An exploration of primary-school teachers' engagement with teachmeets

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Declaration

I, Susan Harrop, declare that this thesis is my own work. It has not been previously submitted for an award at this university or any other institution, and the content of this thesis is legally under copyright legislation.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to a few people who guided me through this process and helped me conclude my thesis.

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Finally, to my family, who have supported me throughout this long journey. Your love gave me the courage and inspiration to carry on.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, my true love and my loving dogs Hooch and Patch who faithfully kept me company during the long hours of typing. I also dedicate this to all who have shown me kindness and humour throughout this journey.

Everyone would be proud that I have completed my doctoral journey.

Abstract

This study explores teachers' perceptions of their reasons for attending teachmeets as a form of continuing professional development (CPD). Teachmeets are organised for teachers by teachers and are attended beyond school hours. The study situates the emergence of teachmeets within the history of changes to education from the 1997 New Labour government to 2021, seen as a time of gradual de-professionalisation. The methodological approach initially involved an interpretivist approach and later adopted a socio-material stance. The research design comprised semi-structured interviews with 12 primary-school teachers in the northwest of England. The interviews investigated teachers' reasons for attending teachmeets, who or what influenced their engagement and what they gained from attending. Using an interpretivist approach, a thematic analysis was undertaken, resulting in five emergent themes: (i) control, (ii) surveillance and fear, (iii) data, (iv) a shared free space and (v) a cohesive inspirational community. Additionally, a case study focused on one participant and took a socio-material approach. This approach was chosen to fully capture the affective contours of the interviews. For example, I was struck by the way silences, corporeal gestures and shifts in tone of voice provided insights into the contrasting affective intensities of the school and teachmeet environments. Findings suggest that school based CPD was limited, contrived, and not tailored to teachers' individual needs, often experienced as part of wider de-professionalising forms of surveillance and control underpinned by fear. In contrast, all participants found teachmeets to be accepting, liberating, and affirming places where teachers reignited their confidence and motivation to continue in the profession. Policy implications point to the gap between

government rhetoric about the role of CPD and the realities of practice. This study highlights the care and concern teachers showed for each other outside of school and the lengths to which some teachers go to support each other professionally.

Contents

Table of Figures ix
Prologue 1
Context to the study 1
1. Chapter 1: Literature Review 6
1.1 Teachmeets 7
1.2 Social Media 9
1.3 Foucault and Education 12
1.4 Changing Education and Policy Context 13
1.5 Education under the Blair Government (1997–2007) 15
1.6 Globalisation 17
1.7 Continuing Professional Development after 1998 20
1.8 Teacher Support through Teachmeets 22
1.9 Teacher Shortages 24
1.10 Introduction of Standards 25
1.11 The Effects of Lesson Observations 27
1.12 The Use of Data Within Education Systems 31
1.13 Summary 35
1.14 Research Questions 36
2. Chapter 2: Methodology 37
2.1 Introduction 37
2.2 Research Design 37
2.3 Methodology, Ontology and Epistemology 39
2.4 Paradigms in Education Research 40
2.4.1 Interpretivist Paradigm 42
2.4.2 Socio-Material Paradigm 42
2.5 Methods 46
2.6 Accessing Participants 49
2.7 Pilot Study 50
2.8 Recruiting Participants 53
2.9 Timeline 58
2.10 Ethics 59

2.11 Undertaking the Research 61
2.11.1 Undertaking the Interviews 61
2.11.2 Analysis 63
3. Chapter 3: Findings 70
3.1 Control 70
3.2 Surveillance and Fear 74
3.3 Impact of Data 78
3.4 Summary 81
3.5 Free Space 82
3.6 Cohesive Inspirational Community 85
3.7 Concluding Remarks 89
4. Chapter 4: Affective Encounters with Carla 94
4.1 Introducing Carla 97
4.2 My Encounter with Carla 99
4.3 I Feel Like Screaming 102
4.4 Feeling Revived 106
4.5 The Clap! 107
4.6 Leadership or Not? 111
4.7 Positive Experiences, Positive Spaces 114
4.8 Affective Encounter 115
4.9 Positionality: attune to affects 116
5. Chapter 5 Seeing Further (Conclusion) 118
5.1 Introduction 118
5.2 RQ1: Why do teachers choose to attend teachmeets? 119
5.3 RQ2: How do teachers experience teachmeets? 122
5.4 RQ3: Are teachmeets a new form of CPD according to teachers' perceptions? 124
5.5 Contextualising the findings within the literature 126
5.6 Limitations of the Study 130
5.7 Recommendations 131
5.8 Policy implications 133
5.9 Personal reflections 134
6. References 137
7. Appendices 153

Appendix 1: List of Participants 153
Appendix 2: Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews 155
Appendix 3: Reflections on the Pilot Phase of the Semi-Structured Interviews 157
Appendix 4: Example of Life History Timeline 158
Appendix 5: Consent Form 160
Appendix 6: Transcription Example 161
Appendix 7: Themes from Coding 167
Appendix 8: Priori and Posteriori Codes 168

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Priori and Posteriori Codes 67

Figure 2: Transcription coding 69

Table 1: List of participants 57

Table 2: Overview of Interview Schedule 58

Prologue

Context to the study

Before becoming a teacher educator based in the higher education sector, I was a teacher in the primary sector. Later in my career, I achieved advanced-skills teacher status, enabling me to work within different schools, supporting both teachers and trainee teachers. It was during this role that my enthusiasm grew for developing the next generation of teachers and supporting them in their ongoing development. My study is inspired by my passion for teacher education and promoting the best teaching practices for children's learning, which also motivated this study.

This prologue is intended to highlight the background and context of my journey and the relationship of my past experiences to the position and stance I will be taking throughout this thesis. I address my positionality at the end of this section. I entered the teaching profession driven by the desire to make a difference for young children and to improve their life chances. I believed that working with primary children was the starting point in creating positive attitudes and values in the acquisition of literacy and thinking skills required for education and lifelong learning. I commenced my teaching career in communities that were socially deprived and had been affected by the politics and policies of the Thatcher years, which devastated local industry and community cohesion. During that time, people living in these areas no longer had the dignity of work, and as a result, there was an increase in levels of drug use, alcoholism, poverty, and violence. It was against this backdrop that I taught for 20 years. I was committed to enhancing

my knowledge and pedagogical approaches to provide children in my care with the best opportunities in interesting dynamic and engaging ways. In 2006, I undertook an MA, driven by a desire to learn more about how to support communities in areas of high poverty. With my newly acquired knowledge, I aimed to implement, change, and refine educational practices to create opportunities for both children and teachers to reach their full potential and be inspired.

My interest in research was driven by my experiences of teaching and being heavily involved with teacher education as a tutor and mentor in schools. The increasing move toward accountability, target setting and performance-related criteria, which was heightened in 1998, left me disheartened, like so many in the primary profession. Much of my time and energy was governed by a managerial system based on scrutiny and excessive paperwork. Avis (2015, p. 212) identifies how this shift toward performance management is at odds with the 'rhetoric of the knowledge economy', highlighting the importance of trusting and respectful relationships.

During the period of 2005–2009, schools became places of intense surveillance, and 'trust' between teachers and senior leaders ebbed away. Blame cultures became the norm senior. Leaders became obsessed with observing and implementing the literacy and numeracy hours; these were clearly on the agendas for all senior leaders to implement. Accountability became a means by which the school could summon staff to account for their teaching.

At this point in my career, I was heavily involved as an English subject leader in a primary school, which involved demonstrating lessons for other practitioners, observing their practice, and

creating action plans to enhance their pedagogy in accordance with the guidelines of the Literacy Hour.

The Literacy Hour was very prescriptive, comprising a daily one-hour lesson broken down into timed slots. It included fifteen minutes of text work, focusing on the syntactic and semantics aspects of texts, followed by 15 minutes of word-level work, either shared reading or writing to demonstrate writer-author techniques. Next came the 20-minute group work or independent work, during which the children were expected to apply the new knowledge they had acquired in the previous sections. This was followed by a ten-minute plenary, during which the children were expected to demonstrate what they had learnt from the preceding teaching. During an Ofsted inspection, I was reprimanded for being one minute over my 15-minute bracket for text-level work. I felt stifled and frustrated, like so many other practitioners, that I was being held to account in this way. This whole process made me very uncomfortable. The erosion of autonomy began to undermine my sense of professionalism slowly and then rapidly. The space I had for critical reflection and innovative practice was limited. I concluded that I no longer believed I had the critical autonomy and intrinsic motivation to be the practitioner I wanted to be. My drive came from the knowledge that education can be truly life-enhancing and transformative if appropriate mechanisms are put in place to allow spaces for teachers to think and be creative. These experiences led me to explore teachmeets, which seemed to be venues teachers were turning to in a context of heightened surveillance and control. I decided to leave primary-school teaching and go into higher education as a teacher educator. This research explores why teachers attend teachmeets, what drives their attendance and how their practice and careers are shaped

by their attendance. It seeks to explore teachers' perceptions of teachmeets and how they impact professional development.

I now address my positionality: I recognise that I am a white woman from a working-class background. As I was growing up, education was valued and seen as the key to social mobility. Training to teach and teaching were labours of love; I felt privileged to be in a position of trust. My worldview, beliefs and values were all wrapped up with my desire to deliver quality teaching and learning for children, firstly through my teaching career and now as a teacher educator in higher education. To some extent, I feel I am on the inside of the research due to the experiences that I shared with the participants. However, my positionality shifted when I became a lecturer in higher education. Reflecting on my interactions with the participants during the study, I did not feel as though I was in a hierarchical position with respect to them. I felt as though we were all colleagues as I did not emphasise my status as a lecturer. However, my participants may have been aware of my lecturer status even if I did not detect this. I have to recognise that there could have been a power dynamic in the interview context that may have influenced the answers the participants gave. My outsider status may have acted to free participants to speak more candidly than they would have to a school leader or colleague.

I take the position that social reality is constructed by people through experiences. Accordingly, my experiences cannot be separate from the research processes. Even so, I am aware that certain elements from my past may have influenced parts of the research process. It is these biases and assumptions from my biography that I attempted to be cognizant of in collecting data,

interpreting them, and presenting the findings. As a researcher, I am required to reflect on how my positionality may have influenced the research process. I will be undertaking a post-structuralist interpretive stance that will be threaded through my analysis and conclusion. Firstly, I will use an interpretivist paradigm and secondly, a social materialist paradigm. The paradigms will be further elaborated in the methodology section. Briefly, a socio-material methodological approach requires a different strategy from that of the interpretivist approach as the researcher actively pays attention to her sensory reactions within the interview context and uses these to provide clues. In a socio-material stance, the researcher's body is recognised as part of the apparatus that creates 'data', and accordingly, data cannot be objective or fixed for all time. Instead, 'data' is recognised as a partial insight situated in a specific time and interview context.

1. Chapter 1: Literature Review

My study will explore the reasons why teachers attend teachmeets, their experiences and whether they are used as a source of professional development. In this chapter, I draw on several bodies of literature to place the study in a historical, social and political context in primary education. This thesis contributes to the understanding and engagement of teachers at teachmeets. Initially, the literature will focus on teachmeets, broadly defining them and covering the emergence of teachmeets. Specific attention will be given to the role of social media in communicating and distributing information about teachmeets to the profession. Next reference has been made to Foucault's, technologies and how these can be used to understand education, with particular attention given to the concepts related to power, control, and dominance. Teachmeets are situated in the historical context during the Blair government of 1997–2007, and the changes that took place in education within policy changes were aligned with globalisation. Particular attention is given to the changes in education and the impact of this on continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers. The latter sections will deal with the impact and effect of the policy changes in relation to teacher retention, teaching standards, the system of lesson observations as a mechanism of control, datafication and the increased impact of this on teachers' autonomy. I focus on literature published between the years 1997 and 2021, as these years encompass significant educational policy changes. These are the years that are pertinent to the invention and rise of teachmeets.

1.1 Teachmeets

This section introduces teachmeets and key studies that explore them. A teachmeet is an informal meeting organised by teachers for teachers. It is a space where teachers' perceptions of good practice, practical ideas and discussions on educational issues are shared among teachers. They are relatively new and undocumented organisations that are very popular with teachers, having emerged in 2011. Most teachmeets last for around two hours, and presentations can last between three and five minutes on related topics, followed by questions and answers. They have become hugely popular and have high engagement, clearly indicating that teachers use these opportunities to discuss and immediately engage with their job and role (Basnett, 2021). They involve collaboration and the sharing of experiences is a positive way to support knowledge transformation (Carroll, 2009; Pedder et al., 2005). Teachmeets are advertised online and via social media. The role of social media will be discussed further in the following section. Teachers attend teachmeets in their own time and are not paid to do so. This study aims to explore the role of teachmeets in teachers' lives. Specifically, it will explore the relationships between teachmeets, CPD and the impact of teachmeets on teachers' careers, considering their engagement with these.

There is limited literature and research on teachmeets; however, the available literature reports that teachers gain knowledge from each other through a range of experiences (Cordingley, 2014). The informal nature of the meeting space provides avenues to increase capacity for CPD (Allison, 2014). It is evident that teachmeets have become sources of inspiration and forums where teachers attend to acquire and disseminate professional knowledge and participate with like-

minded colleagues. Gough (2013) describes this as the 'lived experience' of the profession and argues that teachers acquire information through collaboration. In addition, Bennett (2012) suggests that the importance and value of teachmeets are not so much in the speakers but in the conversations that happen between the attendees. According to McKintosh (2006), the power of these informal gatherings was in the coming together of teachers to discuss a topic or a theme.

Basnett's study (2021) noted that teachmeets were vibrant spaces with far more positive outcomes than drawbacks. Her study highlighted that from the open discussions and presentations, it was apparent that the teachmeets enabled teachers to expand their knowledge and understanding of pedagogical approaches, suggesting that collaboration gave teachers the confidence to tackle problems and gain a range of strategies and resources that could be used in practice immediately. Moreover, teachers value dialogue with colleagues (Bennett, 2012). Basnett (2021) found that through the collaborative atmosphere in teachmeets, teachers left feeling further energised. Basnett (2021) also emphasised that the opportunity that teachmeets provide for teachers to network with other educators across schools was crucial in the development of knowledge and understanding related to the curriculum and wider teaching roles. Phan (2017) concurs with this, noting that teachmeets were seen as a safe space where teachers could learn from others and gain new knowledge. In support of this, Evans (2014) found that teachers said the best CPD was that which was led by teachers for teachers. Allison (2014) stressed that teachmeets were significant spaces for development because they lacked formal control and did not represent the lacklustre structure of formal CPD offered by local education authorities or the CPD organised in school through senior leaders. The CPD offered by schools

was prescriptive. This would revert the power of the informal conversation that empowers and revitalises teachers through these face-to-face spaces and become a barrier to teachers seeking to take ownership and control of their own learning (Basnett, 2021).

Studies have found that teachmeets are places where teachers share experiences, collaborate with each other and exchange information in non-threatening environments and positive ways that support knowledge transformation (Carroll, 2009; Pedder et al., 2005). The next section turns to the role of social media and its influence in promoting teachmeets.

1.2 Social Media

Social Media is a blanket term that has been used to describe technological systems that allow collaboration and community (Tess, 2013). This section will highlight the importance of social media use in facilitating communication in relation to the advertisement of teachmeets. Social media can be defined as web-based systems that provide a social space for users to construct a profile and make links with others who have similar interests and connections (Marques et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2013). Teachers have been known to share experiences and resources that allow for the exchange of ideas and the gaining of new content ideas, information, and knowledge (Gikas and Grant, 2013). This instant and wide-reaching feature of social media communicates with large numbers of teachers and informs them of the time and place of the meetings.

According to the work of Pedder et al. (2005), there are two ways teachers acquire further knowledge and skills. Firstly, they discuss how this can be achieved by engaging with different sources of knowledge; and secondly, and more importantly, it is achieved through participating

in collaborative activities. Meermon (2010) suggested that the use of social media aids in the establishment of communities and face-to-face events. One such community was the teachmeet.

Currently, many educational settings are linked up and engage with social media in a range of ways to support teaching and learning at all levels (Gruzd et al., 2012). Previous studies indicate the potential use of social media to provide an informal network through which to share knowledge and resources and allow for peer-to-peer learning (Madhusudhan, 2012; Forkosh-Baruch and Herskovitz, 2012; Veletsianos and Kimmons, 2013). Social media facilitates the sharing of information about practical issues within teachers' practice (Veletsianos and Kimmons, 2013). The research indicated that social media provides an informal yet open setting for information dissemination (Gruzd et al., 2012; Ross et al., 2011) and allows teachers to follow others in their field who are interested in similar issues.

Research into the use of social media within the teaching profession suggests that many teachers are increasingly using social media as a means of communication rather than more 'traditional' forms such as e-mail or virtual learning environments (Judd, 2010). Furthermore, it has been highlighted that the expectations of where interaction between colleagues takes place and where the transfer of ideas and communication happens are now different from those of previous generations of teachers (Bicen and Cavus, 2011). It is worth noting that the potential to reach and inform large numbers of teachers at any given time is closely linked to the use of mobile devices, which allows for instant access to content (Gikas and Grant, 2013; Du et al., 2010). Almond et al. (2018) researched the global impact of social media in the teaching profession and

found that teachmeets were one of three forms that relied heavily on virtual technology in sharing information; the others were WhatsApp and social media platforms.

Greenhow (2011) argues that social media can facilitate teacher-centred courses that provide learning support. Arquero and Romero-Frias (2013) and Lovejoy (2012) found that teachers were using social media to share ideas in quick and simple ways. Through social media, teachers can connect globally and participate in wider communities. The easy facility of connection of social network sites could influence the high number of participants engaging in teachmeets (Bennett, 2012). Studies report the benefits of using social media as a vehicle for interaction among teachers as a process of gaining ideas and further knowledge in relation to their careers (Almond et al., 2018). Teachers and professionals who engage with social media have been found to have an enhanced sense of belonging, support, and a social presence (Selwyn, 2009; Dunlap and Lowenthal, 2010; Hung and Yuen, 2010). These platforms enable teachers to actively engage and provide opportunities to enhance knowledge and skills (Lester and Perini, 2010). In addition, social media can promote interaction, which can set the foundations for collaborative teacher learning outside traditional school environments and classroom arenas through posts and tweets about events (Lin et al., 2013).

