed as a crucial part of their professional growth offering guidance, security, confidence and support. It was also clear that academic judgement in directing these developments, knowing when to guide, when to stimulate thinking and when to step back, was extremely important.

Recommendations for schools considering engaging with research are:

- Schools will benefit from engaging their staff in research activity that is linked to educational purposes, value and excitement about educational possibilities. In this way they will engage the teachers' emotional commitment and interest.
- Schools will benefit from facilitating teacher-led research activity with cross-school experiences and impact and which enables them to form into a research community of practice preferably with the support of high-quality academic guidance.

Recommendations for the academic community working with schools are:

- The teacher research community of practice must be a safe space to discuss, debate and build confidence and academic supporters must be knowledgeable about schools and research.

- Building communities of practice as a first step facilitates teacher research activity as sustainable. Moving towards a model of figured worlds enables staff to engage in meaningful change where they challenge themselves and the practices that they see around them, refiguring these as they learn.

7.5.2 Teacher professional identity and agency

Roberts and Graham (2008) argued that agency and conformity do not always go hand in hand. In this study, as teacher researchers progressed over time it was clear within group sessions that they were gaining confidence in talking through ideas, challenging one another and thinking about new approaches to meeting curriculum needs. They also reported this in their interviews and talked about the sessions as providing a safe space to discuss and explore perspectives. It was important to voice ideas without fear of criticism (Roberts, 2006), but nonetheless they needed to experience challenges that pushed their thinking further. The teachers moreover saw clear advantages in gaining academic support for this, seeing the benefits of drawing on expertise from someone experienced in research and theory and who brought different ideas and challenges into discussion. They expressed a belief that research reshaped their thinking through making them ask broader questions about what they were doing and why.

In addition to this, accreditation played an interesting and previously little explored role. For the Pisces Trust, the programme of research was intimately intertwined with undertaking accreditation, whilst the Aquarius Alliance had decided against accreditation. This thesis found there to be a mixture of positives and negatives attached to engaging with accreditation. Difficulties were found in the pressures of accreditation which acted to distract teachers from some of the more flexible learning possibilities of research activity. Besides, teachers expressed their worries that they did not have the time to write or even learn how to write academically. Nevertheless, there were advantages in terms of gaining qualifications, professional standing and a sense of satisfaction from undertaking accreditation. Both

routes had given teachers advantages in terms of career progression, engaged teachers in considering theory and had taught teachers how to use a variety of research approaches. Irrespective of accreditation, teacher researchers felt that research activity enhanced their critical perceptions around their daily working practices.

Recommendations for schools considering engaging with research are:

- Schools need to provide staff with a collective and non-judgemental space to meet regularly to facilitate deepening discussion, thoughtfulness and a sharing of experiences. Developing teacher researcher identities has positive benefits for team building personal confidence and an active engagement with ideas from outside schools. Moreover, research should be viewed as a learning journey irrespective of whether it is apparently successful or not.
- Schools need to consider their position in relation to academic qualification carefully. Qualification has advantages for professional standing but may impede research freedoms and creativity and the ability to nuance projects without the additional consideration of assessment.

Recommendations for the academic community working with schools are:

- Recognise that building research communities takes time, thought and constant reinforcement. This will not be a quick process and will require persistence and tackling a lot of issues along the way.
- Accreditation should be based on teacher interests and enthusiasms and built into work that they would want to undertake as part of their role, recognising that the time needed for the associated writing will be challenging.

7.5.3 Critically reflective organisations

In this study, as teachers begin to explore the rhetoric of policy environments and realise that these are just one set of perspectives about how the educational world might be organised, they discovered that although they

were unable to change the whole landscape, they could make small changes to everyday practices that improved pupils' educational experiences. This more 'political' awareness was a notable finding within this research. Whilst potentially still leaning towards the somewhat idealistic, finding small practicable adaptations that they could make that were within their control, gave the teacher researchers some feeling of agency within a wider picture of tensions (such workplace tensions noted by Solomon, 2012), where they considered their levels of control limited. Undertaking research helped teachers develop a sense of the agency and community recommended by Urrieta (2007) whilst doing something enjoyable, stimulating and most importantly, worthwhile. This study offers a unique insight into the development in schools of communities of research practice and the manner in which this can then develop into a figured world of the teacher researcher.

The Aquarius Alliance was supportive of teachers' research journeys through the use of research advocates. This process started at the top of the hierarchy, the research commissioners having themselves undertaken research activities alongside Holly, becoming advocates who convinced staff of the value of engaging with research. These staff then became advocates for more staff who then attended sessions with Holly to learn about undertaking qualitative research. These staff then worked with others and a research culture became part of the ways in which this Alliance operated, teachers understanding that their research would be celebrated and welcomed by individual schools as each school became a greater partner in this work. This led to teacher researchers arguing that research was now a part of their daily practice and they reported that colleagues and children were undertaking research also. The key here seemed related to the time that this group had been working on a research agenda which at the date of my final data collection was eight years. This indicated that figuring a new research identity takes time and considerable reinforcement, working alongside a range of staff and engaging them in a broad spectrum of exciting research experiences. This group now saw themselves as self-reinforcing in terms of their research activity as they inducted new schools, staff and visiting staff into research projects. They had moved beyond working as a

community of practice to the active figuring of their world, entering a debate around their taken for granted practices, shifting their own perspectives and those of others, and working in cross school communities of practice to share ideas and experiences in order to think differently and to see research as an essential part of their daily practices.

The Pisces Trust were following in this direction but were at an earlier point in the journey. Here the reliance on Holly to advocate for research activity was greater, although teachers were also working on assessed projects with other university staff. In addition, the Trust leadership team were fully supportive of the work and saw this as complementary to other initiatives they were taking around school change. They advocated for the value of research activity with heads and encouraged them to support staff engagement in it. However, this Trust crossed a wide geographical area and embodied and greater number of schools and staff than the Alliance. Nevertheless, it was possible to see the early stages of a research culture forming and staff undertaking research projects were enthusiastic about the opportunities offered. It was clear throughout the research conversations that teachers were enlivened by research activity and were appreciative of the time that schools were setting aside for them to attend research seminars. As with the Alliance, the end of year conferences impressed senior leaders through demonstrating the dedication, hard work and considerable growth in knowledge of all the staff involved.

Recommendations for schools considering engaging with research are:

- Schools should afford research activity a high status and embrace the outcomes of the research activity of their staff, celebrating and validating the learning that is taking place and making use of the work teachers have undertaken. Senior leaders should also be advocates of research engagement.
- Schools should accept that engaging in meaningful research activity can be disruptive and increase the level of challenge offered to

leaders and the organisation. They should view this positively and encourage teachers to deepen their arguments and understandings.

Recommendations for the academic community working with schools are:

- Teacher researcher identities can be developed where school leaders act to facilitate teacher voice and appreciate the benefits and redirections that such teachers bring to the school and wider community.
- Engaging teachers in research raises their critical awareness in ways that may not always be comfortable for teachers or their schools and organisations. It is therefore important to be frank with research active staff from the start about the potential drawbacks of such learning activity.

7.6 STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER WORK AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This section first considers the limitations of this research before making recommendations for further work. Teachers need to be active participants and knowledge producers rather than knowledge consumers. If they are producing knowledge, then they are more likely to engage with and get excited about curriculum activity. Then there is a summary of my personal reflections from undertaking this work.

7.6.1 Limitations and further work

One limitation of this study is that it covers only one multi-academy trust and one teaching school alliance. Clearly, it is possible that not all such organisations would achieve the same outcomes represented in this work. So, much relies on the attitudes of the key players involved and the nature of the school groupings. For example, were the organisational leaders not supportive of research then efforts to engage teachers in research activity would be likely to fail. Moreover, the understanding and activity of the academic research lead was particularly influential in setting up this work.

Had the academic research lead been less understanding of schools and less able to adapt research ideas into practicable activities that extended teacher learning, then this too would have hampered progress. What this tells us is that such practices are not merely a case of repeating this model in other settings, but about developing a deeper understanding of the philosophies articulated by the school and academic leaders in building relationships that then facilitate such activity.

A further limitation is that because of the anonymity of such work, it is not possible to put teacher researchers or school leaders in touch with each other so that these practices can be shared openly. Nevertheless, because many of these teacher researchers and school leaders are presenting work in other arenas, in both academic and practitioner settings, some direct sharing of experiences is beginning to take place. As Wall and Hall (2016: 38) stated, sometimes “anonymising a person is considered unethical when writers do that to take the full credit for themselves”. That is not the intention here and hopefully credit has been given to each of the actors represented in this thesis.

Finally, in the reading and analysing of the data collected throughout the two years of engaging in research with the teachers, some issues have been selected at the expense of others. This is always a difficult decision to make as over a period of two years my data set is extensive. I did, however, try to be as objective as a researcher can be, picking out what I saw as most relevant to my research question and aims and working on the idea that other elements of this work can be reproduced in later articles. In filtering the data, it is nevertheless inevitable that some biases existed despite my attempt to provide an unbiased and clearly justified account, although this did not negate the value of the work presented here or the ethical basis upon which the work was carried out.

The study could be extended through future investigations and a discussion of teacher identity and its relations with emotions (Zembylas, 2003), as these appear to underpin much of the work undertaken by teachers. It would also

be interesting to pursue the idea of ‘fantasy’ further as teachers continually paint pictures of education as an inevitable force for good and one that can change all lives for the better. This clearly needs further unpacking. Likewise, the extent to which market agendas are playing a role in how teachers think about education would benefit from further exploration (Hammersley-Fletcher and Darwish, 2017). This could include some notions of reimagining educational practice in ways that meet the needs of different forms of society. Finally, revisiting both research sites in a further two years would be fascinating to examine the ways in which their stories have evolved since the completion of this work.

7.6.2 Personal reflections

In reflecting on my personal research journey, I have engaged with a wide range of novel experiences ranging from gaining an insight into very different educational settings than those I experienced in Syria. In developing my knowledge in a new area of educational literature, in gaining experience as an ethnographic researcher and through to having to learn a lot about attitudes to education, educational approaches and educational environments. In doing this, I drew upon the knowledge and experiences that Holly, as the academic research lead, offered, asking her about her interpretations and checking my interpretations of this experience against her understandings. Whilst this had a potential to bias my perspectives, the additional rich advice and critical reflections offered by my supervision team enabled me to carefully consider the positions I was adopting in relation to this work. Moreover, I regularly checked my understandings with the teachers whom I was working alongside. As a consequence, I am happy that I have done justice to those teachers, research co-ordinators and academics discussed in this work and to the settings reported upon.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE – ETHICAL APPROVAL TO CONDUCT THE STUDY

Manchester Metropolitan University

Memo

To: Usama Darwish

From: Prof Ricardo Nemirovsky

Date: 22/02/2018

Subject: Ethics Application Ref. ED-1718-18

Title: An investigation of the impact that engaging teachers in research activity has for teacher voice, identity, and empowerment.

Thank you for your application for ethical approval.
The Faculty Research Ethics and Governance Committee review process has recommended approval of your ethics application. This approval is granted until 02/10/2020. Extensions to the approval period can be requested.