Almond et al. (2018) suggests that another important criterion of a teachmeet is to provide a space where teachers can meet face-to-face. Chow (2013) argued that the use of online forums, such as blogs and Twitter, is passive in nature and tends to position users as consumers; as such, teachers follow without necessarily contributing (Forkosh-Baruch and Hershkovitz, 2012). In

comparison, teachmeets are highly interactive forums where like-minded people are present and contribute through discussion and engagement. Therefore, it is necessary to understand why teachers are choosing to attend teachmeets in person. The next section discusses Foucault's concepts related to control in education.

1.3 Foucault and Education

Foucault's concepts of power, control and dominance have been used extensively by educationalists such as Steven Ball, to show that schools are not so much about empowering an individual to become knowledgeable, but more about the system of education being utilised as a mechanism of social control. Foucault (1971) noted that education systems were a means of introducing, changing or maintaining ideas. He furthered this discussion by explaining that this could be achieved via the knowledge and power that these systems have and achieved through the people engaged with them. Foucault's (1984) concept of bio power was everywhere in everyday life, permeating all social orders and being part of everyday actions. For Foucault (1984), power and knowledge were entwined. He explained that power created situations, and the outcomes, in turn, influenced or impacted the power. This understanding is not like a Marxist view, which ascertains power as a commodity controlled by a dominant group. Instead, Foucault's notion of power is about a complex mix of people and spaces working together, where acts of power can be both acts of implementation and resistance. Ball (2013) noted that it is a mixture of actions that are lived out and impact people. Ball argued that the government policies of 1997–2007 used the people in positions in schools to implement their policies to control the

education sector. Hence, schools and educational settings have become places where individuals can be highly regulated (Ball, 1984).

1.4 Changing Education and Policy Context

This section will discuss the context and changes made to education policy following the election of the New Labour government. In 1997, the 'New Labour' government, led by Tony Blair, came into power. Under this party, a reinvigoration of labour politics and the notion of a classless society was evident in New Labour's rhetoric of meritocracy and equal opportunities for students and teachers. The idea that talent was based on ability rather than privilege placed an emphasis on individualism and self-empowerment. Whitty (2002) highlights that many applauded the return of the New Labour government and the changes heralded for education policy.

New Labour was to offer Britain an alternative political choice, the 'Third Way', with policies that would point the way forward not only for the UK but also for other countries that were becoming dissatisfied with the neo-liberal stance. New Labour advanced neo-liberalism through a series of policy goals that were geared toward economic competitiveness with less emphasis on social democracy and leading to fewer challenges to globalisation. Giddens (2013) described the neo-liberal stance as one of free markets and as the dominant ideology that is shaping the world.

Ball (2003), drawing on Foucault-suggested educational discourse such as the rhetoric of education, spoke of the interconnected approaches of the market, managerialism, and performativity. At the local and national levels, each of these terms demonstrated different

degrees of importance at different times; however, they very much depended on each being present for specific reforms to be successful. Teachers became very much a part of a top-down governmental approach to education, which was later considered a system of control and implementation of policy. The changes that followed were cloaked in a specific kind of language and government rhetoric.

When applied in a connected manner, these policy approaches offered what could be considered an appealing ‘other’ to the state-centred public welfare system (Miron, 2008). Ball argued that ‘policy technologies involve the calculated deployment of techniques and artefacts to organise human forces and capabilities into functioning networks of power’ (Ball, 2003, p. 216). These ideologies were deeply embedded in the neo-liberal rhetoric of ‘choice for all’. The policy technologies contrast with the older technologies of professionalism and bureaucracy and came to play a crucial role in the alignment of public sector organisations, and, in particular, education. Ball (2003) argued that these alignments laid the foundations for privatisation.

With this new policy supposedly providing ‘choice for all’ coming together, they produced what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) referred to as a ‘devolved environment’ (OECD, 2009, p. 7), requiring central management to shift away from micromanaging to focus on setting the overall framework for such changes in attitudes and behaviour on both sides of the system (OECD, 2009). The policies that followed took tight centralised control over teachers CPD. CPD took place within this new context, a new environment where the changing roles of government agencies rested upon, as stated by OECD

(2009, p. 75), ‘monitoring systems’ and the ‘production of information’. This went on to produce unintended effects, particularly at the school and teacher level.

1.5 Education under the Blair Government (1997–2007)

To address issues related to CPD for teachers, I will review how it is defined and positioned within the new ideological discourses. Under the pre-1997 government, education had been very much woven into the social fabric of the welfare state of 1945. Successive governments continued to use education as a political tool to gain votes and power. The focus tended to be on an individual learner gaining social empowerment. The years of the Blair government from 1997 acted as a catalyst for the shift in how teachers’ roles were understood. CPD became a key aspect of government policy and the mechanism by which policy would be delivered, to which I will turn to next.

After 1997, New Labour and its philosophy of education shifted to a more centralised position of the government. Ball (2008) described this as education and more education, coupled with the notion of globalisation, which is further discussed in section 1.6. *The Learning Age* report endorsed Blair’s view of Britain’s drive for business and commerce. It proclaimed, ‘Learning will be the key to a strong economy and an inclusive society’ (DFEE, 1998, p. 3). Four years later, another key government policy report, *Success for All*, stated that the government’s goals should be ‘social inclusion and encourage economic prosperity’ (DFES, 2002, p. 9). The rhetoric in the policies and reports endorsed an instrumental model of governance with a drive toward employability in the labour market as the key to social inclusion. Employability had acquired a

central role within policy, strategy, and the student curriculum. Accordingly, CPD changed from being personal and a source of personal development to becoming an instrument of government to achieve its economic policy. I was teaching when these changes to policy were administered and felt the impact of how over a period my daily life as a teacher was being controlled; accordingly, there was less choice in relation to development. The courses offered for development were rooted in the literacy and numeracy hours, which, in turn, were rooted in government policy. I would argue linked to globalisation, all of which was related to governance and, as previously noted by Foucault (1984), a mechanism to control and group people.

Education became an important part of the economic policy of the New Labour government. The McKinsey report (2007) became very influential, documenting how to develop good-quality school systems that could compete globally. It suggested that education, teaching and learning had to be improved to service global economic power. Statistics were used to demonstrate that children placed with high-performing teachers progressed three times as fast as those placed with low-performing teachers. The message was taken seriously. The notion that a teacher can be ‘supercharged to achieve more productivity’ took hold. Conffield (2012) analysed the McKinsey (2007) report and concluded that it was flawed on many fronts. This resulted in the government committing to improve teacher quality by stating this in the 2010 white paper, *The Importance of Teaching*. The point was reinforced through the rhetoric that teachers throughout their careers would receive effective professional development and the opportunity to work with other practitioners.

Accordingly, teachers within an educational setting were considered the 'people' of the market, the instruments of policy. The calibre and quality of staff came to play a significant role in the relationship between government policy and education (McGrath, 2003). Furthermore, McGrath noted that such conceptions influenced how senior leaders managed staff and training agendas. As noted by McCulloch (2012), this was manifested initially in a school culture of collaborative planning meetings, staff meetings based on the school's needs and a cycle of lesson observations. The form of teacher CPD requires attendance at meetings shaped by an agenda and instructed through presentations.

Ylijoki (2001) suggested that this had a negative effect on the staff as the support given to them individually was less relevant and led to the loss of professional autonomy. The new corporate style of CPD in school had a negative effect as teachers felt disenfranchised. This was an unintended effect of government policy that had put teaching at the heart of economic policy nationally and globally. Consequently, teachers felt the need to seek alternative support. These changes could also be attributed to issues around the argument of globalisation, which will be discussed next.

1.6 Globalisation

Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers under the New Labour government was becoming highly politicised and centralised as it was deemed to be a vehicle for the development of economic wealth against a backdrop of globalisation. It was part of a bigger government development, and my argument is pertinent to that which was linked to regulation, control

classification and dominance (Foucault, 1984). Education shapes the way we relate to and interact with our environment socially and professionally and is interwoven with our identity and practices. It is important to recognise that education is not value-free (Ball, 2006). It is not neutral but deeply political, as noted by Foucault (1984). Gee (2000) explores how discourses offer us markers of identity and social mobility, which can shift from one context to the next. Ball (2008) and Reay (2006) discuss the impact of globalisation on education and challenge the New Labour's rhetoric of 'choice' in which education was viewed as meritocratic. They noted that New Labour's notion of choice was flawed as not all social groups have the same advantages and access to good education.

Under the umbrella of the 'knowledge economy', one of the most significant duties given to education is to provide a flexible, adaptable, and skilled workforce to make countries competitive in the globalised economy. It focuses on education for jobs and is linked to the economic requirements of the workforce. Consequently, education becomes a commodity with no regard for issues of equality—be that economic, political, or social.

Globalisation, competition, and the rapid progress of technology caused a shift in the nature and patterns of working and in the pattern of training and CPD (Day, 2020). CPD for teachers at that point was centralised and controlled by the government through a network of regional and local advisors and leading teachers. CPD became a top-down approach through the National Strategies programme, bringing conformity and uniformity to all schools within England. This was delivered through the local education authorities through regional, local advisors and leading literacy

teachers. It was a one size fits all model (DfE, 2007). By taking complete control of CPD, under the umbrella of the ‘knowledge economy’, the government dictated training programmes using a standard format that removed professional autonomy and flexibility under the dictate of ‘what you do’. Tulowitzki (2016) suggests that schools changed the educational purpose for a global society, and schools were unsure what that purpose was. As a result of this, CPD and training in schools began to fall apart as senior leaders insisted on a prescriptive and didactic approach. Ro (2018) further emphasised that when school contexts are overly prescriptive, this has an impact on teachers’ practices and professional development. Education is forever changing. Yet practitioners enter the profession to make a difference and to empower through education. New Labour policies instead made changes that directly linked education to the economy. Biesta referred to this as ‘learning for earning’ (Biesta, 2005, p. 172). Later, Biesta (2012) noted that governments had played down any strategies that attributed to empowerment and social mobility within education.

Furthermore, this was indicated through Foucault’s views of education. The policy changes directly impacting the teaching role will be explained in the following section on CPD, with a focus on the years from 1998, highlighting the impact of the changes brought about by the Blair government, in which CPD changed from knowledge to control. This could be noted as pertinent to why teachers sought alternative mechanisms for development and chose to engage with teachmeets.

1.7 Continuing Professional Development after 1998

CPD is a facet of most professions. It is the process by which knowledge and skills are maintained and developed through training. The teaching profession has a long history of developing formal knowledge and skills beyond initial training. CPD keeps teachers' knowledge and pedagogical skills up to date, ensures professional standards are maintained and is also important for career progression and development (Day, 2020). CPD provision for teachers changed significantly from 1998 and arguably changed from professional knowledge to a form of social control. This section will now highlight how CPD changed for teachers.

The structure of CPD outlined above, linked to New Labour constrained teachers. The model often required teachers to attend a one-day meeting led by an 'expert'. This pattern of CPD was typical of the National Literacy Strategy (1998), where leading literacy teachers would disseminate government policy through the delivery of the strategy model. Accordingly, these expert teachers became the actors of structural change (Lucas, 2000).

This became the traditional model of CPD. The Teaching Leaders survey (2011) found that traditional CPD, the format introduced by New Labour, was not held in high regard by teachers. These forms of CPD were often of poor quality and not value for money. The survey emphasised that school staff are better placed to lead their own development. Evaluative data from the Teaching Leaders survey stated that 76% of participants emphasised a will to work collaboratively with other practitioners and schools (OECD, 2009). The literature indicates that the centralised and fragmented education system did not provide a system of CPD that works for the individual

teacher. Durbin and Nelson (2014) found that instead of school CPD, the teaching workforce was developing and using a range of alternative avenues to further develop their professional knowledge.

The education system under New Labour was shifting from social policy to economic policy. For teachers, this meant that CPD was very much about 'doing' and delivering a prescriptive model of education. For example, the National Literacy Strategy (DFEE, 1998) and the National Numeracy Strategy (DFEE, 1999) were set up by the New Labour government. These strategies were perceived by practitioners as the government telling teachers how to teach, alongside telling them what to teach in relation to the already-present National Curriculum. Although these strategies were not a statutory requirement for schools and Local Education Authorities, they were perceived to be mandatory. Many state-controlled schools followed the government's request to implement these policies, which translated into specific, daily teaching sessions. The way these strategies were taken up and the breadth of their influence can be viewed as a move by the government to micromanage education with a tightly controlled curriculum that is overseen by senior leaders and local education authority personnel. It amounted to dictating a pedagogy. Such strategies became the norm and were unleashed on teachers to further disenfranchise them (Hodgson and Spours, 2013).

To summarise, the education system has seen a shift from a shared world in which autonomous and critical thought among practitioners was valued to a shared world in which schools became places to fulfil values related to government policies (Evans, 2004). Day (2009) argued that

practitioners were required to meet the needs of society through the present education system, which serves a complex set of networks. These networks represent various interests, often referred to as edu-businesses, and include academy chains, businesses, philanthropists, local community groups and faith organisations running free schools. All these players have their own underlying agendas. The next section will consider teacher engagement at teachmeets, how teachers experienced them, and the support received.

1.8 Teacher Support through Teachmeets

Previous sections highlighted how CPD had become tightly controlled and manipulated through policy. Teachers faced a top-down, centralised controlled system of CPD in school. This was a direct result of the policy changes linked to government policy, in particular, the CPD strand. CPD resulted in being highly regulated and a mechanism of control (Foucault, 1984). This level of control significantly impacted the role of the teacher and fuelled the need for teachers to turn to each other for support. I would argue that the profession at this point, based on my personal experience of this time in school, became controlled and contrived by the government and the senior leaders, with many professionals deciding to leave the profession, significantly impacting retention. This section will explore what the teachmeets had to offer and give an insight into what would be experienced during engagement with a teachmeet session. Teachers began to look for alternative avenues to support their development, as noted in the following: The work on families and communities by Rosencil et al. (2006) seems pertinent to a possible role of teachmeet in this environment, indicating that teachers attend 'unconference' teachmeets as a source of validation and to engage with the support of colleagues in an informal setting (Almond,

2019). Roscencil et al. (2006) address issues relating to the changing face and what constitutes a family and a support system, which was reflected in the community of teachmeets for teachers. Interestingly, friends and colleagues, rather than immediate family members, become new sources and networks that can provide personal and professional support. Bandara (2020) notes that social interactions among people within physical spaces can forge strong ties that can impact change. This highlights the support, friendship and comradery that was facilitated by teachers within the meetings.

In a post-modern vein, Beck (1992) and Giddens (1992) discuss the move from traditional boundaries to a choice where 'individualisation' and the freedom to choose become decisive factors in developing an individual. The choice of the teacher to attend teachmeets and the freedom to choose bespoke training in relation to individual needs are based on professional reflection (Ewans, 2015). Individual choice because of government policies and change has been previously identified in sections 1.3 and 1.4 as limited and, for some, non-existent, as noted by Foucault (1971), the education system was a tool of power to maintain government policy and control. Education is the instrument of policy, the power to use teachers to deliver the policy. Importantly noting, the freedom of choice to attend was harnessed and valued by teachers.

We can use this lens to consider what kinds of bonds and engagement are forged in teachmeets. This study is interested in teacher engagement via teachmeets and their experiences, what happened, and the friendships forged. These friendships and relationships will be examined in the context of what Giddens (1992) conceives as relational friendships, which are suited to a

contemporary world dominated by the attributes of individuality, equality, mobility, and choice. This could be relevant when considering why teachers are choosing to attend teachmeets and the impact of these on the recruitment and retention of their personal careers. The next section considers teacher shortages and highlights factors that impact the role and engagement of teachers at teachmeets.

1.9 Teacher Shortages

Previous discussions have highlighted the changes that took place in the education sector following 1997, the policy implementation that stifled and disenfranchised teachers, which consequently impacted retention within the profession. Supported by literature, this section will note reasons that may also indicate why teachers were seeking alternative spaces for their development. A study by Hood (2016) was undertaken at a time of teacher shortages in England and focused on teacher retention. These problems were recognised in the government's white paper *Educational and Excellence Everywhere* (2016) and by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) (Hood, 2016). Teachers have been leaving the profession for a variety of reasons, and one of the most cited ones is professional autonomy (Boylan, 2018). The IPPR predicts that the 17% fall in teachers in the five-year period up to 2014 will continue (Hood, 2016). The increase in the predicted number of pupils due to enter the system over the next ten years (800,000 children) is set further to exacerbate the current shortage of teachers. To address a similar situation that has been longstanding in the USA, teachers have been actively encouraged to join networks and create opportunities for CPD events. This responds to a desire to keep teachers in post by developing communities. This could be a possible theme that may appear when the

empirical data is analysed. Building on the work of Darling-Hammond (1997) in the USA, American researchers (Fortner et al., 2015) have shown in their longitudinal study spanning 20 years that teachers are retained through support and quality CPD through networks and support from practitioners. This will be further explored in the empirical chapters. It could be argued that teacher shortages are due to the control exercised within schools in relation to government policies, as previously noted. As highlighted at the beginning of the chapter, Foucault (1971) described the system of education as being a powerful mechanism to implement and sustain policy. Additionally, other technologies of control used within the school system are the introduction of teaching standards and lesson observations, both impacting the role and daily practice of the teacher, enhancing control through these mechanisms. These will both be discussed. Firstly, teaching standards, followed by lesson observations to highlight how these technologies were implemented and added to the fear, control and surveillance of teachers.

1.10 Introduction of Standards

The teaching standards will now be discussed and highlighted as well as how these standards also became a mechanism of control. The government white paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (2010), introduced new standards for teachers. Oancea and Orchard (2012) argued that specifying professional standards was a practical move introduced by the Department for Education. The aim was to regulate all teachers by a common set of standards to measure performance. Teaching staff would be observed against the standards and judged accordingly to the criteria. The effects of this strategy will be discussed in the following section. The white paper identified that teaching quality has been an area requiring development for several years. Hood

(2016) supports the call for expert teachers, as the value of expert teaching has been shown to impact pupil progress (Gipps et al., 2015). By drawing on the skills of successful teachers and their classroom practice, which has been noted as a strategy to enhance teachers' professional knowledge and skills. The government of the day harnessed this knowledge and introduced the role of leading practitioners and advanced skills teachers to work with schools to improve practice. All had to be assessed against the standards criteria to prove worthy of the role, a role that was used as a mechanism of policy to gauge staff against the standards—a policy and crucial issue that impacted on teacher's daily role, which is teaching to the standards. This could be an important factor in connecting teachers to communities. Research suggests that unifying teachers seems to be important in teacher retention (Gipps et al., 2015). This study is interested in the reasons behind the teachers' choice of attending teachmeets, their experiences and if it is a new form of CPD.