If your research changes you might need to seek ethical approval for the amendments. Please request an amendment form.
We wish you every success with your project.
Prof Ricardo Nemirovsky

Head of Ethics
Faculty Research Ethics and Governance Committee
www.mmu.ac.uk

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APPENDIX TWO: RECORDING CONSENT FORM

Usama Darwish
PhD research student
Education and Social Research Institute
Faculty of Education
Manchester Metropolitan University
Email: usama.darwish@stu.mmu.ac.uk

RE: recording interviews/focus groups/observations

Dear Participant,

Many thanks for allowing me to conduct interviews. focus groups and observations with you. It is normal practice to audio record interviews and focus groups to help ensure the accuracy of the researchers understanding of information given. I will moreover take notes related to my observations. As a result, I would like you to sign this letter giving permission to record in the ways stated and use this recorded material for analysis and report writing purposes. I wish to stress that none of the information provided will be used in a way that can be attributed to yourself or the school from which it came. At the risk of sounding over formal but for your information I have copied the code of ethics covering this research below.

Individual schools and school staff will not be identified without their explicit written consent. Debriefing will be conducted through presenting participants with summary notes from their interviews/focus groups for comment. Data pertaining to any individual will be available only to that individual and the researchers involved but will otherwise remain strictly confidential. Data will be stored electronically and password protected, basic data being available to the researchers only. All interviewees will have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without prejudice should they wish to do so. Publications from the research will be available to all involved. There is a policy of keeping data collected during research for re-analysis or inspection by the commissioning body (subject to confidentiality restrictions) for a period of four years post completion of the project after which all data will be destroyed. In addition all research staff are committed to the professional codes of conduct (notably the Code of Practice of the British Educational Research Association) and relevant legislation (e.g. the Data Protection Act). Moreover, ethical approval has been sought from Manchester Metropolitan University Ethics Committee. If you have any questions please feel free to contact Dr Martin Needham as my Director of Studies – email m.needham@mmu.ac.uk. Also, if there are issues that you would prefer to talk through with someone independent of this research please discuss these with the Head of Ethics in the Faculty of Education Professor Ricardo Nemirovski – email r.nemirovski@mmu.ac.uk

Very best wishes,

Usama Darwish

MMU Research

I understand my rights as explained to me above and am happy to give my consent for the researchers to audio record and use my interview and focus group data together with making observational notes.

Print Name:………………………………………………

Sign:…………………………………………

APPENDIX THREE: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – FOCUS GROUP, OBSERVATIONS, AND INTERVIEWS

Study Title
An investigation of the impact that engaging teachers in research activity has for teacher voice, identity and empowerment.

Invitation paragraph
I would be delighted if you would agree to take part in a research study that I am undertaking. So that you can make an informed decision I am providing the following information and welcome any comments or questions about the study. I am also happy to share my findings and recommendations with you on completion of this work. I hope that you will feel able to take part in this research.

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of this work is to investigate the role that engaging teachers in research activity might play in influencing their thinking about their educational approaches and practices, and the extent to which such changes may be sustainable. This study will therefore investigate whether research activity amongst teachers acts to deepen their critical understandings of educational practices, enhance their confidence in and ability to voice their opinions, together with increase their sense of professional identity and empowerment.

Why have I been invited?
You are invited to partake in this study as you are one of the teachers becoming involved in research activity with Manchester Metropolitan University. The study is taking place across two school academy groupings and, with permission, will involve focus groups and observations for all those engaged in taught development sessions. In addition, I have sought 12 volunteers to engage in semi-structured interviews and in keeping a research diary to enable me to capture more detailed knowledge of your experiences in relation to your research activity. Gender and ethnicity of participants are not the focus of this study and will make no difference to who is approached to engage with this work.

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part as participation is entirely voluntary. I will describe the study clearly and go through the information sheet, which will enable you to make an informed choice. If you are willing to take part I will then ask you to sign a consent form to show your agreement. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?
The research will take part over a period of 3 years although the data collection period that involves you will take up to 2 years. You will be asked to

take part in 2 focus group interviews (organised at central event days) and I wish to observe some of the centrally taught research approach sessions that you attend.

All data collected from you will be anonymised and whilst I will collect recordings from focus groups and observations of sessions these will be held on an encrypted computer in a password protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. Any written data will be stored in a locked cabinet. All data will be destroyed after a period of five years in line with the ethical approval processes of Manchester Metropolitan University.

Expenses and payments?
No expenses are paid so your time is voluntary.

What will I have to do?
I will be asking you to engage in focus group discussions at the centrally delivered sessions and will be observing these sessions so that I can see what research teaching input you have experienced and gain an understanding of your perspectives on undertaking research.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
You may be concerned about revealing aspects of practice that reflect problems for yourself or the school. I am hoping that you feel that you can be honest in your responses and be assured that you will at no time be identified as an individual within my work, nor will your place of work be identified.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
The information I will gather from this study will help to increase understandings of the impact of involving teachers in research. My hope is that this information will aid understandings of teachers' professional development and enhance the empowerment of the teaching profession.

What if there is a problem?
If you have any concerns about any aspect of this study, you are welcome to speak to me, Usama Darwish on 07942602440, and I will do my best to answer your questions.
If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally you can do this in the first instance by contacting my main supervisor, Dr Martin Needham, using the email address m.needham@mmu.ac.uk. All researchers are committed to the professional codes of conduct (notably the Code of Practice of the British Educational Research Association) and relevant legislation (e.g. the Data Protection Act). Moreover, ethical approval has been sought from Manchester Metropolitan University Ethics Committee. Also, if there are issues that you would prefer to talk through with someone independent of this research please discuss these with the Head of Ethics in the Faculty of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University.

There will be no compensation in place for you to claim back time or expenses.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, and any information about you which leaves the university will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised. Your confidentiality will be safeguarded during and after the study and my procedures for handling, processing, storage and destruction of collected data conform to the Data Protection Act 1998.

I will collect the data using observation, interviews, and diaries and all communications will be recorded and transcribed. All data will be stored safely as described above, anonymised and given a research code known only to the researcher to ensure anonymity remains throughout the research study for the participant.

My supervisors and I will have access to view identifiable data, in order to monitor quality and compliance relating to ethical procedures.

What will happen if I don't carry on with the study?
If you withdraw from the study all the information and data collected from you, to date, will be destroyed and removed from all the study files.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of the research study will be used to pursue my PhD at Manchester Metropolitan University. The results of the study will be available to participants from the point of publication and submission to the University. Participants will not be identified in any report/publication unless they have given their explicit prior written consent to be identified.

Who is organising or sponsoring the research?
N/A

Further information and contact details:
For more information regarding the topic of this research, contact the researcher using the following details:

Usama Darwish – 07942602440
usama.darwish@stu.mmu.ac.uk

APPENDIX FOUR: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH TEACHERS (YEAR ONE MAT)

1. What does being a teacher mean to you?
a. What do you think a teacher does?
b. What is the purpose of being a teacher
c. What is important to you about being a teacher?

2. What was influential in your decision to be engaged in research?
a. Did you undertake research because it was accredited?
b. How did you get involved?
c. What do you see as the potential advantages of being involved in research?

3. Do you have any concerns about engaging in research?
a. What are the challenges in doing research alongside your work?
b. Do you have any concerns relating to what is being asked of you?

4. Where have you drawn support to undertake this work?
a. Is there anyone at home or at school providing you with support to do research, and if so what kind of support?

5. Can you talk about your experiences so far and how you have been finding the course?
a. What have you been learning?
b. How have you found the research sessions you attend; i.e. stimulating, boring, challenging, etc?
c. Have your perspectives on doing your job / teaching changed at all?

6. What would you say to other teachers contemplating undertaking research?
a. Would you recommend undertaking research?
b. Why would you say this?

7. Is there anything further about this experience that you think it is important for me to understand about teachers engaging on a research journey?

EXAMPLE PAGE - INTERVIEW RESPONSE TEACHERS (YEAR ONE MAT)

Interviewer: What value do you place on having an academic facilitator for undertaking research? Like Holly for example?

Respondent: I think it is really important … I think it is nice to have someone to ask questions to, it's never considered a silly question if you see what I mean, I never feel like, I sometimes feel like ahh to an academic it might be quite silly but actually we've got that good relationship and it's the same people at the sessions all the time and I do find it useful and Holly gives us particular papers that I probably wouldn't have seen or come across it before, it gives you a different way of thinking. [PAUSE]

Interviewer: What importance do you place on recognition of your research work? Whether it is recognition in terms of something to show for it, getting a degree, like a Master's or something, or in terms of having another post or having your work recognised or something like that?

Respondent: I think, to me it is important .. I think a lot of value goes into the recognition of sort of academic prowess. I think it is important to me, but it is not the only driver for it, ... actually the knowledge that I gain from it is as important, but I do want to get a Master's (Laughs)… [PAUSE]

Interviewer: Yes… and perhaps PhD after that..

Respondent: Well yes …(Laughs), If I get through it successfully … that is the plan.

Interviewer: Yes why not … so what did you learn about research in your previous training? Are you new to research or have you learnt about research before, have you had any training or done any research?

Respondent: Ehm yes, so as my degree is in Psychology, which is quite a research heavy degree, undergraduate degree, and it was a thing where everything was quite scientific research, I conducted my own research study for my dissertation and so I am quite familiar with research as sort of practice ehm but I'm doing it in a sort of in different way now, it is quite nice, but there are quite few similarities between social sciences and education in terms of research. [PAUSE]

Interviewer: How do you see the professional development of teachers joining this MAT with the Trust ethos and with their programmes of developing teachers' skills?

Respondent: I think one of my colleagues here joined as NQT …. she said her NQT programme is in, the [Pisces Trust] is incredible … and just we literally have been talking about it five minutes ago before I came here. I think the CPD that we get offered here is really good, because we can share it with other schools … on Friday for example we are going up to London to have joint STEM training, which I think you just wouldn't get if you were not

part of the MAT because there is no funding for it and there is not the expertise for it. And we are one Form Entry School and although you have one school with loads of different talents, we cannot have it all, if you see what I mean. Everything, everyone from every school has something to give which is nice.

APPENDIX FIVE: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH TEACHERS (YEAR TWO MAT AND TSA)

I. VALUE OF RESEARCH

1. Now you are in year two of undertaking research how have your thoughts developed and/or changed in relation to the value of research?

2. In what ways do you think research has impacted upon your practice? (both positively and negatively? / are you more confident with conducting research and research methods)

3. Do you see research as something that you will continue to undertake in the future? (and if so why/ why not)

II. VALUE OF GROUP WORK

4. To what extent do you think working in groups is important in sustaining research activity? (have you found being part of a group is an incentive for you and does it give you more insight? Does it help being in the same family of schools?)

5. To what extent does working and discussing research with teachers from other schools affect your research approaches and thinking? (does it help being in the same family of schools?)

6. Have you had any opportunities to work across schools? (and if so what has been the impact on you of this? / Is it helpful conducting the research with the support of the family of schools than conducting the research in your own school alone?)

III. VALUE OF ACADEMIC INPUT

7. What role does academic literature play in your thinking about work in schools? (is there a particular paper or author that has influenced your practice or/ and thinking?)

8. What value do you place on having an academic facilitator for undertaking research? (do you think it helps that the academic facilitator is coming into the family of schools to work with you?)

9. What importance do you place on recognition of your research work? (to what extent is it important to gain accreditation or other kinds of externally visible recognition?)