Teacher development is more likely to take place and be successful when teachers are exposed to discussions about and around routine practices and collaborate with other practitioners (Garet et al., 2001; Desimone, 2009; Hood, 2016). In the following section, I will aim to demonstrate what was happening at school and class levels, which may well be influencing the need for teachers to seek collaborative communities beyond their individual settings, such as the effect of lesson observations, to highlight teacher fear and disempowerment through policy that had been implemented in schools by senior leaders.

1.11 The Effects of Lesson Observations

The different approaches to lesson observations and their purposes have become a disputed area (Ball, 2008). Inspection scrutiny and the impact of graded or ungraded lesson observation for many practitioners. Ball suggests that observations have had a detrimental effect on the teaching profession and have unwittingly become part of the self-regulation that Foucault described in reference to the panopticon effect (Foucault, 1980).

Gleeson (2015) describes this as a 'normalised model of observation' and reflects that schools are falling in line with government and Ofsted expectations. The Ofsted approach to school inspection places lesson observation as the key to a teacher's success or not and has been referred to as a 'normalised gaze' (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). Scholars call on Foucault who described assessment practice within education results as a form of holistic control as the 'all-seeing eye' in relation to accepted standards (Foucault, 1977, p. 84). Normalisation is a Foucauldian term that can be defined as the adjustment of behaviour to fall in line with 'prescribed standards' (O'Leary, 2014, p. 35). The idea that lesson observations are then used alongside the data to give an analysis of children's and teacher outcomes has led to teachers feeling that they are being controlled and losing autonomy.

Perryman (2009) states that normalisation is a powerful mechanism of power, which is achieved through 'hegemonic internalisation of discourse of control' (Perryman, 2009, p. 614). In general, this means that those who are subjects of power internalise expected behaviours and learn these behaviours through the acceptance of discourse.

The ‘homogeneity’ within the graded lesson observation that Foucault signifies is enforced through the requirement of all teachers in the sector to demonstrate standardised notions of what is considered ‘best practice’ during observations. The teachers who can demonstrate these standards will become part of the successful group, and those identified as not successful. These labels feed the rhetoric about the gap in children’s performance as measured by test results. This kind of argument builds a causal link between classroom observation and educational performance, which paints teachers as the cause of pupils’ underachievement. This could relate to why teachers are seeking their own spaces in the form of teachmeets to discuss and develop practice. Furthermore, teachmeets might act as spaces where they can gain knowledge and advise in how to attain the expected standards that were designed by the government and demanded by senior leaders.

Foucault (1977) refers to this process as ‘the examination which combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalising judgement’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). In this case, Foucault’s examination refers to the termly graded lesson observations that teachers are required to undertake.

The process of normalisation extends to much more than has been highlighted thus far. Gleeson et al. (2015) draws attention to how normalisation impacts on pedagogy. During lesson observation, teachers are expected to tailor their lesson to the correct strategies that comply with the notions of ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ practice. This expectation highlights the highly

regulated process imposed on teachers, which is the result of government policies and enforced by Ofsted rules.

While Gleeson et al. (2015) refer to the practice as the need for a teacher to perform a ‘show case lesson’ (Ball, 2015, p. 84), Ball (2003) goes a step further when he describes such a lesson as the ‘spectacle of enhanced fantasy’ (Ball, 2003, p. 222). These regulatory practices may well relate to an increased need for teachers to have an independent space to think and consult with like-minded colleagues.

One consequence of the need to observe and grade lessons is that it demands time for preparation. Teachers must either stop doing other things or modify their methods to produce the formulaic lesson structures required to demonstrate accepted practice. Furthermore, the fear of being penalised for not ‘meeting expectations’ or being judged as ‘requires improvement’ personally impacts teachers as well as the school. Fear is a key element in Foucault’s (1980) description of how the panopticon works.

Fielding et al. (2005) indicate that the process of continual observation goes against the values of what teaching is about. The attributes and values of a teacher are to continuously think of new ways to engage with pedagogy, reflect and experiment outside the box and ultimately hooking learners in. This is an important aspect of the roles of both new and experienced teachers. These points suggest the importance of understanding why teachmeet spaces are significant events in teachers’ calendars.

Wragg (1999) has highlighted the advantages of lesson observation that prioritise teacher development. Wragg (1999) remarks that ‘good classroom observation can lie at the heart of both understanding professional practice and improving quality’ (Wragg, 1999, p. 17). O’Leary (2014) specifies that the biggest problem in sustaining this climate in schools is the issue of grading lessons. The banding of lesson observations and the formality of the process as it is undertaken by senior leaders create stress and strain for teachers. This stress may relate to the need for an informal space where teachers can retreat for supportive, non-judgmental collaboration with others. Gleeson et al. (2015) argue that support is the primary requirement for teachers’ professional practice to be developed. Additionally, O’Leary (2012) argues that lesson observations have a role to play in understanding and evaluating teaching. Used supportively, lesson observation can be a way to measure and evaluate the performance and competence of teachers while also identifying their future CPD requirements. What is at stake, however, is how competence is measured and how it is used and managed by senior leaders.

O’Leary (2011) and a larger-scale study by UCU (2013) both highlighted the lack of benefits that graded observations had for teachers. Both studies concurred that the lesson observation, graded or not, was merely a tick-box exercise aimed at satisfying Ofsted. Wragg (1999) discusses the purpose of observation and, more specifically, the way in which observations should be used. What is clear, through Foucault’s notion of ‘normalisation’, is that the teaching profession has become self-regulated and controlled through the fear of not making the standard, the fear of losing their professional status and ultimately the fear of not being good enough and being

removed from post because of government policy. These policies are implemented by the government, through Ofsted and school leaders. The use of data will now be discussed with the aim of understanding why teachers may choose to engage with teachmeets and how the increased use of datafication within the job impacted their autonomy, resulting in disempowerment.

1.12 The Use of Data Within Education Systems

Data collection within the education system has become a huge factor that has impacted and influenced teacher attitudes and working life. Data collection has added to teachers' fears and loss of professional autonomy (Biesta, 2015). Much scholarship has been dedicated to how data is collected and used to assess, manage and control individual teachers. Data collection and analysis have become important factors in the daily working lives of teachers. The demand to collect data relates to the globalisation agenda (Henry et al., 2001). The need to be seen to rise in the Programme for International Student Assessment league tables relates the way governments acquire leverage in relation to other nations. Sellars (2014) argues that the use of PISA tests within the English education system have led to a further expansion of global testing. Many studies suggest that the rhetoric of globalisation is used by the United Kingdom to compete internationally and is used to drive the agenda of upskilling the workforce through education. Stauton (2017) argues that post-Brexit Britain needs to compete effectively within the world. He argues that for this to take place, schools need to teach the necessary skills. Powell (2015) highlights the need for education to implement the skills required to bridge the gap. In addition, Biesta (2011) notes that changes in the markets impacts education. Hence, top-down initiatives

are imposed on the teaching workforce with the argument that schools need to climb the assessment tables. This system of assessment and reporting has impacted on how schools work, and the results of these assessments are used to measure and rank the performance of governments. Senior leaders have become obsessed with the use of data to measure and compare the performance of teachers and children. Head teachers and senior leaders have been given greater autonomy and accountability under the present system of government and are using this focus on school performance and output measures. Whitty (2006, p. 167) argues that this process of 'governmentality' is facilitated by a 'new breed of educational professionals who prioritise school performance and educational entrepreneurialism'. Gerwitz (2003) adds that the increase of accountability is driven by a new layer of professionals who are key to the processes that underpin the concept of 'governmentality'. Furthermore, these mechanisms increase greater accountability at the school level and further erode the positions of LEAs.

The DFE acknowledges their role is to set high expectations and empower pupils to succeed. Yet as Lawler (1995) suggests, the generalised approach to testing in schools is not fair, objective or reliable. While data plays a significant role in assessing schools, the gathering of data can be problematic. Teachers need to use data in a particular way if progress is to be evidenced. Bradbury (2015) notes that teachers should be at the centre of this process as they know their classes and children. Clements and Tobin (2021) further this argument and highlight that there are contradictions in the connection between national testing and the standards debate. It should be noted, too, that teachers have been continually told that they need to be tested by both the government and senior leaders.

Selwyn et al. (2015) argue that what they refer to as datafication in schools is due to accountability reforms that were introduced during Michael Gove's time as Education secretary, which became known as compliance data. This, in turn, put immense pressure on class teachers, which shifted and changed their status and agency.

The increase in the collection of data requires analysis and comparison and has coincidentally resulted in the commercialisation of schools' business systems (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016). Furthermore, Selwyn (2015) notes that data, rather than being neutral, is influenced by what is easily measured or analysed. According to Veldkamp (2017), big data in schools was often collected in various forms, in huge volumes and uploaded to systems to be used for monitoring purposes. Eynon (2013) noted that schools are in danger of collecting large amounts of data with no clear purpose, which Lavertu (2014) stressed led to the data becoming pointless and confusing, such that individuals do not use it appropriately.

Bradbury (2020) noted that as far back as 2010, there have been immense changes in school systems in relation to assessment and data. For example, test data is collected from pupils aged four, seven and eleven years of age. Accordingly, data has become important and high on the agenda for the government, schools, and parents. While there is a need and a requirement to collect data, there is also a need to consider the purpose of that data collection (Guy Roberts-Holmes, 2020). A positive set of data on test scores ensures that Ofsted will note a positive outcome, equating good data with being a good school. If the data is not positive, then schools

pay the price in terms of their reputation. This, in turn, impacts on the school workforce, with school leaders implementing data-driven instructions and agendas influencing all aspects of school life, including senior leaders' control of CPD. The priority of senior leaders to get the right data drives everyone to improve their children's test scores. Gillborn and Youdell (2000), in their work, described this as the need to improve data by constant assessment.

This has shifted expectations of who and what teachers are 'expected to be' (Bradbury and Robert Holmes, 2017, p. 7). Maguire et al. (2018) suggest that this approach grinds teachers down and impacts their professional beliefs, relationships and, ultimately, their professionalism. Bradbury (2012) argues that teachers have very little room left to resist these changes.

Bradbury (2020) analyses the datafication in schools using a framework known as the five Ps (pedagogy, practice, priorities, people, and power) to understand the impact of the changes since 2010 and the effect on the teachers' role. The changes have impacted on how teaching has been altered such as grouping based on data with a view to improve outcomes, reducing time spent on building vital relationships with children, reducing children to numbers and on how success is determined (Wilkins, 2011). All these factors relate to the loss of personal control, lack of autonomy in the classroom and the need to collaborate with others and engage with communities such as teachmeets.

1.13 Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have reviewed literature on how the New Labour government instigated changes that greatly influenced teachers' professionalism and the rise of regulatory governed, neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideology. I have pointed to the changing role of CPD as education became the servant of the economy, including the role of social media in enabling teachers to share ideas and experiences and the gradual erosion of professional autonomy. I have also discussed the rise of new managerialism, datafication and the drivers behind the increased focus on examination scores and league tables in the global education market. I have reviewed literature that points to how these changes shifted CPD from a means to develop personal skills to a mechanism for implementing centralised state policies and how requirements for lesson observation, along with test scores, produced a panopticon effect according to which teachers came to feel relating to a sense of being continuously monitored and judged. To further this Foucault's concepts of control, dominance and power have been highlighted in support of the main argument that education is controlled through government policy and impacted negatively on teachers. In contrast, I reviewed literature that suggests that to develop meaningful careers, teachers need to have the confidence to adapt and change according to circumstances and look for opportunities to progress.

At present, there appears to be conflicts across all layers of the education system. There appears to be disparity in roles and unease between senior leaders and teachers, between the state system and academy chains and between left-wing and right-wing philosophies. Ball (1993) notes

that this is an ongoing struggle that will have no solution. This study explores how teachers cope with retaining their autonomy and the role of teachmeets in this context.

The literature review presented in this chapter provides an overview of the changes and circumstances that may have influenced teachers to seek alternative support for CPD and career development. This study aims to address a gap identified in the literature review, which is the limited research on why teachers attend teachmeets. Furthermore, based on the perceptions of teachers, if teachmeets are a new form of CPD, what insight can be gained about how teachmeets influence and support teachers' practice. The primary goal is to explore the phenomenon of teachmeets from teacher's perspectives.

I will be using the following questions to explore the notion of teachmeets from the teacher's perspectives.

1.14 Research Questions

Specifically, my research questions are as follows:

1. Why do teachers choose to attend teachmeets?
2. How do teachers experience teachmeets?
3. Are teachmeets a new form of CPD according to teacher's perceptions?

2. Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design for this study, including the epistemology, ontology, paradigms, methods used for participant recruitment, data analysis and ethical considerations. The primary focus of the study was to identify the reasons why teachers attended teachmeets as a form of CPD, their experiences and what they gained from them. I aim to explore this focus through methods that enable and empower the voices of the participants. Firstly, I will describe the philosophical foundations and the proposed research approach.

2.2 Research Design

From the start of the study, I valued the voices of the participants as significant as their personal accounts of their experiences at teachmeets form the basis of the study. Therefore, I settled on using semi-structured interviews and managed to recruit 12 primary school teachers who volunteered to take part because they attend teachmeets. Two forms of analysis of the interview data were employed: first, a thematic analysis across all 12 transcripts reported in chapter 3, and a case study based on one participant, which employed a post-structuralist analysis inspired by socio-material approaches reported in chapter 4.

I used an iterative process of exploration, reflection on the data, analysis and explanation to guide my understanding of the phenomena of the teachmeet environment. Firstly, a thematic analysis of interview transcripts calls on Braun and Clark (2006) and then a socio-material approach calling

on Barad's work on how quantum physics has implications for social science and concepts such as 'affect' of affect.

I introduced the socio-material approach in chapter 4 where I took a different perspective. Relating back to the prologue, I recognise that the researcher's positionality involves shifting perspectives. Through my biography and early teaching experiences, I felt that to some extent, I was an insider with respect to my participants. My assumptions, values and beliefs guided how I asked questions and listened. I recognise the need to be aware of this during the research process. As I undertook the thematic analysis of interview transcripts, I was aware of my positionality shifting as I looked for commonalities. I was surprised, to some extent, of what participants were describing, and so I felt that I was more of an outsider, although my experiences would have helped shape and construct the themes. In chapter 4, I shifted to a socio-material paradigm to undertake a case study of one participant. The socio-material paradigm was inspired by Barad's work (2007) on how quantum physics has implications for social science. Barad (2007) explains that affect or affective forces are present and continually entangled in the ongoing processes of life such that new experiences are created. By actively paying attention to how I was entangled in the interview process and the education system, I pay attention to how I was both affecting and how they affected me. Accordingly, phenomena came into view as researcher and participants as well as place and other non-human elements together to create 'data'. Multiple elements affect each other and respond to each other. So, my position is one of entanglement at this point. This will be discussed further in the section below on ethico-onto-epistemology.

2.3 Methodology, Ontology and Epistemology

I will now outline the methodology of the overarching research process. Ontology and epistemology are discussed in relation to my chosen paradigms.

Basit (2010) suggests that while epistemological assumptions are concerned with methods in which to engage in research, our ontological and epistemological perceptions can dictate the researcher's axiological position in relation to what is valued. This will then impact and, in turn, determine the methodology and methods to be adopted and used for the research study. In the following section, I will attempt to consider these concepts. As indicated in my prologue, linked clearly to my biography, and lived experience, I draw upon these in the body of my analysis, alongside the lived experiences of the 12 participants. This is a rigorous process because what was found across all 12 participants not only feels familiar, given my career experiences, but participants also kept telling me the same kind of things. The themes that came into view were also influenced by the literature review that alerted me to what other studies have found in relation to teachmeets.

According to Basit (2010), research in education is just one area that comes under the umbrella term of 'social science research.' Just like any other social research, it not only seeks to discover but also explains and interprets. Basit (2010) and Cohen et al. (2010) indicate that ontological assumptions seek to understand what counts as knowledge, what is considered real and what exists—that is, the very nature of being. Hartas (2013) introduces a simple definition when he states, 'Ontology seeks the classification and explanation of entities in that "what is" and "what

there is to be known"' (Hartas, 2013, p. 15) are articulated in a descriptive as well as an explanatory manner about what is being inquired about.

In contrast, epistemology is a theory of knowledge. Greco and Sosa suggest:

> Epistemology is driven by two main questions: ''What is knowledge?'' and ''What can we know?'' If we think we know something as nearly everyone does, then the third main question is 'How do we know what we know?' (Greco and Sosa, 2006, p. 1).

Greco and Sosa (2006) go on to further suggest that most writings on epistemology have addressed at least one of these questions related to how we know what we know. Greco and Sosa, Cohen et al. (2010) suggest that epistemological assumptions are concerned with the very bases of knowledge.

2.4 Paradigms in Education Research

A paradigm is a vehicle for researching a phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2017). Paradigms have been described as the different ways that researchers can know the world (Davies and Fisher, 2018). Both ontological and epistemological concepts underpin these contrasting approaches and ways of looking at the social world (Flick, 2012). Research paradigms are underpinned by a strong philosophy and help to guide the researcher's thoughts and findings (Poni, 2014).

Four main research paradigms are often associated with social sciences, namely, ‘positivist’, ‘interpretivist’, post-structural and the newer sociometrical (Fenwick et al., 2012). Cohen et al. (2010) indicate that these differing views and the way they are used to understand social reality will construct different meanings and impact upon the way the world is interpreted and how ideas and concepts are formed.

Positivism is usually related to a quantitative approach, and a qualitative stance is related to an interpretivist perspective. Positivism is related to numbers while interpretivists use words (Poni, 2014).

The qualitative approach is considered by many researchers to be the opposite of the quantitative approach. To research, it ‘answers very different questions to those addressed by quantitative research’ (Barbour, 2014, p. 13). Qualitative approaches can offer an understanding of social processes. Qualitative approaches aim to provide descriptions, narrations, perceptions, experiences, and feelings rather than the focus being on measuring and quantifying amounts. A qualitative approach can help the researcher unpick meanings by analysing the narratives, explanations and accounts provided by the participants (Barbour, 2014). Developing this idea, Davies and Hughes (2014) suggest that qualitative research requires an abundance of careful thought during the planning stage. Paradigms that involve qualitative approaches can be divided into interpretivism, social constructivism, critical and socio-material.

2.4.1 Interpretivist Paradigm

An interpretivism perspective is directly connected with people and their social roles and the makeup of their relationships, which, in turn, impact the meaning of those roles. Researchers engaging in this paradigm seek to understand the world of humans and how they act within it (Saunders et al., 2009). On the other hand, qualitative researchers value the nature of enquiry and stress the social construction of the nature of reality (Tracy, 2010).