IV. RESEARCH AS CPD

10. What did you learn about research in your previous training? (the nature of research sessions)

11. How do you see the professional development of teachers joining the MAT (Multi-Academy Trust)? (past and present? / what is the focus of teacher CPD compared to the government agenda? & do you see yourself differently after being involved in the programme?)

12. What do you think of the research celebration at the end of the year?

EXAMPLE PAGE INTERVIEW WITH TEACHERS (YEAR TWO MAT AND TSA)

Interviewer: Could you please tell me how you first got engaged in research?

Respondent: I think when I first was involved in research it was about personal development and changing things in my classroom, so it was more sort of trying things and having the confidence, because I was relatively newly qualified when I started being involved in research, doing things in RCTs and having the ability doing that bit of a literature review to look at evidence to back up what we were doing, and the confidence to change things and that added to my development. The biggest thing is the mechanism for me to develop every day. The different people I have been involved with and the variety of ways, have been because I developed that confidence through it and the approach with which we develop everyday across the teaching school. So for example, I was involved in the last academic year just finished, the report we have done about it in October looking at, I went to look at school priorities from across different schools in the Alliance working in schools where we were looking at improving writing at greater depth and what could be done for that and we did a lot of research methods for that and it was like, to teach somebody else the research methods and they would be able to use that in their own research. They had similar feelings as the people in the original studies had that I was involved in. So, they had to develop confidence too. For example the paper that I was involved in presenting at BELMAS, I said I think this [undertaking research] gives people the confidence to change and also give them a different way of looking at things. So it actually opens their eyes, stepping back and actually looking at their own practice in their classrooms at that particular school when we had quite particular preconceptions about where the area was in writing they wanted to improve. They were quite convinced that it was spelling, spelling, spelling and then when we actually looked at it from a research study that we did and the qualitative data we gathered looking at children's writing, actually it wasn't quite what they thought it was and it was actually more about language and that had a bigger impact. I think that it is always like a fresh pair of eyes without having to get an extra person involved so I think that is really good because it encourages you to think outside the box a little bit and to have to look at it may be differently to the way that you previously did. And the thing that we do most at the moment and I have been involved in is spreading across the Alliance rather than just being in your classroom. For example, at the moment I am working with some NQTs and really we have been able to go down as well as upward giving them the confidence to go and make change actually in their classrooms that can actually make quite a big difference for research methods and that extended to literature and what's out there that otherwise you might not see.

Interviewer: Thinking back to your taught sessions, what sort of methods did you engage with?

Respondent: What I have been looking I have done a lot of observation and obviously observation is not enough we go out and look at the temporal environment and see on the hit-list what's going on, what can we hear and

what can we see all that outside thing. It is interesting what you can see, not necessarily sometimes what you were expecting. So we have done a lot of that and did that to support other people, so we are looking at the listening walks and what we can learn from those and questionnaires we have done as a quick win to spread a message out there to people in a manageable way, semi-structured interviews, focus groups we have done quite a lot of that and also RCTs looking at where we are actually going in and changing one thing and seeing a measurable change. It is actually looking more… it is not really massive I suppose but that self-reflection and what people will have learnt individually from it.

APPENDIX SIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH RESEARCH PROVIDERS

Q.1 Can you talk to me about the work that you have been doing?
  How did this work start?
  What is involved?
  What is the overall purpose of this work?

Q.2 What are the benefits and challenges associated with this kind of programme?
  Issues around audience
  Issues around locations
  Issues around style of delivery necessary

Q.3 How do you feel that the programme was received by the students/teacher researchers?
  Do you have any evidence of impact?

Q.4 What do you think about teachers engaging in research activity?
  What are the advantages and disadvantages?
  What are the potential benefits and challenges of accreditation?
  What are the potential benefits and challenges of non-accreditation?

Q.5 What is the most surprising thing that you have found in dealing with teacher researchers?
  Can you give me some examples?
  What has been the overall value of this programme?

Q. 6 Are there any questions you would like me to ask or you want to add in relation to this topic?

EXAMPLE PAGE INTERVIEW WITH RESEARCH PROVIDERS

Respondent: To go back to the question about what research can give them, in the loosest terms research, basically reflection and reading, can give them space and mechanism to think about whether this is okay what can be done about it what it means, it is a way of exploring …. You know it's got a kind of connection with therapy… it is not designed to make you feel better, like therapy is, but it's designed to give you insight and that insight can enable you to cope, so for example the classic aim of psychotherapy is not to cure the person necessarily because the person may not be sick, but they come to you for a reason, you cannot fix their problem but you can help them explore ways by which they can learn to live with whatever it is and I think that's part of the purpose of what the purpose of research is. It is certainly part. For me it is part of the purpose of research…. it sounds very reductive the way I've just said it, but I think there is an element of truth in it. I am thinking on my feet here. Oh God, if I said anything awful I am gunna get the sack now. Umm so what else?

Interviewer: very refreshing and useful ideas.

Respondent: So what else? What are the other advantages and disadvantages of research? Other advantages, it is always good to keep moving, right?.. if you come to a standstill in your life that is when you get bored you get stale. So research can act as a boost, can act as a push. It is like having extra litre in your car's engine. It is like having a meal that can give you energy and sleep, it can make you think again… Disadvantages, well I am imagining these. I have not seen evidence of these but I would guess there is as time passes there has to be cost to the time you spend, in addition to doing your day job, where do you find the time to do research, but you know what, even that may not be a disadvantage because … of … the truth is if you don't have time to think then you are really not in the right job. And research is really a question of thinking. It is not about data collection, it is not about analysing stuff, in a broader sense it is thinking about something and considering it and the type of research that they are involved in largely involves coming to your own conclusions in a structured organised and sensible way, which is why the government is not a big fan of research. It does not like this kind of research. It likes the kind of research which produces Nobel prizes for medicine and it likes new applications for crop sprayers. The world in general is not a big fan of this kind of reflective introspective stuff. But that of course is because it produces people who know how to fight back, who are better able to say, 'you are talking bollocks… it is not true'. There is nothing worse than a teacher who tells the government you are talking bollocks. Delete that… Other disadvantages to the students I do not see any big disadvantages really. I think that research done well of course delivered well would be a plus. There may be occasional students who can't cope. It is not just because they cannot cope with the course it is because other pressures in their work and personal lives are affecting their ability to do the work.
I am beginning to increasingly believe the subject of all good educational programmes, the subject is not education, the subject is personal course for students. You are not really studying education for studying, itself, I mean in

a broad way, you are studying yourself. You may collect data from other people, but in the end, yourself is always in it. You collect data and you choose how to analyse it and you write the report to the company and everything … research is always about you. I mean there may be exception if you are building bridges and using stressed concrete, but that is not research in the same way. Now this is classic social science research.

Interviewer: Now what is your opinion about the research being accredited or unaccredited. How do you feel about that?

APPENDIX SEVEN: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH RESEARCH COMMISSIONERS

Q.1 Can you tell me about how you first got involved with the university?
How did you get involved with the lead researcher?
What did you expect the partnership to bring to you?
What did you gain from having a researcher working with the staff?
What influences did working with a researcher have?
How has the relationship developed and/ or changed over time?
Does the individual researcher make a difference in this context?

Q.2 Can you tell me about how you view research activity amongst teachers?
How does it link to professional development?
Can you outline any impacts notes as a result of this work?
Has this work had an impact on you personally?
Has the work of teachers changed as a result of research activity?

Q.3 Please could you outline the value that you place on research accreditation?
What do you perceive to be the pros and cons of accreditation?

Q.4 Please could you outline the value that you place upon undertaking research?
What do you perceive to be the pros and cons of undertaking research?
What does it mean to be research active?

Q.5 Can you outline any ways in which the research agenda is benefitting cross school communication / relationships?
Are schools working together on projects?
Are staff making ongoing relationships across schools through the session delivery?

Q. 6 Can you describe any impacts or shifts that you have seen that you can relate to this research agenda?
Could this have happened without a research partner?
At what levels have you seen impact taking place (staff, school, culture etc)?

Q. 7 Where has research worked at its best?
Has research activity affected staff voice?
Does research have an impact on staff beyond those directly engaged in research?

Q.8 What are the challenges that you have had to overcome in facilitating teachers to be research active?
Have there been different reactions from different schools?
Have you faced resistance?
Have staff become more challenging?

Q.9 What have you most enjoyed as part of the engagement with and in research?

What are your hopes for the future in relation to research?

Q.10 Are there any questions you would like me to ask or you want to add in relation to this topic?

EXAMPLE PAGE INTERVIEW WITH RESEARCH COMMISSIONERS

Interviewer: Could you tell me how you view research activity amongst teachers? What is the impact of research activity on teachers?

Respondent: Yes. I think you know if we look at teachers, we have got teaching standards, haven't we? and we have a national benchmarks that teachers should tick these boxes and what's enabling teachers to become research practitioners in giving that freedom and what this does is enabling them not just to tick those teaching standards boxes, but go beyond that and explore what works best for their children, as it is every day teachers are faced with different sets, not of people, but different scenarios, and different set of needs within their class and changes and what this does has shifted their attitudes so teachers are ready to celebrate change. There is a new research opportunity so it is changing a class or where there is something being delivered more centrally, a curriculum change, so the teachers then see that as a research opportunity and it is such a positive thing.. and ..ehm for example, if they are reviewing their own skills, and looking at those teachers' standards, they see how they are able to … it is awful that we have those standards, and they see how they can develop a whole new approach to viewing the teacher's roles… it is so much more than those standards, isn't it? It is about giving those teachers the credit we know in medicine and in other walks of life, these professions receive the highest respect, because research sit behind them, but for teachers you know they are not held in the same esteem, are they? I think this is also doing the ground work about enabling teachers to go way beyond standards, does that make sense?

Interviewer: Thank you ... just like we are talking about research, how do you see the value of accreditation, as far as research is concerned, do you think that teachers doing research for accreditation as opposed to doing research freely without necessarily having or being accredited with a Masters and the end….

Respondent: Ehm ehm .. you know there is a moral purpose behind research practitioners in their classrooms and the moral purpose is to improve provision for the children and we do that within the school and within the classroom and across the region, more specifically and accreditation is more important, it is a more extreme reward if you can say that .. it is very important in that staff receive the feedback that is being positive, it is important in terms of encouraging them to move forward when they gain the accreditation, they feel the success, it is important for their wellbeing and their personal achievement, just like children, for me personally it is not important, but for my staff I want them to ideally have the intrinsic and the extrinsic.

Interviewer: What are the cons of accreditation?

Respondent: The cost.

Interviewer: Well, that is very straightforward, but as far as the teachers themselves, what do you think?

Respondent: We don't view it positively so it is difficult as any external kind of benefit I am thinking, I know at the moment another member of staff that you will be interviewing has embarked on a Masters' accredited programme with our high school. I know that she comes away with agreements and disagreements and that only can be positive, that we agree and disagree. I know that the taught element, the accreditation, isn't the way we learn here, we

APPENDIX EIGHT: AN EXAMPLE FROM A FOCUS GROUP

Answer 5: I think it depends how you view better. Better as in we're better than you or we're doing it in a different way are we right we should do it like this or better as in this is the optimal way for our school and our community I'll go back to the university again to do this particular thing, like you said that that better might be different from what or will be different from school to school to school, so meaning not so much better but best for us, a clever way of doing it.

Interviewer: So, you like a much more contextualised 'better' if you like so,

Answer 5: Yeah if that makes sense, yes.