Social constructivism suggests that humans construct reality within the social institutions they encounter (Shaugnessy et al., 2003). Researchers within this framework take an interest in how people come to socially agree or disagree on what is real or not. Meaning is constructed socially and collectively. Social constructionists work to look at how things are created and can be changed (Cohen et al., 2017). A critical paradigm tends to frame the understanding of reality while accounting for power, relations that create, inequality and social change (Cheek, 2007). The purpose is to criticise and justify the existing status quo within society. Through this paradigm, researchers often operate to produce alternative knowledge and understanding to produce better facilities and policies for all (Davies and Fisher, 2018).

2.4.2 Socio-Material Paradigm

According to Fenwick et al. (2011), socio-material is referred to as a fourth research paradigm in education. The socio-material paradigm decentred the human and considers how culture, nature, humans and other humans are entangled and entwined (Barad, 2007; St. Pierre, 2015).

Sociomaterialism is the coming together of the verbal and material aspects (Fenwick et al., 2011) such that place, time and environment are entwined with gestures and utterances that move beyond words. Fenwick et al. (2011) outline the philosophical implicitness of taking a socio-material stance that involves both ontological and epistemological shifts beyond constructivism.

According to Barad (2007), humans and non-humans are meshed together, resulting in each impacting the other. In her work, she demonstrated that the apparatus used in Neils Bohr's scientific experiments can influence how phenomena come to view (Barad, 2007, p. 71–131). When light entered an experimental apparatus, it can behave either as particles or waves, depending on whether the apparatus had one or two slits through which light passed. This problematic effect is fundamental to quantum theory, as opposed to Newtonian science. Accordingly, the apparatus has to be considered as part of the phenomena that come into view. Karen Barad argues that in quantum physics, 'Objects can be ascribed an independent ''physical reality'' in the ordinary sense' (Barad, 2007, p. 188). This means that assemblages of elements have to be taken as the primary empirical unit. As Barad explains, phenomena 'designate instances of wholeness' (Barad, 2007, p. 119). The implications for the social sciences are complex and are taken up by socio-materialists. Quantum physics has problematised unity, identity and consistency for social science. Accordingly, there is no such thing as a body moving forward in linear time and has implications for the continuity of things, as continuity is troubled bodies losing their unity and being is entangled within multiple patterns of movement and time-spaced trajectories. This means that the researcher and their feelings, possibilities and reactions

in the interview context have to be viewed as part of the apparatus through which 'data' is generated.

Barad further noted that all can be affected, the subject and object and all. There is no fixed point from which to view phenomena; they are constantly shifting. Instead of rigour, Barad argues that the research needs to take an ongoing approach. That is the need to take into account as much as possible how involvement in the research process is contributing to the phenomena that come into view.

Further this, Barad (2007) notes that there can be no separation of ethics, ontology or epistemology as these are all entangled. It is through the responses and entanglements that knowledge is co-constructed. According to Haraway (1988), there is no bird's-eye view of the world. In the socio-material paradigm, epistemology cannot be treated as separate to ontology or my positionality as a concerned researcher. Therefore, by changing the paradigm, as the researcher, I am not claiming objectivity or claiming to find causes. I am instead paying attention to features that would not usually be the primary focus in a thematic analysis, which seeks commonalities across interview transcripts. In a socio-material approach, I sought to describe differences; those aspects of Carla's responses that would not be found across other participants' interviews yet which might provide insights into her experiences in school and teachmeets. As Barad (2007) points out, according to quantum physics, all things are entangled; and this includes the interviewer's participation in the interview process, which, in the case of Carla's interview,

included what I brought as a person entangled in the education system, including my values and interests outlined in the prologue.

In chapter 4, I took a socio-material stance to take a new perspective on one interviewee referred to as Carla.

The socio-materialism paradigm is concerned with the entanglements of human and non-human entities. I was entangled in the interview context such that my thoughts, beliefs, sensory awareness of sounds, body gestures and how my body was affected by these and how my gestures and posture, for example, in turn, may have affected the interviewee; and these became what I paid attention to. A socio-material methodological approach requires a different approach to an interpretivist approach as the researcher actively pays attention to their sensory reactions within the interview context and uses these to provide clues. In a socio-material stance, the researcher's body is recognised as part of the apparatus that creates 'data', and accordingly, data cannot be objective or fixed all the time. Instead, 'data' is recognised as a partial insight situated in a specific time and interview context. Rigour is not a matter of repeatability or an attempt to generalise so much as a matter of how open a researcher can be to barely perceptible clues, such as changes in an interviewee's tone of voice, silences, shifts in posture and reactions to space and noises that are not usually given attention to, for example, in a thematic analysis. During the interview with Carla, some of these features impinged my senses, and I found I could not dismiss them. Her interview afforded what MacLure (2004) describes as instances that 'glowed' and which led me to seek to pay closer attention to them and, in turn, led me to the literatures on

socio-material methodologies. Taking a socio-material stance offers a different approach to an interpretivist stance.

It was the unexpected and unpredictable elements of the personal and material aspects of the responses of the participants that impacted me during the interview, making me take notice and observe. Fenwick (2011) considers that there is a need to look beyond the normal procedure and methodology of the interview process. Socio-materialism, referred to by Deleuze (2008, p. 46), discusses of the power of connections between the 'visible and non-visible', explaining that life is made up of human and non-human elements. Using these two approaches enabled me to explore interviews from two different stances.

Chapter 3 presents the interview data from an interpretivist qualitative approach. With this stance, I looked for themes that emerged across all 12 interview transcripts. In chapter 4, I switched to a socio-materialism standpoint to pay attention to what I was affected by, which went beyond the words spoken by an interviewee.

2.5 Methods

As my study was situated within the qualitative paradigm, I chose a method conducive to this paradigm. There are a range of methods available to the researcher in relation to qualitative research. For this study, I chose to use semi-structured interviews. An ethnographic study could have also been considered, but pragmatic issues such as being able to dedicate enough time to attend the teachmeets precluded this.

Robson (2011) and Smith (1995) describe the initial stages of the interview as being crucial in developing a relationship with the interviewee so that they are ready to 'talk freely and expose their experiences and feelings to a stranger' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p. 154). Therefore, during the initial stages of the interview, I engaged in social dialogue and followed this up with an explanation of the process, including reminding interviewees that I would be recording the interview. Underpinning my research is the need to have personal trust with the participants. I feel that this can be facilitated through the method of semi-structured interviews. I hope that this method will encourage the construction of rich and detailed data during the semi-structured interview conversation. This could have been achieved using group interviews, which can result in participants becoming inhibited and not fully contributing to a structured interview (Bell, 1992).

Kvale (1996) defines research as a 'conversation with a structure and a purpose'. He further summarises the interview process as a 'construction site of knowledge' involving both the interviewer and participants (Kvale, 1996, p. 6). He also posits that an interview is a journey that is mutually beneficial to both the interviewer and the participants in understanding their experiences. Smith (1995), Robson (2011) and Kvale and Brinkman (2015) describe the interview process as an 'interpersonal situation', discussing a topic that is interesting to both parties (Kvale and Brinkman, 2015, p. 15). Kvale believes that the interview conversation must balance the needs of the interviewer and the participant. Charmaz (2006, p. 27) describes interviews as 'contextual and negotiated' and reflect differences in age, gender, and ethnicity. Thus, the

interviewer must remain flexible and reflexive throughout the process. Semi-structured interviews focus on gaining the participants' views and experiences, as the 'purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in somebody else's mind' (Briggs and Coleman, 2009, p. 208).

I constructed the interview questions to tap into key events relating to teachmeets, key people, acts of agency, why interviewees attend teachmeets, what the impact of attending and experiences of teachmeets are, as well as their aspirations as teachers. In constructing the questions, I was aware of my biography in relation to my lived experience as a teacher. As a novice researcher, I needed to be aware that these experiences did not bias the questions. The commonality of experience during the key years of policy change could entangle my line of thought and confuse my interest in the focus. This was previously discussed in the prologue. The questions also considered issues raised in the literature review, which I used to guide my thinking. Gillis (1994) warns that the way people remember events is also a construction:

'We are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities. Memories make sense of the world…and "memory work" is embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten) by whom and for what end' (Gillis, 1994, p. 5). This was important in relation to my biography discussed in the prologue. Researchers need to be aware of the situation and their position within that process. Critiquing what is reported, why and how we know it is relevant.

Wellington (2000) considers different types of interviews, ranging from unstructured interviews to fully structured questionnaires. Both Wellington (2000) and Kvale (1996) state that the semi-structured interview is a compromise and can draw together the flexibility of organisation and analysis. I used prompts to explore further responses to the given questions possibly in a direction that had not been identified in the early stages of the interview (Smith, 1995; Robson, 2011; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). The specific interview questions can be found in Appendix 2.

2.6 Accessing Participants

This section will discuss the background to the recruitment of the participants. In the beginning, I knew the teachers from my attendance at the annual conferences at the university, which I coordinated as part of my role as the newly qualified teacher coordinator. It was my responsibility to arrange CPD conferences for teachers, NQTs and mentors. Visiting speakers, tutors, teachers and NQTs came together to share practice using the model of the teachmeets. These were evenings and conference days for newly qualified teachers, teachers and their mentors. The participants were recruited from these events. They were asked at the end of the conference day/evening if they would be interested in taking part in further research, which would involve two or more interviews within a year if they had regularly attended teachmeets. If they consented to this, it was followed up with a phone call and a follow-up e-mail, which included the participant consent and information form (Appendix 1). The participants consisted of 11 women and one man. This approach allowed them to decline or participate comfortably. Some participants requested more information about the types of questions I was likely to ask prior to the semi-structured interview; others were just happy to proceed. Further information was

clarified during a phone call. I am unsure if the request for information about the interview questions was related to the topic or about the preparation required beforehand, which is in a teacher's nature to be prepared and ensure success with the task. Knowing the questions beforehand may have been reassuring for some participants. The time and location for the interview were agreed upon by each participant. Interviews took place in the participants' school settings situated within the Northwest.

2.7 Pilot Study

The use of the pilot study set out to explore if a Life History Timeline (LHT) would be useful and to trial the interview questions. The pilot study was conducted with three participants who could not be part of the main research due to personal reasons. I obtained consent, and they agreed to take part in the pilot study.

The use of the pilot study was important to my research, particularly, the use of the LHT. Firstly, I wanted to iron out any problems that may come to light prior to undertaking the semi-structured interviews with the 12 participants. The main aim of the pilot study, according to Anderson and Arsenault (2011), is to test the techniques and procedures to see that they work adequately. The pilot study allowed me to check the feasibility of my instruments (Robson, 2014). In addition to this, Kvale (1996) suggests that verification of the research needs to be considered by the researcher. This means that several different aspects of the interview have been carefully considered to support the quality of the process. This entailed carrying out the pilot interview and asking for feedback on the process and the content (Appendix 3). The aim was to improve

the validity of my questions for the semi-structured interviews. Hence, the three participants who took part in the pilot interviews were practitioners within the Northwest and were all at various stages of their careers. They included both males and females. The questions trialled are found in Appendix 2. This was to ensure my data collection would be meaningful and that my study was fit for purpose.

As part of the pilot study, I was considering using an LHT where two participants were asked to complete an LHT, which was prompted by a single statement: 'The teaching profession has changed in the past 25 years, from your perspective how have you experienced those changes?' An LHT is a drawing or series of words on paper where the interviewee recalls events from their past. The LHT intended to keep the participant focused on the task and to provide relevant data (Adranson, 2012). In addition, semi-structured questions were designed to tease out the issues raised through the LHT in a way that perhaps a questionnaire or survey would fail to do (Somekh and Lewin, 2011).

The first participant undertook to write an LHT and gave thoughtful and rich feedback, which helped me to further design my research instrument. As this was my first interview, I was nervous and felt like a novice. Since it was a semi-structured interview, I was concerned about how much input to give, as I feared leading the participant in biased ways. I had allowed an hour for the interview, and it lasted 45 minutes. Throughout this interview, I was unsure of the pace of the questions. It was from this first interview that I learned that it was important to have a warm-up question to ease the nerves of both the researcher and the participant (Somekh and Lewin, 2011).

According to Kvale (1996), it is necessary to reflect on the pilot interview. I learned that listening to the responses was integral to the quality of data gained. I was conscious that I would have to actively listen, but more importantly, that I should be ready to ask a further question that may elicit a more profound response. Gibson and Brown (2009) advised not to try and analyse during the interview and instead aim to retrieve quality data by extending the questions. They suggested writing up details immediately following the interview, which I did.

During the second interview, I felt that the general question at the beginning went well as it seemed to put the interviewee at ease. The LHT and the semi-structured interview were carried out consecutively. Although still a novice, I felt I listened better and was able to ask questions where I thought the participant could elaborate. I felt this interview allowed me to practice listening, a skill alluded to by Anderson (2011).

I followed Gibson and Brown's (2009) advice of writing the details and reflections immediately after the interview, which helped me to alter some aspects. For example, although the LHT seemed like a good way for the participants to reflect and track their career journey, I found it did not necessarily add anything to the process. It was a good tool in getting to know the participant as a precursor to the interview. After consideration and discussion with the pilot participants, we all felt it would not add much to the outcome of the data. Furthermore, we all concluded that the semi-structured interview questions yielded rich data. I decided not to include

the LHT as part of the data collection instruments. I also adjusted a few of the semi-structured questions.

In conclusion, the pilot studies were informative and enabled me to develop my knowledge and understanding of the interview process, how to ask questions, how to listen and how to refine my research instrument. Kvale (1996) notes that 'high-quality interviews are characterised by spontaneous, rich answers and that good short interviewer questions can yield long answers that the interviewer can follow up by asking for clarifying points' (Kvale, 1996, p. 145).

2.8 Recruiting Participants

Teachmeets have become popular among teachers. Teachmeets are organised throughout the country and within the Northwest, all advertised and communicated via social media (see chapter 1, section 1.2). This approach communicates to a vast audience at one given time. They take place in the evenings at different locations each time, therefore providing choices and accessibility to teachers where travelling time can be limited and located to their demographics, which can affect the numbers of those who choose to attend.

The selection of the sample for this research was based on volunteers who had previously attended the Newly Qualified Teacher Conferences at the university situated in the Northwest, either as practitioners or as mentors, as previously discussed (see also section 2.6). The participants were volunteers who had engaged with the conferences in the past. They were asked if they would be interested in participating in the research by completing a simple and short

response form. Fifteen responded and became my participants, all of whom are teachers in full-time teaching positions. This was an opportunity sample. There needed to be a range of participants, including teachers with various years of experience. I do not teach or have any role within the participants' settings.

The age of the participants ranges from 20 to 52 years with the average age falling between 30 to 37 years. The group comprised 11 females and 1 male. All the participants are qualified primary teachers working full-time in a range of settings, as detailed in Table 1:

Participant	**Age**	**Time in Teaching**	**Type of School**	**Age Group Taught**	**Gender**	**Region**
1. Jenny She has taught for ten years only in KS2, Years 3, 4 and 6. She leads Geography.	32	10 years	Primary	Year 6	Female	Northwest
2. Cara Cara teaches Year 2 and has done so for 5 years and taught for a total of 7 years. She	29	7 years	Primary	Year 2	Female	Northwest

leads KS1 reading.						
3. Kim Kim has a total of 14 years of experience. She has taught extensively in Year 2 and Year 6.	36	14 years	Primary	Year 3	Female	Northwest
4. Carol Carol has taught all year groups and leads Computing.	45	23 years	Primary	Year 3	Female	Northwest
5 Wendy Wendy has taught all phases in primary and has a range of post-graduate qualifications.	52	30 years	Primary	Year 5	Female	Northwest

6 Carla Carla has taught in both key stages. She has spent the last 7 years in Year 6.	36	14 years	Primary	Year 6	Female	Northwest
7 Jonny Jonny has only taught Year 5. He leads Science and wishes to become a headteacher.	27	5 years	Primary	Year 5	Male	Northwest
8 Jo Jo has extensive experience across the primary sector. She leads SEND and has a SENCO qualification.	53	25 years	Primary	Year 4	Female	Northwest
9 Maggie	45	18 years	Primary	Year 4	Female	Northwest

Maggie has taught four in both key Stages 1 and 2. She coordinates inclusion.						
10 Louise Louise has taught mostly in Year 3 and Year 4. She leads Science and has taught in Year 1.	46	17 years	Primary	Year 2	Female	Northwest
11 Sarah Sarah has taught Years 1 and Years 2, 3 and 4. She leads PHSE.	33	11 years	Primary	Year 1	Female	Northwest
12 Sylvia Sylvia has taught most year groups. Presently, she is in Year 2 and has been for 7 years.	40	18 years	Primary	Year 2	Female	Northwest

She leads KS1 English.						

Table 1: List of participants

The participants were from a variety of areas within the Northwest and at various stages of their careers. They all work within the primary sector of State Education. In terms of the 12 participants who took part in the main study, the majority were white, middle-class females and there was 1 male (Appendix 1). There was very little diversity.

2.9 Timeline

The timeline for the interviews was from November 2019 through to January 2020 (Table 2). The location of the interviews was arranged in negotiation with each participant at times and places convenient to them. All participants chose to undertake the interview within their primary settings. The spaces within schools varied from big, comfortable and reasonably quiet staff rooms to dimly lit quiet offices, to cluttered cupboards and workspaces.

November 2019	**December 2019**	**January 2020**
School 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5	School 6, 7 & 8	9, 10, 11 & 12
November Week 1 Schools 1 & 2 *(morning visits)*	December Week 1 School 7 *(afternoon visits)* December Week 2 school 8	January week 1 school 11 *(morning visit)*

November Week 2 School 3 & 4 (*morning visits)*	*(lunchtime visit)*	January Week 2 School 12 *(afternoon visit)*
November Week 3 School 5 *(afternoon visit)*	December Week 3 School 6 *(morning visit)*	January Week 3 schools 9 & 10 *(evening visit) 5:00 p.m.*

Table 2: Overview of Interview Schedule

2.10 Ethics

Ethics play an important role in any type of research, including educational research, as echoed by Farrimond (2017, p. 72) who stated, 'Doing ethical research is a fundamentally important part of educational and academic practice'. With reference to qualitative research, Creswell's (2014) interviewees are asked to divulge personal and private details of their experience regarding a few topics relating to their role. This process requires significant trust between the researcher and the participant.

Interviews can raise many ethical issues that need to be anticipated when conducting qualitative research (Brooks et al., 2014). According to Moulever (2012, p. 8), if proper ethical procedures are not followed, 'not only will our peers doubt the value of our work, but we will also be letting others down who we made a pact with, our participants who gifted their words to us, and the readers of our findings.'