Interviewer: yeah yes, absolutely it does..Yes? *inviting in new speaker*

Answer 6: I think it's about identifying areas that are only relevant in your cohort or you're your school because I know particularly in my research I'm planning on doing it's specific to my cohort and like key stage two, so I'm looking at making it better for the children as opposed to being better than a diff, another school so the contextual element of it is it's better for the children rather than who's the best school or whichever

Interviewer: ok. So to pose another question what are your worries about doing this programme? Have you got concerns or worries or reservations?

Answer 7: Time!

Interviewer: Time yes?

Answer 8: Time is a big worry. I think if, If you going to do it really well, to the best of your ability, erm I think time is a very import concern cos In reality what you have is [*indistinct*] I know the ideal is that you can balance this along with what you are doing the research to support our practice erm but the time to actually do that writing up and time to spend on your own research and you don't want to do is just like oh I've got a few hours here let me just read part of this book and see what I can write from that you want to be able to have a real depth I would say within so that when you then take your area of that research and you want to support your colleagues and you want to try and help them think in a different way then you need the basis within practice that is about children no matter where they are in school or whatever school they go to you need to have that embedded in you and you need to have the time for you to have a real understanding of your own research so that you can move that research forward in practice and time is very difficult.

Answer 9: I think there are a few of us taking on new roles in September so it's making sure we're giving those roles the amount of time that that needs as well.

Answer 10: You'll do it you will

Answer 11: You will

Interviewer: (*laughs*) yes (*general laughter and noise*). How can how can we manage time in order to make it work? What sort of strategies can we use?

APPENDIX NINE: AN EXAMPLE FROM FIELD NOTES

The second school was situated in a poverty-stricken, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, urban area where discipline, aspiration, and experiences were all essentially problematic. The Trust initiatives around developing pupils' experiences of a wider curriculum that involve for example, art, historical venues and investigation were being used to extend and expand the lives of children who might otherwise not be able to do such activities. The teachers were very vocal in their support of this agenda.

This school was a primary school. The school building was contained and organised in a way similar to a large-scale family home. This gave the feeling of a family setting. There were sitting areas furnished with sofas and comfy chairs, rugs and imitation fireplaces. The room the research sessions took place was in the school 'intervention room'. It housed small chairs for children, geometrically designed tables and the room had access to a smaller room where cake and tea were served. The space overlooked administration rooms and play areas. The arrangement of the chairs in the room and the placement of the cupboards, and the windows that overlooked a corridor, with shutters that could be opened and closed, made the room feel larger. Inside the room there were many pictures, signs, posters, books, teaching tools, as well as play tools. During arrival administrators came in and out of the room, sometimes sharing information and commenting on school chores and issues, as well as work routines. The atmosphere was very friendly and staff seem cooperative. I could see the Trust influence in parts of the school, but this influence did not appear to have reached this area. Considering this was an 'intervention room' where children came for learning and comfort, it seemed less cosy than other areas of the school and left teachers sitting around in a traditional school-like arrangement of joined up tables and low-level chairs. Nevertheless, teachers appeared to be happy being there and there was a sense of satisfaction with the work they were doing.

I observed that the participants were very enthusiastic about the course. There was a feeling of excitement amongst them. Teachers were there to make purposeful use of their time and enjoy sharing their experiences with each other, learning from the research material they were provided with. There were instances in which the people in the group voiced their concerns about what if they were unable to cope with the demands of research and at the same time do their daily duties, but these concerns soon dissipated. They were good at reassuring each other and the academic research lead stressed to them that if they managed their time carefully and worked on projects that complimented the work already undertaken, then they would be able to do their jobs, the research adding an extra element of interest to their day.

The day was focussed around teacher feedback from having undertaken focus groups in the period between then and the previous session. They had each brought a transcript of their focus group activity with copies for others to read. In this way they worked in small teams to analyse the data that they had created and also to reflect upon the process of undertaking focus group

interviews. They also identified key elements of this activity that they could use to inform and develop effective practices when adopting such a research approach in future. The data gathered prompted a good deal of lively conversation and discussion both around the content of the data and around what they had found worked well and what had not. They appeared to have learned a lot about power within a focus group and have a lot of questions around how such an approach can be inclusive of all voices. They were happy to have me join their groups and sit in on these conversations. My opinion was also sought and I engaged very much as one of the team.

APPENDIX TEN: A SAMPLE OF TEACHER RESEARCH DAY AGENDA

Research Agenda

10th Oct 2017 10am-3pm

10am – 10.45 Coffee and introductions/purposes of the day/year

10-45 – 11.30 Why am I in education?

11.30 – 12.30 Focus group exploration

12.30 – 13.00 The purposes and uses of focus groups

13.00 – 13.30 Lunch

13.30 – 14.30 Liquorice Allsorts game – making difficult decisions

14.00 – 15.00 Personal Vision versus Government policy

15.00 End and dates for next sessions – (developmental sessions – 13th and 14th Dec in hubs)

APPENDIX ELEVEN: ANALYSIS - MIND MAPPED THEMES FROM DATA

2a

accreditation

flexibility

Challenges

Workload

personal qualities

Political Nature

hierachy

Working with Colleagues

reflection time

TIME

Research is only worth doing if it benefits the children
DAVE/ Moira

Research is more beneficial having the time to do it. and building relationships is important in doing research and teachers having understanding with the researcher is very interesting and useful
DAVE

2D

perceptions of being a teacher

what do you think a teacher does?

Qualities of good Teaching

Teacher subject related passion — Hattie

differentiation — Lorna

catering for the whole class — Lorna

Being a teacher means making a difference to children — many teachers said so — Moira

"it might sound a bit cheesy" — Moira, Patricia

Research confirms what I have already thought of but more open-minded and check on my practice as a teacher/leader — Stephen

a teacher gives the children rounded education — Patricia

Since 2005 I've worked in Teaching & and research approach. I feel research means things forward — BRENDA

Every child gets a fair share of your time — Lorna (TA)

More than they think — Hattie

not just telling but working with the families — Hattie

Making sure students achieve their best — Dawn

Making students inspired to do work — Dawn

catering for the whole family — Gina

There is a team of staff who can ... — Patricia

preparing children for stuff outside the classroom — Hattie

taking a responsibility for developing people's lives — Gina

Being someone students can refer to and can come to when they have a problem — Dawn

a teacher needs to be a good listener — Moira

telling you what you want and what they need — Moira

being a facilitator of learning, a carer and nurturer, teaching children to love learning — Gina

To know I am making a difference in a positive difference — PATRICIA

a teacher is a good role model for children — Patricia

allowing children to grow — Marion

get children to national expectations — Marion

build the confidence of children to come to school — Marion

make school a fun — Marion

inspires children to achieve — Peter, Hattie

fill the gaps between what the child wants to know & what is expected of them — Marion

think differently — Hattie

in order to be a good teacher, be a good practitioner — BRENDA

what makes a good leader and a good teacher? — DAVE

Meeting official standards

good teachers always reflecting on their practice — BRENDA

things work well, things don't go well — because

I learn a lot about leadership and ... — DAVE

prepare the children for the future emotionally, socially, academically, ... we have a lot of boxes to tick — Patricia

providing equal opportunity — Lorna (TA)

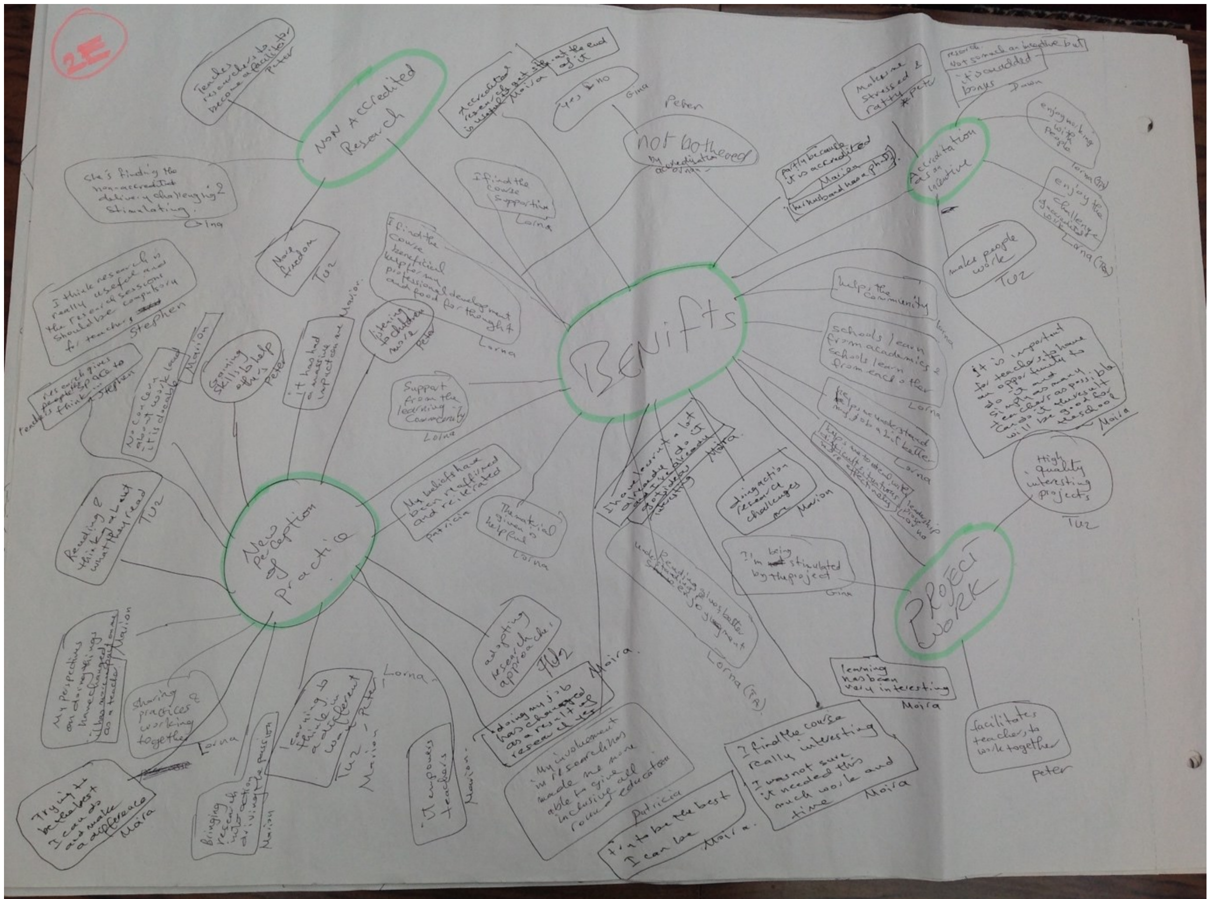
what does a teacher do?

a teacher teaches specific subjects & shows interact with others, social skills on top of everything else they need — Moira

There was no tension between research & school load ... management — Dave

My research project is across 12 schools TRUSP. It is far greater than anticipated — Dave

Out of 12 schools I only visited 4 — Dave


2E
NON Accredited Research
not bothered
Benifts
New perception of practice
Project Work
More freedom
Support from the learning community
helps the community
High quality interesting projects
facilitates teachers to work together
I find the course really interesting
I was not sure it needed this much work and time
Sharing practices & working together
I'm being stimulated by the project
make people work