Brooks et al. (2014) suggest that the practice of ethical research pays attention not only to the relations that are forged but also concerns the quality of the research being produced. Building on the notions of Burton et al. (2014), the discussion of ethics within educational practice draws attention to an important element that runs throughout this project, which is the need to protect the professionalism of the teachers and the participants.

There is a need to 'ensure that research is ethically sound, valid, reliable and trustworthy to minimise the risk that could endanger the emotional, physical, financial and general well-being not only of the participants but also of any stake holder connected to research' (BERA, 2011).

Prior to commencing the study, ethical clearance was sought. As the researcher, firstly, I had to abide by the Manchester Metropolitan University guidelines on ethics. I submitted my ethical approval to the ethics committee, which was approved to undertake my research. I have had to ensure that all the university's guidelines on ethics were followed and all relevant and necessary documents were both fully completed and authorised for the approval of the university Ethics committee. The researcher also undertook a research awareness course, which formed part of the university's ethical approval.

I had to ensure that at all stages of the research process, the participants understood that they could stop the procedure. The consent form and information sheet informed the participants about this (see appendix 5). The interview was to be audio-recorded and would later be transcribed in full; the data would then be kept in an encrypted file that only I could access. The

consent form explained that I would not share any raw data with anyone else and that the study interview transcripts would be retained for five years on a secure system. All consent forms were completed prior to the interviews being carried out. The relevant information sheets and a brief overview of the research aims, and consent forms were brought to the interviews. I was given permission from all participants to use the data generated throughout this study. The participants cannot be identified in the empirical chapters, and for the purpose of the thesis, I use pseudonyms instead of the participants' real names. I also recognise that my own values and beliefs are embedded and woven within the research in relation to caring and being concerned for what matters. As previously discussed in chapter 2, is Barad's understanding of the ethico-onto-epistemology perspective, where all aspects are entangled including ethics. I noted my feelings and reactions at the side of the interview paperwork by using keywords that would remind me of my emotions or feelings during the interview, for example, 'feeling tense', a 'rush of anger', being conscious all the time; that if I am feeling this in my body through the responses from Carla, how I might, in turn, be affecting her, aware of how my presence, my biography may have or be influencing Carla's response. I was conscious to check that Carla was fine to keep going and that she did not need to pause the interview.

2.11 Undertaking the Research

2.11.1 Undertaking the Interviews

The location of the interviews was arranged through negotiation with the participants for a convenient time and place. Due to time constraints, I aimed to take all the relevant information sheets, a brief overview of the research, the aims and consent forms with me (Bryman, 2008). I

had planned to undertake the interviews for 90 minutes. The interviews varied in length; sometimes they were completed in 45 minutes, and other times, they took 60 minutes or more. Some interviewees were quick and sharp with the questions; others went more slowly. Some of the participants appeared nervous, and others, even though appearing relaxed, often spoke quickly and gave a lot of information, which seemed like they were talking about anything and everything.

As previously discussed, the sample of participants was from a variety of areas within the Northwest, in various stages of their careers, and all working within the primary sector of State Education. In terms of the 12 participants who took part in the main study, I had a selection of both males and females (Appendix 1). I was dubious before I began thinking and wondering if I would have enough data. Consequently, I was surprised by the amount of data I quickly began to gather. Kvale (1996) suggests stopping the process of interviewing when there is sufficient data. I did not follow this guidance, and when confronted with my data for analysis, I found I had more than enough data. I had to make decisions about what to include or leave out. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

While undertaking interviews, I found it challenging to know when, how and what to extend in the conversation and how to probe the participants further. As the interview process continued, I found that the length of the semi-structured interviews reduced as I became more comfortable with the process and knew what to extend and discuss. On reflection, around the eighth interview, I felt that my role changed from one of trying to explore and into one, to someone

who was emerging. Continually, I was reflecting on the educational experience and biases as noted in the prologue.

I was working full-time and undertaking my doctoral studies part-time, using whatever free time I had to organise the data collection. Finding time to write has been an ongoing and persistent concern. Adding to this challenge the fact that the institution I work at grants no time for doctoral studies, so I had to undertake the research during holidays or on weekends. After transcribing I realised, I needed a system to organise my data and thoughts. I found the system advocated by (Schiller, 2017) that involved keeping index cards with ideas and keywords of where I was up to at a particular point. This helped me reconnect my ideas and thoughts between weekends. The next section will turn to the analysis.

2.11.2 Analysis

I will now turn to the analysis process in relation to my study. Robson (2011) and Swain (2017) draw on the work of Miles and Huberman (1994), who stressed that all analysis should include a process of data reduction, data display and conclusions. I aimed to capture how participants construct meaning from key events and interactions with key people. I undertook a thematic analysis, as Swain (2017) notes that this follows three phases using both inductive and deductive reasoning. The intention is to capture the 'richness of themes emerging' (Smith, 1995, p. 11). Swain (2017) describes this method as an 'ongoing, organic and iterative process, requiring the researcher to be reflective and reflexive' (Swain, 2017, p. 1). Thematic analysis is described by Clarke and Braun (2006), who acknowledged that thematic analysis can be seen as a

phenomenological method (McQueen and Namey, 2012; Joff, 2011). They highlighted the theoretical flexibility of thematic analysis. Gibson and Brown (2009) refer to this as 'empirical coding' (Gibson and Brown, 2009, p. 32). Themes are identified using a priori codes; these are deductive themes based on the research questions, theoretical framework, or interview questions. A posteriori code is inductive; these are the themes that are taken from the examination of the data. The process of both inductive and deductive analysis allows the 'data-driven codes' to combine with the 'theory-driven codes' (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Rather than using a piece of software, I chose to complete the analysis manually, noting specific areas of analytical interest driven by the research questions. This was so I could familiarise myself further with the data and gain a secure understanding of coding and the process of analysis. Robson (2011) suggests that if you have a substantial amount of data, computer-assisted qualitative analysis software packages can be viewed as being in terms of time and efficiency. Although Bryman (2008) offers a detailed guide on the use of NVivo, Robson (2011) points out that it takes time to become proficient in the use of such software. Furthermore, Robson (2011) also highlights that thematic analysis is a flexible method, and the potential for the range of reflections on the data could be too broad. McNaughton and Lam (2010) suggest that computerised packages are only useful in the initial stages of analysis to identify keywords. They note they can be useful, and their use is the personal choice of the researcher if they are adopted. They further comment that computerised packages should be used in conjunction with other data analysis methods.

From my previous studies and experience of conducting interviews, I know that the transcription stage is a lengthy and time-consuming process, which can not only be highly frustrating but also exciting. Kvale (1996) suggests using a professional transcription agency. However, I did not follow this advice and set about transcribing my own data. I decided to do the transcription myself with the intent of capturing the pauses, sighs, and changes in the intonation of voice, which can give further clues about what the participants had experienced. Gibson and Brown (2009) advocate that a researcher should always transcribe part of their data. The process of transcription was time-consuming as I often had to rewind for accuracy.

A transcript was made immediately following the interview process, taken from the recording. Even though this was time-consuming (Silverman, 2011), and sometimes even making the time to transcribe was difficult, I found it beneficial as the interview was still fresh in my mind. During the transcription, I had to replay the recording to clarify words or sounds, which, although also time-consuming, was necessary to ensure the accuracy of the sound or the word recorded, lending authenticity to what had been spoken throughout the interview.

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach to data analysis enabled me to organise and describe the empirical data. As my study is based on qualitative data and interpretivist in nature, a thematic approach to organising and analysing data is appropriate (Belotto, 2018). According to Hicks and Peng (2019), positive analysis involves giving priority to data that are relevant to the focus and research questions. However, the themes were also a result of my own values, presuppositions and interests, as previously noted in the prologue.

At various stages of the research process, through the lived experiences of teaching, my positionality has been part of the driven interest in the topic and possibly influenced the question at some points. My working-class background and the value attached to a good education for social mobility. Just noting that being aware of this is of importance within and through the research process, as previously indicated, everything is entangled. Some aspects of the commonalities noted through the analysis are recognised and were familiar to me due my biography. However, this does not mean there is no story to tell. Using two paradigms and being conscious of my biases demonstrate rigour.

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model allowed me to identify and organise key findings in relation to the dataset. In Stage 1 of the process, I familiarised myself with the data by listening, transcribing, reading and rereading the interview material. At this stage, I began to identify initial ideas. The second stage of the process was where I was beginning to recognise themes, notice interesting features from the data and assign them an initial code, as noted in Figure 4. Stages 3, 4 and 5 of the process demonstrate the approach to analysis, which involves sorting the codes into potential themes. Looking across all transcripts for commonalities added rigour to the study and the process. This was undertaken by applying a colour-coding process (see Figure 5). A form of translation and interpretation was taking place through reviewing and defining the codes into themes and mapping these relationships across the data set. These were then organised into envelopes with the relevant data cut up and placed with them. The final stage is to analyse examples thoroughly in relation to the research questions. The gathering of these examples and

the analysis constructs the story and guides the report that will be produced. In this interpretivist stance, rigour was a matter of looking for consistencies across interview transcripts. That is, if participants keep reporting the same kinds of issues, I could be reasonably confident that I was detecting something that was part of their perceived and shared ‘reality’.

I began to generate initial themes by using the questions and listening attentively to the transcribed responses while making notes and recording keywords and phrases. I recorded these and then looked carefully across the 12 transcripts to see if I could identify initial codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) identified a theme by putting all the data related to that theme together, which was then colour-coded (see Figure 4).

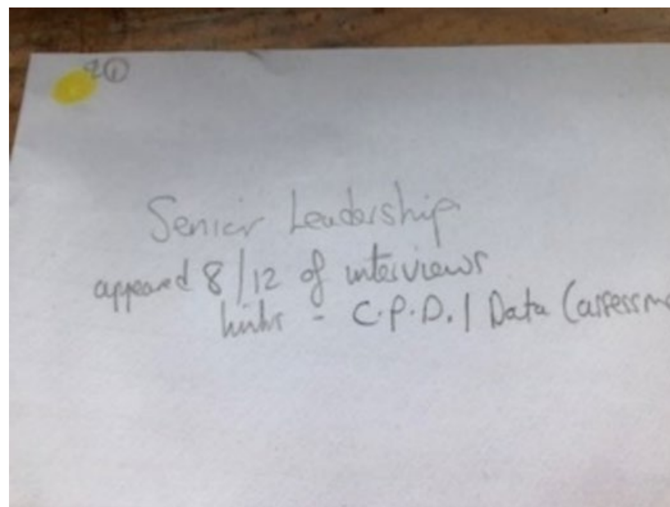

Figure 1: Priori and Posteriori Codes

The following step was to check the themes against the full set of transcripts. This process was lengthy and challenging, as I had to decide what was relevant and what was not. The notes and observations I made at the very beginning following the transcription proved to be useful here. I

gained a long list of themes, which were then shortened to a smaller number of key themes. I placed into an envelope those sub-themes that did not fit the main themes in case they would be needed for future reference. I found it surprising that not many themes referenced government policy, although a few participants spoke about it in their interviews. The final stage of the thematic analysis was to look at the themes carefully for associations by acknowledging the links between them.

Working within this flexible framework, I followed the three phases of thematic analysis, and as suggested by both Swain (2017) and Braun and Clarke (2006), I began to familiarise myself with the data. As I was transcribing the interviews myself, the listening and writing process helped me to do this.

The first stage, which was in accordance with Braun and Clarke (2006), was to familiarise myself with the data, I reread the transcriptions, made notes and comments often moving backward and forward and sometimes revisiting the recording to clarify words, and become familiar with repeated words or phrases which would give me a sense of what was happening within the data. Although I found this process interesting, it was also one that demanded my full attention as it required me to notice the repeated phrases, which could be identified as themes, try to clarify them and then search again for new themes.

In addition to the transcripts, I kept a visual account of key events and people, so I had a reference and an overview. These could be used later in the process where a comparison can be drawn. Super (1980) posits that this aids the analysis of individual contexts.

The codes were deduced by repeated readings of the transcripts and based on the attributes of the data. For example, strong themes, recurring issues, mistakes or disagreements and absences in the text were considered. By identifying the codes in the data, I hoped to draw out significant and recurring themes in my analysis (see Figure 5).

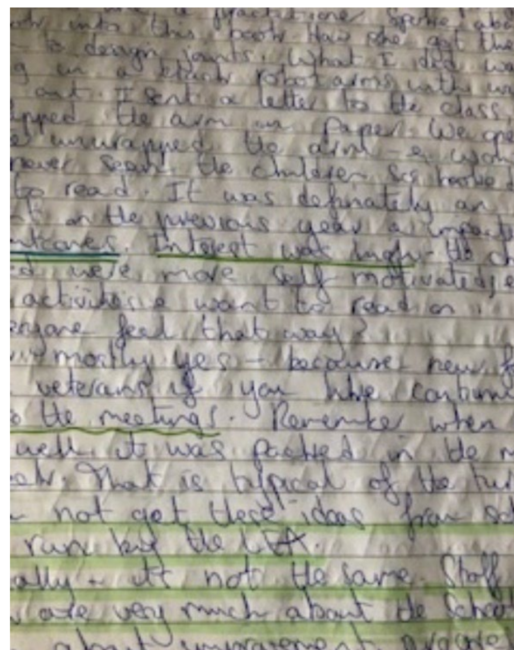

Figure 2: Transcription coding

The completion of Stage 1 identified priori codes, which reflected the questions and the framework. In the following stage, the researcher reread and identified key themes and phrases by colour-coding, which identified the posterior codes emerging within the data.

Following the thematic analysis of the transcripts, a Word document was created where extracts of the data from the interview transcripts were recorded, demonstrating the posteriori themes (see Appendix 8) to illustrate any reported findings. These were organised and kept secure on a USB stick protected by a password.

In this chapter, I have outlined in detail my choice of data collection and analysis methods: thematic analysis and employing a socio-material approach. In the following chapter, I will present the main themes from the analysis.

3. Chapter 3: Findings

This chapter will present and discuss findings from the semi-structured interviews with 12 primary-school teachers. The questions explored their reasons for attending teachmeets, who or what influenced their engagement and what they gained from attending them.

I carried out a thematic analysis (see chapter 2) on the section on analysis (p. 64). Five primary themes emerged: (i) control, (ii) surveillance and fear, (iii) data, (iv) a shared free space, and (v) a cohesive inspirational community. Each theme will be described in order, and quotations from participants' transcripts will be used to illustrate meaning.

3.1 Control

The first theme to be discussed is the issue of control. This emerged in relation to questions about CPD. Access to CPD is a fundamental right for all teachers to continue developing as a professional

and to enhance skills (DfE, 2016). Education policies suggest that teachers should engage with CPD to further develop their subject knowledge and pedagogic skills and to be at the cutting edge of their knowledge and practice (see the section on CPD in chapter 1). The guidance given by the government policy is that CPD in schools is compulsory, that CPD should be underpinned by research, be appropriate to the school's needs, be organised by the senior leadership team and must focus on pupil outcomes (DfE, 2016).

All 12 participants spoke about having to attend CPD sessions and reported that these were compulsory sessions. They reported that in their schools, the message that CPD is not optional but requires full staff attendance was relayed. They described how senior leadership insisted on attendance to ensure that their key messages and expectations for teaching and learning would be delivered to all teachers. Participants spoke of the expectation that they would be compliant, they must conform, and they must be present. Many issues emerged that can be captured by the term *control*.

All participants reported that the need for personal development to be ongoing and supportive to their roles was essential. In effect, they all recognised the need for CPD. They all said they understood its compulsory nature and indicated that they had been told by senior leaders of the requirement to attend the school CPD sessions so messages would be consistent.

All participants reported a lack of choice in relation to bespoke CPD and attendance. For instance, they said that the only CPD available was the standard school provision. Although government

policy states that CPD should be aimed at personally developing teachers, all 12 said they had no access to personalised CPD in their school. This meant that they felt they had no support with personal development or in pursuing their individual interests. They said that CPD did not take account of the individual teacher's career development. They reported that senior leaders seemed to be uninterested or nonchalant about the notion that teachers may have career aspirations outside the stock institutional CPD provision. They described CPD as a mechanism for school development that is viewed in a very specific way rather than personalised.

Eleven out of the 12 participants said they had limited opportunities for CPD to address their personal needs.

> There is no room for my personal needs to be met. (Jenny, school 1)
>
> CPD is school-driven, not personal; it is about the need of the school. (Carla, school 6)
>
> CPD is driven by senior leaders and head teachers; it is about the school and only the school. (Carla, school 6)

Most participants indicated that senior leaders insisted that all staff were required to attend meetings, and that the meetings focused on an agenda that reflected the performance needs of the school. Participants gave the impression that the top-down approach in which leaders pointed to government policy, was a way to control their attendance. Hence, to the participants, CPD has become a mechanism to bring staff in line with school objectives, which ultimately are driven and dominated by state control, as the following quotes indicate. Teachers are very aware of this.

> CPD in school is contrived; it is around what senior leaders say is needed. (Carol, school 4)

> Senior leaders say what it is about, say what we must implement. It is this way because it is what the government wants. (Maggie, school 9)

Their comments suggest limited opportunities for CPD to address the personal needs of teachers to develop and enhance knowledge and understanding, as Jenny, Maggie and Carol suggested.

> There is no room for my personal needs to be met. (Jenny, school 1)

> There was no healthy dialogue at the staff meetings. There was no discussion or debating therefore no development of ideas. We were unable to question or ask questions. (Maggie, school 9)

> I was once told not to rock the boat I was expected to follow the requests and expectations of the senior leadership team. They set the agenda for the school development priorities. (Carol, school 4)

These comments reveal the participants' perceptions that senior leaders' attitude toward CPD was driven by a school agenda for the purpose of the school and had become a barrier to any kind of personalised professional development for individual teachers. These comments indicate that many teachers aspire to improve and develop their careers and want CPD to support them to do so. All participants highlighted that they are not able to express their desire to access personalised CPD.

> In school with colleagues and leaders, I am angry my personal targets need to be related to the needs of the school and not mine. I can't discuss these. (Carla, school 6)

Carla's comments suggest that the senior leadership team sets, controls and implements the staff meeting agenda. All participants said there was a lack of personal and professional opportunities to develop through CPD. They spoke of a controlling attitude by senior leaders, which they found negative and detrimental to their needs.

To summarise this theme, in relation to CPD, all participants had experienced no choice both in engaging with bespoke CPD and in attending school-directed CPD. In every one of the 12 schools, CPD was perceived to be a mechanism used to bring teachers into line with school objectives, which were directed by and linked to government objectives. Personal and professional needs and desires for CPD are not being met. Calling on Foucault (1984) and his concepts of power and control, earlier noted in the literature review, government control was being exercised in schools through policies being implemented in relation to CPD by senior leaders. I recognise the lack of choice in relation to CPD and the lack of choice in not attending school CPD from my time in school, as discussed in the prologue. Government policy was being implemented through school leaders, resulting in a top-down approach to CPD.

3.2 Surveillance and Fear

All participants indicated that they did not feel that they could trust and speak with their senior leaders, which led to a general feeling of fear and of not being supported by management. All participants indicated that they were frightened and wary of the formal lesson observations that take place every six weeks. They said they also feared the meetings that followed the

observations, and the way data was used to scrutinise them. Participants described feeling worried and fearing the consequences.

> I do not feel supported by the headteacher or the deputy headteacher. It is their way or no way; I fear not being seen doing what they ask or direct. I can't be myself. (Jo, school 8)
>
> I dread observations, I always worry, and I am frightened by the conversations that follow. (Carol, school 4)
>
> I fear been called in and told I am not doing my job and have my role taken from me (Louise, school 10)
>
> The fear of being watched and monitored all the time is not done in a supportive way. (Jonny, school 7)
> There is no culture of praise of what you do well, just waiting for the one thing you do that they do not like. (Jo, school 8)

All participants noted there was an element of fear related to the observation cycle, which was half-termly. They were worried by the conversations that took place following these and the targets set going forward. All participants were worried about the way they were monitored and were frightened of having roles taken from them. Many indicated that they did not trust their senior leaders and that this felt like a closed environment where professional dialogue could not take place, a place of distrust.

> I keep my own council in school. I am fearful if I say or express my views. (Carol, school 4)
>
> I am guarded in school around senior leaders. (Carla, school 6)

They described a situation in which there was no work-place trust amongst colleagues where they had to guard what they said. It seemed that talking and thinking openly were not encouraged, and they could not thrive in these environments.

> I select how and what I ask, it really is not a positive place. (Sarah, school 3)
>
> I am careful how I phrase things; I do not find talking to managers easy (Carol, school 4)
> My discussions are short and formal. (Jonny, school 7)

None of the participants gave the impression of being able to voice concerns with colleagues and engage in a professional debate. They seemed unable to have discussions that enabled them to collaborate with colleagues. All participants said they did not feel confident to discuss concerns or raise queries, speaking of an uneasy working atmosphere where they were made to feel they lacked competence, and this sapped their confidence.

> They make me feel like I do not know what I am doing. (Carla, school 6)
>
> I feel nothing like a professional. (Wendy, school 5)
>
> No praise, just watching and waiting for you to make a mistake. It is a micromanaged environment underpinned with constant questioning and scrutiny. (Jonny, school 7)
>
> I feel shaky and uncomfortable in any formal meeting with them. (Jo, school 8)

These comments indicate that the culture within schools was one of surveillance and fear. It seems that control was maintained by making teachers feel that they were not trusted to carry out their jobs autonomously. The constant surveillance eroded their confidence and trust a technology that Foucault (1980) described as a mechanism by which people can be controlled by others through policies. Self-regulation was what Foucault (1980) described as the panopticon

effect, as previously discussed in chapter 1. This was maintained by a culture of not praising or acknowledging teachers' competence. Participants painted a picture of a cold, negative environment with little attention given to personal well-being or their professional abilities. Many participants said that praise was limited and linked to performance and data, and the agenda expectations of management. This was a key driver used by senior management.

> Praise is very much linked to performance; if you are performing well then you are praised. (Maggie, school 9)

They stated that it was difficult to ask questions of senior leaders or query issues:

> You can't ask questions they may feel that I am not capable of doing my job well. (Jenny, school 1)
>
> It would be unwise to query it would just bring my knowledge into question. (Sarah, school 11)
>
> I worry about how I am seen by senior leaders. (Jonny, school 7)

These comments indicate that there was huge distrust and discomfort relating to performance and relationships with management. Participants indicated that they were worried about their performance and had a fear of not being good or valued.

> I would not trust my line manager to keep things between us I am frightened of the consequences. (Sylvia, school 12)
>
> I worry about been called in and told I am not doing my job and have further targets which add to my workload. (Cara, school 6)

Participants gave the impression that if they were seen to question or not seen to be carrying out directives given by senior leaders, they lived in fear of the consequences. They were concerned that their ability to do their job well would be questioned. They spoke of a ubiquitous culture of

observation and scrutiny, which seemed to be an approach that left them feeling de-professionalised, not valued and not able to exercise autonomy.

> They may not think I can do my job, that I am weak, so I am guarded in school. (Jo, school 8)
>
> I don't want to be placed in competencies. (Maggie, school 9)

These comments indicate that in all the participants' schools, there was a fear of failure, a fear of being watched and a negative culture. Most participants indicated that they all just wanted to do a good job.

In summary, participants have noted that the frequent lesson observations made them feel weak, worried, and unprofessional. The continuous surveillance made them feel as if they were being judged as incompetent, and this eroded their confidence. This is reflected in the work of Foucault (1971), which highlights using mechanisms by which to dominate, control and categorise. The lesson observations became the panopticon where teachers were manipulated through the lesson observation into a culture of surveillance and fear of observation. Participants described a strong lack of trust in the senior leaders and a lack of praise unless it was linked to performance.

3.3 Impact of Data

Throughout the interviews, all 12 participants linked their performance to assessment scores. They spoke of the need to always perform better to enhance the achievement data of pupils. They said that the message was about the need for data to read well in the face of Ofsted

inspections and parental satisfaction. Teachers indicated that all 12 schools related to the study prioritised results. This is related to datafication, which is discussed later.

> Results data and levels that is all I am asked for. (Carol, school 4)
>
> We are always driven to raise the bar. (Jo, school 4)
>
> Assessment drives everything. (Sarah, school 11)

All participants indicated that assessment was high on the agenda and drove everything that happened in schools, from resources to observations. They suggested that assessment and data were demanded by senior leaders across all schools and were constant sources of discussion within their schools. One described this as the day, the week, and the terms were always about assessment.

They described how leaders used the data that was also used to focus their attention on staff and use it to set expectations. The class data would be scrutinised, and senior leaders would discuss and set targets for both teachers and pupils to attain every half term over the coming weeks.

> Assessment data or levels that is a focus for every staff meeting, every two-week review meeting, sometimes ahead of those meetings I feel sick. (Louise, school 10)

A participant noted that discussions were always focused on the children's current levels and the need for them to make progress over a short time.

> What are your levels? Compare the cohorts. (Wendy, school 5)

> Who has not made progress since the last meeting? What do you intend to do about it? Child progress action plans who have attained that level. (Jo, school 8)
>
> What can you do next to improve results. (Cara, school 2)

Teachers referred to high expectations attached to data performance, which contributed to a performance-led community. Nine out of the 12 participants found the school environment to be toxic and oppressive.

> I find it stressful. (Jonny, school 7)
>
> Sometimes I feel anxious when I know I have a review meeting. (Jenny, school 10)
>
> It is a constant target setting process so stressful. (Carol, school 4)
>
> Who is doing well? You need to set further targets. Who else needs to move on quickly? It is exhausting. (Jo, school 8)

These comments indicate that participants were working in an environment that was driven and built upon constant evaluation that involved requirements to review and refine. Their comments are as follows:

> Tell and do model. That's what my working life is. (Carol, school 6)
>
> They ask for my results, and I assess and report every two weeks and the school is graded good. (Kim, school 3)
>
> Nothing but a data machine; that's how I see my job. (Jo, school 8)
>
> Data is driving everything. (Sylvia, school 12)

Participants have indicated that their working life was dominated by the need to test and set targets on a weekly basis. They appeared overburdened with constant requests and

requirements to show progression. They gave the impression of a working life ruled by data. All participants spoke of being concerned and worn down by the need to repeatedly demonstrate improvement through personal and professional scrutiny related to their class-assessment data.

3.4 Summary

Participants painted a picture of being under immense pressure working in schools that are highly controlled environments, obsessed with collecting performance data for which they are regularly judged. This built distrust between teachers and senior leaders. The obsession with data has been referred to as 'datafication', and all participants describe the terrible atmospheres in their schools that appeared to be toxic and emotionally draining. Independent thinking and reflections were not encouraged or wanted. Participants felt controlled by senior leaders and feared questioning the processes of performance data. Data scrutiny had become an apparatus for control, as stated by Bradbury (2020) in the literature review and data, and the constant tracking of these asserted government policies in schools, ensuring a conformist workforce. Foucault (1984) concurs that education, and in particular, his argument of governmentality, emphasises state control and particular concepts that are used for this through the use of a range of concepts to control subjects in this case, teachers.

The next themes will focus on teachers' perceptions of teachmeets. Teachmeets are informal meetings arranged by teachers where they can share and discuss ideas related to the aspects of teaching. They are spaces that are free from formal management structures.

3.5 Free Space

Teachmeets are organised by teachers for teachers on a regular basis, often advertised through social media. Teachmeets are held frequently in the evenings after the working day, outside of school hours. Teachmeets provide places where teachers feel they can talk, collaborate, learn, and grow with like-minded colleagues. All participants indicated that teachmeets were positive places to go and be with other practitioners. The following quotes illustrate what the teachmeet space meant to the participants who constantly compared them to school spaces.

> I could not ask questions in school like I do at teachmeets. (Jo, school 8)
>
> It is a different place to be, friendly, happy and stimulating. (Carla, school 6)
>
> It is a different place to school, open and transparent. (Sylvia, school 12)

The teachmeets are an open forum where teachers have the opportunity to meet regularly to share teaching and learning ideas. Additionally, this is where they can discuss openly and spend time together. A key aspect was that their involvement was voluntary, the format of the meetings was non-hierarchical, and the environment enabled open and frank discussion. According to teachers, teachmeets are valued communities where participants feel at ease with colleagues and are able to converse about their daily jobs, worries and issues. They spoke of them as places as beacons of hope that provided the motivation they needed to keep going.

> They are a lifeline that keeps me going. (Kim, school 8)
>
> They raise me up and give me hope. (Carol, school 4)
>
> Fabulous places, highly collaborative with honest open discussion. (Sarah, school 1).

> It is my lifeline out of the factory. (Cara, school 2)

In teachmeets, participants found opportunities to talk freely in open discussions. They derived motivation to carry on and ideas to help them manage the data-driven environments of their daily working lives. Through the collaborative involvement in teachmeets, they felt inspired. They spoke of the freedom afforded by being able to choose what topics to discuss and how they were able to share ideas. The space was described as a place of freedom, as it is free from formality and the restrictions of senior leaders.

> Colleagues understand your situation and aspirations. (Cara, school 2)
>
> They are supportive and encouraging; the meetings help me. (Sarah, school 11)
>
> They are special places where I know I will be supported. (Carol, school 4)

The opportunity to talk with other colleagues within the profession is important for the personal and professional development of teachers. Teachmeets were described as precious environments where participants said they felt safe to talk, discuss, share and be open about their fears and life on the job. Participants described them as a place they escape to, where they could be themselves and talk about difficulties or barriers they face in an environment where they felt supported.

> A positive environment. (Jo, school 8)
>
> A place which is free; I can say and ask anything. (Wendy, school 5)
>
> Colleagues understand your situation and aspirations. (Cara, school 2)

They are supportive and encouraging the meetings help me. (Sarah, school 11)

They are special places where I know I will be supported. (Carol, school 4)

The opportunity to talk with other colleagues within the profession is important for the personal and professional development of teachers. Teachmeets were described as precious environments where participants said they felt safe to talk, discuss, share and be open about their fears and life in the job. Participants described them as a place they escape to, where they could be themselves and talk about difficulties or barriers they face in an environment where they felt supported.

It is a place for me, a place where I feel I can be me. (Jonny, school 7)

These participants spoke of having a space where they could escape the shackles of management, where they did not have to curb their thoughts or worry about their words. Some spoke of this as a safe, informal community.

Informal little community space without the formality of management. (Maggie, school 9)

Teachmeets are spaces where teachers feel able to meet without the constraints of the formal school setting, without the watchful eye of senior leaders—a place where they can be relaxed enough to become themselves as professionals. Teachmeets are places where teachers can discuss, share and further develop their professional skills, knowledge and identity. These communities are where they find enthusiasm and motivation to carry on being teachers. Many

meet regularly at teachmeets, and through this, they feel joined to a wider network of communities forged by teachers in their own time and according to their needs. According to Basnett (2021), these are safe spaces where, through discussions and presentations, teachers can increase their knowledge and skills.

3.6 Cohesive Inspirational Community

Teachmeets provide informal professional communities that are a source of inspiration. In these communities, they meet like-minded professionals who draw inspiration from each other. They are highly interactive spaces that have assembled practitioners. Teachmeets appear to be a place where participants have gained and harnessed support for a variety of reasons. They have sought and found personal, emotional and professional support. This will be highlighted through the following quotation and discussion explained by Maggie.

> Colleagues understand my worries when I go here. It is always a positive experience; it gives me such confidence. (Maggie, school 9)

In teachmeets, participants feel they can share troubles and concerns, receive help and find solutions to problems in an atmosphere where they feel at ease, and, most importantly, where they leave feeling positive and able to move forward. All 12 of the participants indicated that attending teachmeets had given them professional support, motivating them to apply for promotion and make professional progression.

> I have conversations about middle leadership, about how to go about applying and demonstrating the skills for this. This is something I would never raise in my school. At the teachmeets, I have conversations and discussions that have made me see that this is something I can do. Following one of the teachmeets, I decided to look and apply in other schools for middle leadership positions. (Louise, school 10)

> I was just surviving the day job. I always thought job progression was for others but attending the teachmeets has really boosted me, given me confidence to move forward I will attempt to apply for different positions. (Jonny, school 7)

Teachmeets enabled participants to imagine moving on and begin to actively engage with the process of looking for career prospects. All participants emphasised the importance of productive conversations and spoke of the collective nature of the teachmeets, which were based on mutual trust, and how this enabled them to ask questions they could not ask in school.

> Here I feel I can ask questions of colleagues. (Carla, school 6)
> It is a free open space I feel comfortable asking anything. (Wendy, school 5)

Participants said that they felt comfortable within the teachmeets spaces—comfortable enough to put their heads above the parapet and ask questions of colleagues whom they would have been afraid to ask in school, fearing comebacks from senior leaders. Teachmeet spaces were regarded as places of freedom in which anything voiced was not silly and would not be disregarded. They said that information shared in teachmeets would not get back to management and leaders.

> Whatever is said within the teachmeet between people stays within the group. (Carol, school 4)

> I trust everyone at the teachmeets they are honest, supportive, and just want the best for each other. (Sylvia, school 12)

Participants valued the openness, honesty, and transparency of teachmeets, which contrasted greatly with school environments. Key to this was trust. All participants felt they could trust their colleagues within the teachmeet space, while they did not trust people outside of it, especially the leaders in their schools. This lack of trust was an area of huge discontent. In teachmeets, participants said they felt different and noted they could voice their thoughts freely without the fear of reprisals.

Teachers described teachmeets as places that enthused them and gave them the support they needed to continue in the job.

> Teachmeets are my lifeline. (Sylvia, school 12)
>
> The teachmeets always support, raise, and give me hope. (Kim, school 3)
>
> I know I can discuss and ask whatever I want to. (Jenny, school 1)

It is clear that apart from support, being able to ask questions and contribute to debates was empowering. These debates gave them hope and ways to feel refreshed and able to continue with their professional roles. Ten participants out of the 12 indicated that the professional conversations in teachmeets raised their confidence, reenergised them and allowed them to make new friends.

> Attending teachmeets boosted my confidence in the classroom. (Jenny, school 7)
>
> The teachmeets have given me friendship, support, and collaboration. (Sarah, school 11)
>
> The teachmeets have renewed my energy, improving my well-being. (Carol, school 4)

Teachmeets seemed to have an impact on teachers' well-being. Ten participants indicated that the teachmeets had helped them to rekindle their vocation and values. It gave them a sense of purpose again and reminded them of who they were.

> Here I know who I am. (Jo, school 8)
>
> I am back in touch with why I chose to teach. (Kim, school 3)
>
> Through the connections of friends, I have made I feel proud of the job I do. (Cara, school, 2)

In summary, participants indicated that they had been able to rediscover their voice, a voice lost in school environments, and rediscover their professional identities.

> I enjoy the teachmeets I feel supported, I have friends who I can converse with I feel I can voice my views they are people I reach out to and respect. (Kim, school 3)
>
> I have become confident in knowing that I have a personal voice. (Jenny, school 1)

Participants suggested that in undertaking activities within a group of like-minded professionals, they drew upon each other's strengths positively and collaboratively. All 12 participants indicated that during the teachmeets, they had gained not only friendships but strategies as well that

improved their classroom practice. All participants indicated that teachmeets had helped them enhance their knowledge in relation to teaching, learning and pedagogy.

> My knowledge of creative approaches to empower better teaching and learning has been developed and enhanced. (Cara, school 2)

Participants suggested that through the discussions they had been part of at the teachmeets, they had been able to engage positively with the changing school curriculum. Some spoke of gaining a range of creative teaching strategies that had enabled them to refine their practice immediately the next time they were in the classroom.

> I have a better self-belief in the curriculum, and new strategies to use which gives me confidence. (Sarah, school 11)
>
> It has given me an understanding of how to make the children curious about their learning. (Kim, school 3)

Ten out of the 12 participants noted that they learned a great deal about the curriculum and gained the confidence to become more creative and motivated to try out new ideas. Consequently, some reported the benefits for pupils because they had found new and interesting ways to engage them, which has knock-on effects on attainment.

3.7 Concluding Remarks

The findings demonstrate that teachers are loyal to their profession and the children they care for. This was evidenced by their apparent desire to meet other practitioners at venues like

teachmeets to discuss and learn more about the curriculum, to become confident in their delivery and to do a good job for the children in their classes. Most of all, attending teachmeets in their own time after a busy working day demonstrates indeed the participants' highest levels of commitment to the profession, highlighting their willingness to update knowledge and skills. From the analysis of the data, most participants indicated, 'I get ideas and support which I can use straight away in the classroom', and 'the discussions from fellow practitioners help me to do a good job'. Basnett (2021) concurs that the teachmeets were productive and creative spaces where teachers shared and, as a result, built on existing skills and knowledge. This highlights and supports the notion of the teachers' loyalty to their profession and duty to teach well for the children in their classes. Furthermore, it indicated that they cared about CPD as it gave them autonomy, a mechanism to manage the oppression and escape from the surveillance. They expressed a desire to do the best possible job they could and work to the best of their abilities. It may well be that the focus on data in schools gives teachers benchmarks to be aware of the relationships between their pedagogic approaches and pupil engagement and, hence, attainment. All participants spoke of wanting to develop their professional knowledge and further their careers. They recognised that CPD was curtailed to becoming better teachers. Yet they stressed that CPD should be tailored to each teacher's needs and career ambitions, and, above all, they required CPD that involved choice and flexibility. All participants suggested that the top-down, generalised CPD they received in schools hindered their professional development and gave no opportunities for personalised CPD. One major theme that emerged from the interviews was the lack of choice, either in attending school CPD sessions or in the content of school based CPD sessions.

Another important theme that emerged was that of fear, and associated with this was how it made teachers feel, which was that they were judged not good enough to do their jobs, along with an ongoing fear of performing poorly in classroom observations. The main theme noted by the participants was that of fear, of being identified as not good enough to do their jobs and the fear of performing poorly in observations. Looking through the lens of Foucault (1984) and his concepts of control, this was evident from the experiences of the participants. They described school environments as places that lacked a sense of nurture, exemplified by senior leaders failing to nurture participants personally or professionally. There were no personalised conversations and little praise.

Obsessive data collection was another major theme. Teachers were concerned with how data was collected—the frequency of this collection and how data was used to set expectations for staff members and pupils. In contrast, they valued teachmeets as places where they felt free and valued, painting a strong picture of teachmeets as supportive and collaborative environments where they felt nurtured and where they gained knowledge. They gained ideas about how to teach creatively and how to apply for promotion. The interactions in teachmeets gave them hope to continue within the profession, and more importantly, all this was anchored in trust. Teachers came together, supported, and helped each other in non-judgmental ways. They found comfort in each other considering their shared experiences of the controlled and toxic school environments. The next chapter offers further insight into these findings from the affective encounters with one participant.

My study found that CPD was a decisive factor in the participants wishing to search for alternative avenues of personalised enrichment, which was apparently found at teachmeets. One of the suggested reasons was that there was no choice for CPD in school or choice of attendance. Another was that the CPD in school was completely objective and led from government objectives, therefore negatively impacting the participants.

Other factors from schools were those concerned with surveillance and fear. My findings suggested that performance and being monitored half-termly was a source of discontentment. All participants indicated a desire to do a 'good job' but feared the reprisals if they were not perceived to be performing as management desired. A main theme linked to school was related to data; all participants noted that this was the root for the continual onslaught of monitoring and observations. Through the sub-themes, there appeared to be a lack of personal nurture with very little praise, which led to them not trusting the senior leaders within the participants' schools. The above themes highlight the situation within the participants' schools, indicating various reasons for them seeking the personalised CPD, which would facilitate and enhance their performance. Next, I will demonstrate the themes that are related to where the participants found that support in relation to teachmeets.

All participants attended teachmeets frequently. Here, they highlighted some of the main reasons. Participants indicated that the teachmeets were free spaces—that was the overarching reason why they attended as it was free from the formal setting of schools. Here, they indicated

they found support from colleagues. They discovered career development where they could harness personalised CPD. They all noted that the teachmeets were an inspirational community where they felt they could improve their knowledge of the curriculum, both subject knowledge and pedagogical skills. It was a community in which they trusted colleagues. The participants noted that teachmeets were seen to be a community and inspirational spaces that gave them hope from all the collaborative activities. In relation to my positionality and my biography, I think that it is remarkable that these spaces were created at a time when education was controlled and used for key government messages. According to Foucault (1971), exerting power through the education system was not only a way to control but also to change the way of thinking and ideas. Teachers created these spaces as a way to claw back autonomy. These will be further highlighted in the chapter below, through the encounter with Carla.

4. Chapter 4: Affective Encounters with Carla

In this chapter, I adopt a different approach. I draw on one participant's interview to capture the experience of the participant through the shift in tone and emphasis. A socio-material approach will be used, employing the concept of affect as previously outlined in chapter 2, where it was explained, through Barad (2007), that the material world cannot be separated.

In this chapter, I take a different way to look at the interview data and focus on one participant and one that suits this research to understand further beyond the boundaries of the normal conventions of the interview (MacLure, 2004; St. Pierre, 2015). Taking a different approach enabled me to pay attention differently to the interview transcripts. I chose Carla because of the effects and affects of our interactions and discussion and how that stayed with me. Even as I write this, my mind returns vividly and revisits some events that took place during the interview. I was moved by my interactions with Carla, and it was through this affect that responses took place. My positionality is entangled with the material world through my response-ability concept (Barad, 2007) of ethico-onto-epistemology; my response is affected, working within the material world and not upon it. Nothing is separated; everything is acting together and creating responses. I have a care to respond. The body can affect and be affected, as previously discussed in chapter 2. Using the concept of affect (Barad, 2007) ensures a rigour that can be used to explain the phenomenon.

I was struck by her language and how she communicated through actions, gestures, pauses and silences. I also paid attention to how I had been affected by what Carla had said. I came to realise that I had been affected by many of her comments in ways that I could not demonstrate through semantic analysis. This is what Barad (2007) described in her ethico-onto-epistemology as the reality of response-ability, the mixing of everything together that produces a reaction, and it is in the reaction that the possibilities, the changes can be noted, the new knowledge co-constructed.

According to Fenwick (2011), there are many understandings of the concept of 'affect'. One version suggests that affect is the impact of an occurrence or event (Fenwick, 2011). By using the lens of socio-materialism, I will attempt to assemble the outcome and engage with the data to refine and reshape the outcome. Affect theory is connected to socio-materialism and communicates the impact of an occurrence or an event in various ways.

Through seamless boundaries, we feel and think by connecting in various and invisible ways through channels that are connected to the surroundings, gestures, movements, and sounds, all joining together to form different outcomes. The empowerment of these actions gives rise to options that were not previously thought about, affects that are present in the middle of time and space. This is succinctly summed up: 'By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided, or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections' (Moody, 2013, p. 81). Affect is concerned with different elements working together to enable exploration from a different perspective to gain a deeper understanding of what is taking place. In relation to the data, this will be concerned with body

movements, gestures, thoughts, beliefs and silences, all tangled and working together in space and time, which produce affects outcomes. It is the changes noted through the affective that are powerful and interesting to the researcher. Some can be more powerful as the body energises; others can be less powerful—all of which affect all parties involved in the interaction and what is communicated through these (Moody, 2013).

Affect theory, which is connected to socio-materialism, explains the impact of an occurrence or an event. Personally, this meant how I retained discussions and gestures long after the initial interview. In my thoughts, I continued to return to Carla's words; they were embedded in my mind and often rose to the forefront. Taking the approach of the affect concept as the researcher, positions me on the inside of the research. Bringing myself, my response, and my intuitive thoughts to account positions myself closely within the situation; therefore, I need to be mindful of this throughout the research process. The response of Carla, my response in return and how the participant affected me, and in return, and I in return, Barad (2007) notes that the entanglements are what co-constructs the knowledge and is what MacLure (2004) discusses as the notion of how data 'glows' and how this aids the researcher to understand what any of the potential utterance or body gesture may mean. This was unlike the usage of the interpretivist paradigm of thematic analysis, as described in the previous chapter, where I applied a prescribed set of principles to the world to guide where I was not personally entangled. Using the concept of ethico-onto-epistemology, I am within that material world where everything is entangled. However, both paradigms enabled the analysis to be undertaken with rigour. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach in the thematic analysis and Barad's (2007) concept of affect to

guide the research, and noting the difference as previously discussed, enabled commonalities from the data to be identified, analysed and reported.

Fenwick (2011) suggests, going beyond the boundaries of the normal conventions of the interview, that taking a socio-materialism lens enables the researcher to see things from a different perspective. This is supported by MacLure (2004), stating this as an approach that will help me to look at the findings to consider what they could mean.

The approach that I take in the following discussions is based on what I noticed, what I felt from the participant, how this left me feeling and the impact of the conversation on me. How the interview content began to stand out personally to me; the 'data glowed' (MacLure, 2004). I kept thinking about the interactions and responses; they were constantly in my thoughts. I was replaying them, returning to them time and time again. I now introduce Carla.

4.1 Introducing Carla

I chose to focus on Carla (pseudonym) because from the very beginning of the semi-structured interview, I was aware of the interesting nature of the statements that were unfolding throughout the interview process. The utterances and the body language seemed to be illuminating something. I also felt affected by her through her tone, gestures, and the words she spoke. These impacted me. Sometimes I could feel her energy, which made me want to get up and shout at her; other times, I felt her frustration, which made me feel numb.

I came to pay attention to, for example, the shifts in her tone and how this enabled an emphasis on some phrases or words. As I reread the transcripts, I started to note these as well as my feelings and reactions, demonstrated through the usage of the bold type above the participant's words. I paid attention to silences, body gestures, utterances, and changes in tone. This is to indicate powerful moments that potentially add insights and highlight different perspectives when using coding categories or themes. It also enabled me to pay attention to events within the interview. As noted by MacLure (2004), paying attention to different factors, such as tone, silences and gestures, works through what is communicated as 'affect' rather than through the lexicon alone. Some events contributed to the 'glow' for me: when something had happened that would not leave me alone, something that I kept revisiting and pondering about.

I chose to focus on Carla because her interactions have stayed with me; they impacted me in such a way that I found myself reflecting on those moments. This powerful five minutes with unexpected charges of energy from Carla made me think more deeply about this occurrence. It was a moment for me that signified a different force and relates to what MacLure (2004) refers to as the 'glow'.

I started to pay attention to how I, the researcher, used body gestures. Within the interview, for example, Carla loudly clapping lurched me upward, sitting more erect and staring at her with intent. Recognising my affective contributions weakens the boundaries between the researched and researcher, recognising that we were both entangled in a dynamic encounter where energies flowed, intensified and sometimes decreased.

In the words taken from the transcript, these have been indicated by the boldface type above the responses to alert the reader to the silences, body gestures, utterances, and changes in tone. This is to indicate the powerful moments that potentially add meaning to the understanding of the response and the truth in relation to the phenomenon.

By using the lens of socio-materialism, I will attempt to assemble the outcome and engage with the data to refine and reshape the event. Maintaining rigour within the research process by using the socio-material lens through Barad's (2007) ethico-onto-epistemology, I now turn to my encounter with Carla.

4.2 My Encounter with Carla

In the following sections, I draw on my encounter with Carla who, at the point of the interview, was a qualified teacher working in the Northwest in a primary school setting. I first met the participant at a series of Newly Qualified Teacher Conferences. Organising conferences and regular meeting points for all who had recently qualified and their mentor in school was part of my work role. Overall, Carla had a very positive attitude and served as a mentor for a newly qualified teacher. As explained in chapter 2, the rationale for participant recruitment and all interviews were arranged in accordance with the participants' suitable location of their choice. Following consent, an interview was arranged with Carla. I will now discuss that encounter using data from the transcripts in support of what was previously discussed. From that point in time to the present, I still ponder on those five minutes prior to the interview.

We walked around the school to find an alternative room as the one allocated had been commandeered for use by a member of the staff who was working one-to-one with a child. The memory I had of the participant's energy appeared different in comparison to the previous meetings. This was prior to the formalities of the beginning of the research. I thought this could be due to the fact that the interview was occurring at the end of December, which is a very busy term in schools and other work-related pressures such as Christmas plays, parties and reports and the additional hassle of now finding a free room.

However, before she spoke, I noticed Carla's body gestures in response to the warm-up question: There have been many issues and changes in education throughout the years, how have you experienced these?

Carla commented:

[Her tone was strong with a huge sigh and a long pause between 'impossible' and 'you'.]

If I knew then what I know now I probably would have not chosen to teach a difficult impossible road you work all the time and do not feel valued. (Carla, school 6)

I was immediately struck by the negativity. The negativity came at me through her sigh. Before she spoke, there appeared to be what seemed like an age, an awkward span where nothing was said. Then there was an audible sigh. The response felt physical and awakened me. I felt there was something direct and immediate within this response. Could it have been the result of relief

because we had found a room, or was it the result of an emotional state underpinned by stress and anxiety?

I noticed that Carla's energy was very different from the previous time I had met her at the teachmeets. The room we finally settled in was small, cluttered on all sides with learning resources. There were no windows, not even on the door. It appeared to be a storage cupboard with a desk and two chairs that were used as an overflow to the teaching areas, which felt like a desperate attempt to accommodate people in time and space. It was untidy, and not an inspirational location to be for adults or children who would be expected to undertake interventions in this environment. It was dull and claustrophobic. This could have influenced the presence of the negativity and sadness that hit me in full force, which I felt was now attached to my observations and thought processes.

Carla seemed to communicate through emotions indicating her thoughts of regret. Yet, she also seemed to be somebody who was on the edge of change or wanting change. Joining these words and mixing them with an aggressive tone, sigh and pause, it was evident that a change had occurred in their persona and attitude.

Carla sat opposite me in the cluttered room. We crouched at a small table that was designed for children. She appeared as a lonely figure, tall, slight, and pale—a look that made her seem desperate, like a person who was giving everything but was still not valued. I felt as though I was experiencing her lived experience. I was immediately struck by the collection of emotions that

were entangled with the interview responses. The mood conveyed through the emotions highlighted a common theme of being valued by people in the workspace. This was a theme highlighted by other participants as well. This seemed to be one of the reasons she attended teachmeets.

I was immediately struck by the change in her take, which was in stark contrast to the one that I remembered from the conferences. During the warm-up question, it was evident that changes had taken place. This affected me. I felt the impact of the change.

4.3 I Feel Like Screaming

The following response was related to the reasons Carla chose to attend the teachmeets. She spoke with quickness and urgency, which was emphasised through her tone changes. However, they were spoken with clear articulation. The tone changes were engaging; the message was clear. The response did not appear to be expressed under pressure or as a way to persuade. There was no misunderstanding the words, and the tone emphasised a desire and need to attend the teachmeets for the reasons below. This has been echoed by other participants.

Why do you attend teachmeets?

[She spoke with quickness, her tone changing.]

Update myself professionally, catchup with colleagues, add a sense of purpose to what I do.

Toward the end of the sentence, the words signalled a shift. I noticed the change in tone and attitude currently displayed by Carla. The words were lighter and appeared to be conveyed with

a sense of relief. Carla's responses appear to support the reasons given by the other participants, expressing that through the free spaces of the teachmeets they find collaboration through which they are updated professionally, a venue where they find purpose and value. This informs and supports them in their role. Despite their busy schedules, Carla and the other participants find time to attend. They attend frequently and freely highlighting a wish to attend related to collaboration and professional development.

Have you attended all teachmeets?

Mostly I have only missed one from a minor op, I enjoy attending and need to attend for my development.

Once more, the long sighs appeared to be powerful when aligned side by side with the verbal responses. The space, body and time were speaking between porous boundaries. I was engaged by this, not distanced from the dialogue. In particular, when Carla was pausing, I felt comfortable even though I felt Carla staring straight at me. I was absorbed by her response; she had my full attention, adding credence to her comments.

[There were long sighs and pauses.]

One per term they are so interesting, it is my lifeline, out of the factory I mean school. It is just so busy, full on, chasing paperwork, jumping through hoops it's madness. I think for me it is the constant demand about where your children are at. What are your results? The looking at data all the time. It makes life hard and difficult. Then attending one-one meetings with Senior

Leaders. Then staff meetings looking at how other schools are delivering the curriculum and looking at their results. I feel like screaming (long pause) nothing to do with my class, my children or me.

It seems, and I felt as though she was telling me directly, that Carla was indicating the difficulties and barriers that were in place within the school environment and her direct working life. Her working life, as was indicated by other participants, was draining and was a constant cycle of negativity. Attending the teachmeets was that space that was free from the structure of the school environment. They attended for a different level of support from what they received or did not receive from the teachmeets. During the teachmeets, they were free from senior leadership control, and the space they experienced was one of collaboration and inspiration.

I felt Carla's sheer enjoyment about attending the teachmeets. She spoke with excitement. The message was clear and well-articulated. Carla spoke about colleagues and the teachmeets softly but with passion. Her enthusiasm was strong. I felt from her personal response that she was direct; on the other hand, this was forceful. The quickness of the spoken language was clear in communicating and presenting her points of view. There was no confusion in her descriptions; it seemed that the teachmeet spaces impacted her personal development, and she viewed them as inspirational spaces.

What do you experience at teachmeets?

[She spoke with excitement.]

Support, colleague support, from people who are experiencing the chalk face, living with it on a day-to-day basis. Talking and sharing experiences it's helped to get me back on track with why I go every day, why I turn up it's about the children.

Through her intonation and excitement, I felt, and it seemed as though Carla was communicating that her attendance at teachmeets was a welcomed and positive experience. It appears that through the shared experience of the teachmeets, Carla and other participants found that the activity supported their personal development. I was struck by the sharpness of the focus within the response. I responded to this with attention.

In the following response, Carla appeared to demonstrate negativity through her words; the loud voice and sighs indicated this. This change in tone and pitch captured my attention and gained my interest; I felt Carla's agitation and frustration.

[Her voice was loud, her sighs long.]

Yeah, my sanity is restored. I had a one-to-one meeting to review my results I was asked where the evidence was in my tracking and monitoring how did I test them, how was I sure that the children understood inverse operations. It felt like I was in a parallel universe I think that Senior Leaders have forgotten everything they were told about how children learn. All they seem to ever ask me is about data, statistics, and percentages, oh and attendance how do I make up the missed learning for children. They make me feel like I do not know what I am doing there is no thanks. I feel nothing like a professional there is no praise, no thanks I do not feel valued.

There appears to be a clear message that teachmeets were open space and could impact development. The long pause that came next gave me the impression that Carla was under a lot of pressure, but her message conveyed something quite important. Through the silence, there was an emotional gesture. I felt saddened by this as the vibrant teacher I once knew appeared dejected and lost. I felt oppressed.

4.4 Feeling Revived

Do you not get this support from your own school?

[There was a long pause after the word 'apply'.]

Everything I trained to do does not seem to apply. I'm not even sure they know what to do with the data information except to set me stupid targets, that compromise me as a teacher. So going to teachmeets helps me. I feel solidarity. I get a pat on the shoulder. I come out of the teachmeets feeling revived and ready to go back into the class, taking on board the support of my colleagues from the teachmeets.

It seemed that Carla was deadened by the constant requests for data and target-setting processes. It seems that her individuality was squashed. She seemed to be saying as a practitioner that there is a need to follow your own path, to reflect and refine, but the shackles of

performance weigh heavily. It seemed that Carla gained energy through the collaboration with others from the teachmeets. It seems that the teachmeets make Carla come alive.

In the quote below, the clap was significant in communicating an affective message. It immediately grabbed my attention. I was struck by the loud, sharp sound that demanded attention; almost struck with fear, I felt I needed to pay attention. In the previous chapter, I reiterated how all participants had reported that they felt valued, and there was praise given to them at the teachmeets. All participants also indicated that the pat on the back or the request to try an idea put forward, or the simple words given to and by colleagues, for example, 'I like that idea', gave the one-minute praise that seemed to note praise, success, and progress. I found myself reacting emotionally to Carla's response.

4.5 The Clap!

Then out of the blue, Carla clapped her hands loudly.

> **[She clapped after 'yes' with a change in her tone; her speech was quicker, sounding excited.]**

Yes, supportive conversation allowing me to reflect and unpick what I do and what that means to me as a practitioner and what it means to the children in my care. They make me feel good about what I do.

The clap struck me, and I felt and observed Carla come alive. Her energy made me see and feel how value and praise were important to her, both professionally and personally. Through these

bodily actions, I felt the force of Carla's message. It seemed that the teachmeets were giving a much-needed boost to the participants' CPD requirements, both personally and professionally, as noted in the previous chapter.

[There was a long pause following the words 'do more of'.]

No, it is always about what you are not doing what you need to do more of never well done you are doing well, or your children look happy and engaged well done yes, but not from staff the parents and children are grateful.

I was sensitive to the negativity in Carla's tone, which impacted my understanding of the role of a negative environment within the school. It was an effective response that seemed to indicate a lack of support, meaning, no value or reinforcement given at a personal level. Carla appeared low and saddened; I felt this negativity too.

[She spoke with a softer tone.] This was in response to a question about what is gained from attending teachmeets.

Lots of ideas. Tips that you can try out and use them straight away in the classroom. Friendship confidence that has been huge for me continuing to be confident in what I do and how I teach and that confidence enabling me to want to continue. If I did not attend the teachmeets I feel I may lose the commitment to work as hard as I can.

The softer tone, I felt, seemed to note a shift in energy levels. The impact of the positive elements gained from attendance at the teachmeets appeared to have lifted Carla's mood. I felt this, and

I reacted in a similar way. It seems that the support is welcomed and that there is a clear indication that within the teachmeets, there is support and value. It appears that Carla and the other participants welcomed and used teachmeets as a form of voluntary CPD.

> **[She spoke louder, laughing.] This was in response to a comment in relation to the above not being gained from school.**

No definitely not school is about results what happened last year, and what's happening now. Comparing cohorts of children. It's nothing about the now and positive environments all of that what you learn when you are training. It's almost like the managers only see school settings as a data machine.

Carla conveyed anger through a louder tone, which was an emphatic 'no', indicating that the assessment processes took over any personal requirements for bespoke professional development. This seemed to anger Carla, and I felt the anger from her. The louder tone was significant and commanded attention. I noticed the change in her tone, and I reacted to this with attention; it was a stark contrast to the previous soft tone she exhibited in her previous response, which I reacted to immediately. I felt Carla's agitation.

The laugh was loud and exhaled with conviction, almost with frustration and urgency, as if the point needed not only to be voiced but also really heard. When I asked about CPD in her school, the laugh and the loud voice put together struck me, and the impact conveyed the message of anger and urgency. The words felt like they had struck a chord she really believed was important.

Her words were spoken with honesty, stating the need for personal development within CPD. The fact is, this did not happen; the room was totally secluded from others.

> **[There was a long pause after the words 'personal development', and then silence at the end.]**

It's not really aimed at my personal development; it's set up around the needs of the school. Where there have been dips in my school performance—usually around data, which then generates what the staff meetings, insets will be about.

Carla's message about CPD in schools was that it was not aimed at her personal development. Both the long pause and silence were significant in conveying this message—that there was no personal choice for development. Carla remained focused on this conviction as she emphasised the words 'around the needs of the school'. I felt the strength of her feelings through her pause and the silence. The silence was like a thud as if someone had walked into a wall. There was no further comment. I felt Carla was conveying the depth of her feelings about how alienating CPD was. It was like a thud that stopped everything she was interested in. She was telling me that CPD did not focus on her; it was pointless, repetitive, and damaging.

I then asked the next question.

Tell me about the CPD in your school.

> **[She laughed loudly, and her voice was strong.] This was in response to 'Is there CPD in your school?'**

There is no CPD in school.

Her response was made along with loud laughter, and her strong tone was in accordance with most of the participants: that CPD was not personalised and did not exist in their schools for those reasons, hence why they were attending the teachmeets. This was a significant moment where Carla and myself both seemed to mirror each other with the laugh. I felt as though I was feeling and understanding exactly what she had uttered. I felt a mutual understanding with her through her words.

[She chuckled and spoke with a softer voice, getting louder toward the end.]

Only when I must attend a staff meeting or go to another school to get new ideas or to see how another teacher is doing it that's usually related to better results. I never get to choose for myself what courses I would like to attend.

Her response, even though light-hearted, communicated the need for better and more opportunities in her quest to understand how to improve her pedagogic practice. There is no choice in the school, as development and options are provided only at the teachmeets. Through the utterances and shift in her tone, I felt that there was an affective acceptance in Carla's response, that this was the situation within the school. My reaction to this was one of sadness, not only for Carla but for the profession as well.

4.6 Leadership or Not?

Do you ever ask to go on any courses of your choice?

[There was a long sigh toward the end, and she spoke slightly louder.]

Yes, I wanted to go on a Forest School Course I gave my rational why this would be good for my development, and how it would be useful to the children and the school needs. It didn't fit the development plan and school focus. When I questioned it the Senior Leader response was as part of your performance management you were asked to select targets in relation to the priorities of the school. So, I no longer bother.

It seemed by the bodily sighs and shift in her tone, that Carla felt deflated. She appeared disheartened, knocked down and frustrated. I felt my own reaction; it was one of anger and frustration.

Can you choose what CPD sessions you would like to attend?

[She spoke with a quieter tone followed by a pause.]

Yes, I am directed to them no choice really. (Senior leaders dictate)

The impact of the tone conveyed a clear message in relation to the CPD on offer in school, which seemed to be entirely about the needs of the school. It seems that this is an area that troubles and affects Carla both personally and professionally. This also had a negative impact on myself. I felt her anger and frustration. I felt stunned. I pictured the school leaders and their deadening approach to staff, CPD and leadership.

What are your thoughts on government policies?

[She said this in a louder voice, speaking quickly.]

They are to blame they just mess with education. I do not feel valued as a professional, they do not trust us to do a good job. They set the agenda which means for me this constant focus on assessment, of my performance. Heads and senior leaders just drive it. In a nutshell the government do not care about teachers or children.

Her response took me by surprise. Carla seemed overly despondent about the situation. She could see the link between government policy and the headteacher's role. Yet I was surprised by this response, for while Carla seemed almost locked in and captured by her immediate working environment, she was still able to reflect and have a good awareness of the wider policy context. I felt her frustration. Although her words were spoken at a faster pace, they were focused and clear. It left me angered but also with a growing expectation.

The credibility with which her words were delivered made me feel her agitation in the swiftness of the expressed words. They were not spoken in anger, just spoken quickly. This is what gave the words impact. The pacing of the words impacted me directly. I felt she had a realisation, a new understanding of her career. I felt uneasy with this.

What are your thoughts on the curriculum?

[Suddenly, she shouted.]

They are not worth the paper they are written on. Curriculum is too narrow no freedom to extend knowledge just very constraining.

I felt the anger as she shouted her frustration in relation to the curriculum and government involvement. This made me feel empty. I had no words to offer comfort or a positive outcome.

4.7 Positive Experiences, Positive Spaces

What was the impact of attending the teachmeets?

Speaking in a softer but very controlled tone, conveying the message that her attendance at the teachmeets did impact her personal and professional development. Carla found teachmeets inspirational places.

[She spoke in a softer tone.]

Personally, it has helped me to hold onto and nurture my identity as a teacher. It's supported me in my knowledge, role, and duty as a professional. Professionally, I have more knowledge, ideas I now know, through tips and talks with colleagues that I will keep at it, and I think in 2 more years I will move on perhaps think about a middle leadership position.

The above softer tone seemed to advocate that teachmeets were a welcomed space, where both personal and professional development took place and positively impacted Carla. I felt that the teachmeets were communities where Carla became reenergised.

4.8 Affective Encounter

In trying to capture the lived experience of Carla through the entanglements which go beyond words and appear through gestures, tone, and bodily actions as described by Barad (2007). I felt the immediate impact of actions and voice which were absorbed, collected, and analysed demonstrating the affect I felt.

My affective encounters with Carla enabled me to gain further glimpses of why participants sought to attend and engage with teachmeets (see p. 90). Such reasons appear to be for both professional and personal reasons.

There were a few encounters that seemed to highlight the school mechanism and processes related to the requirements of constantly collecting data and measuring children's attainment which appeared to leave Carla de-motivated and apathetic as a practitioner. Carla also expressed that control by the senior leadership in relation to CPD in school and the lack of bespoke choice and personal development, seemed to leave Carla deadened. It seems Carla through attending the communities of teachmeets, collaborating with others, gained, renewed and re-energised both her personal and professional autonomy. The next chapter offers discussion on these findings against the background of existing literature and theory from within the field which will relate to the issues raised. I would now like to link this work on my encounter with Carla to the themes explored in the previous chapter.

There appears to be commonality with the other participants that there was a disbelief in CPD in school there was a whole question that it was not bespoke, it was managed by senior leaders for

all staff in relation to school needs and not personal career needs. Referred to in relation to the theme on control.

All participants had indicated that the pat on the back, or the request to try an idea put forward, or the simple words given to and by colleagues for example the idea of the one-minute praise that seemed to note praise, success, and progress (see p. 89). All participants appeared to gain praise and re-assurances from colleagues at the teachmeets (see p. 109).

4.9 Positionality: attune to affects

My position within this chapter was one of entanglement as explained through Barad's (2007) ethic- onto- epistemology and acknowledges the interconnection between how an interview is set up, including the researcher's presence, and how phenomena come into view. I have explicitly referred to how my encounter with Carla was viscerally felt. I was aware of her mood changes and when she seemed to be depleted and when she came alive. I was not separate from the interview process. Barad (2007) refers to the researcher's need to take response-ability; that is to acknowledge that my positionality was entangled with what I have reported here as findings or as 'data'. I have described how Carla's affects, her moods, gestures, and tone of voice affected me and that I felt this in my body. Accordingly, my bodily moves, gestures and tone of voice will have acted back on Carla and influenced, to some extent, what she felt able to say. Our reciprocal interactions and responses might be seen as an affective dance. What came into view as phenomenon (Barad, 2007), that is, what I noticed and so what I have chosen to describe here is one of many possible outcomes of the reciprocal dance.

Thinking with affect has enabled me to show how issues such as power, dominance, and control (Foucault, 1984) had become embodied in Carla. I have described how the affective energies that flowed in the interview related to visceral experiences of oppression, loss of autonomy, and dis-empowerment. I have also described how when talking about teachmeets Carla came alive; her enthusiasm, motivation and joy was viscerally felt.

Like the other participants, Carla had been living with the effects of government policies implemented by senior leaders in the school. By looking at the interview in a different way. I became aware of visceral affects of these policies on participants. By paying attention to affects, gestures, tones, and moods in the interview with Carla, it seemed that these communicated the visceral and embodied affects of these policies. Perhaps as she spoke, she relived incidents in the interview. Foucault (1984) referred to forms of control and surveillance as governmentality. Paying attention to affects to attune Carla in the interview gave me a different way to understand participants' experiences. Specifically, I became aware of the affects relating to space, place, embodiment, and time in the interview with Carla. This provided a 'feel' or what was happening in interviews beyond the content of what was spoken. The thematic analysis presented in the previous chapter emphasised the content of what participants had said, while in this chapter I have tried to pay attention to the more-than-spoken.

5. Chapter 5 Seeing Further (Conclusion)

5.1 Introduction

The research aimed to explore why teachers attended teachmeets, what their experiences were and if they can be considered as a new form of CPD. This concluding chapter will summarise the study by revisiting the research questions. The findings will be contextualised within the literature review reported in chapter 1 and highlight the study's contribution to the field of education, specifically to the literature on CPD. Next, I consider the limitations of the study. Finally, I offer recommendations for policy and practice and suggest further research.

The research questions are as follows:

> Research Question 1 (RQ1): Why do teachers choose to attend teachmeets?
>
> Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do teachers experience teachmeets?
>
> Research Question 3 (RQ3): Are teachmeets a new form of CPD according to teachers' perceptions?

Each research question will be addressed, in turn, by presenting relevant insights from chapters 3 and 4.

5.2 RQ1: Why do teachers choose to attend teachmeets?

The themes reported in chapter 3 were the following: control, surveillance and fear, control by data, shared free space and cohesive inspirational community. Before directly addressing why participants attended teachmeets, there is a need to report their experiences in school. Participants spoke at great length about feeling oppressed and de-professionalised in school. Therefore, instead of answering the question, this section provides the background to why teachers have been motivated to create alternative places outside of schools where they can regain their confidence and feel valued. To understand the urgency of this need, this section summarises the findings from the four key themes: control, surveillance, fear and the impact of data. Where relevant, I weave findings from chapter 4, which describes the more-than-spoken aspects of my interview with Carla.

Participants spoke about CPD as a form of control. It was evident from the thematic analysis (see p. 69–72) that CPD was not bespoke; it was school-driven and had little impact on personal development. All 12 participants spoke about having to attend CPD sessions in school (see p. 69). These compulsory CPD sessions were repetitive and mainly covered government requirements. All participants reported that they had no opportunity to attend personalised CPD (see p. 70).

In the interview encounter with Carla, I gained a sense of how the CPD experience felt compulsory and uninteresting. For example, Carla laughed out loud when referring to the school-based CPD. She commented emphatically, ‘there is no personalised CPD in school’. Following that comment,

I noticed a stillness in Carla's demeanour. I was aware that this was an affective ripple entangled within the response. She seemed to become deflated or deadened.

Foucault (1984) noted that government control could be exercised in schools through policy enactments. Power and control were being exercised through a top-down approach to CPD, which was imposed on teachers (see p. 73). Placing this in a historical context, it seems that schools have become less nurturing spaces for teachers. Teachers had become disempowered and controlled through government policy (Foucault, 1984). Next, I address the second theme related to why the participants attended teachmeets: surveillance and fear.

All participants spoke about surveillance and fear, specifically in relation to senior leaders. A lack of trust had grown between senior leaders and teachers. All participants indicated that they feared formal observations (see p. 73). All participants noted that the frequent lesson observations made them feel weak, worried and unprofessional. The continuous surveillance made them feel as if they were being judged as incompetent, and this eroded their confidence. Participants described a strong lack of trust and praise from the senior leaders unless it was linked to performance.

Foucault (1971) refers to the mechanisms through which domination operates. Participants signalled that lesson observations operated as forms of surveillance in a similar way to Foucault's description of the panopticon. Teachers seemed to experience lesson observations as part of a culture of surveillance, inducing fear.

In the interview with Carla, I noted the quietness and sadness expressed through her voice and eyes (see p. 74–75). Foucault (1980) notes surveillance as a technology by which people are controlled by others. By using classroom surveillance to ensure teachers were implementing policies and management strategies and by judging those who were not doing exactly what was prescribed, teachers feared being judged. The constant surveillance seemed to erode their self-confidence and self-belief. All participants indicated a feeling of uneasiness and discomfort with senior leaders along with a sense of being continually watched. This suggests they had internalised the judgment, as described by Foucault (1980) in what he refers to as the panopticon effect. The continual surveillance was noted by all participants (see p. 77), and they spoke of feeling incompetent. Foucault (1971) describes the use of policies to dominate, categorise and control; and lesson observations had become a strong technology of control. Lesson observations have been an example of this, the panopticon. One further theme to be considered is controlled by data.

All participants spoke of the role of collecting data as oppressive (see p. 78–81). They said they had to demonstrate children's progress by regularly reporting test scores. If the scores were not showing progression, teachers would be judged by senior leaders (see p. 80). All participants spoke of the constant pressure from data collection and the review meetings that often followed if progression was not evident in the scores they reported (see p. 77–80).

How this pressure felt came across in the interview with Carla, as I sensed her mood and the tone of her voice got louder when she spoke about the necessity to report children's scores, expressing her frustration when she spoke about schools being only concerned about progression, about monitoring and getting better results (see p. 108).

Foucault (1984) suggested that education can be used in various ways to control and induce compliance. Obsessions with data collection can be considered as another form of governmentality. Ball (2008) suggested that such practices demonstrate the influence of state control in the micro-dynamics of school practices.

These themes demonstrate teachers' discontent with schools and, together, paint a picture of toxic cultures where they feel de-professionalised, afraid, and bullied. This provides the contextual background against which teachmeets emerged. These findings demonstrate the extent to which all participants felt oppressed in their workplaces. The literature review described when teachmeets emerged in England in 2011. These findings reinforce the relationship between school cultures and the emergence and uptake of teachmeets by teachers. The next section addresses more directly why teachers attend teachmeets.

5.3 RQ2: How do teachers experience teachmeets?

The two key themes, 'shared free space' and 'cohesive inspirational community', provide some insights into why teachers attend teachmeets as well as how they spoke of their experiences in

them. Findings from these themes will be summarised before turning to how Carla’s interview provides some insights into the effects that she communicated about her teachmeet experiences.

All participants spoke of teachmeets as shared free spaces where they felt able to meet without the constraints of the formal school setting and the watchful eye of senior leaders (see p. 82–85). They were described as places where they could be relaxed and talk as professionals. Teachmeets came across as places where teachers could share ideas and develop professional skills and knowledge and regain a sense of their professional identity and competence. They described a real feeling of being connected to others and of teachmeets as communities. Participants’ enthusiasm and even passion for teachmeets were reflected in Carla’s interview, which is discussed later.

All participants spoke of teachmeets as ‘free spaces’ (see p. 85–87). They suggested that activities within a group of like-minded professionals could draw upon each other’s strengths in a positive and collaborative way. All 12 participants indicated that during the teachmeets, they had gained friendships as well as strategies that helped their classroom practice. All participants indicated that teachmeets had helped them enhance their knowledge in relation to teaching, learning and pedagogy. They spoke of teachmeets as spaces where they could talk openly without fear of judgment and where discussion and debate were exciting and generative. They spoke of enhancing their professional knowledge. Much of this was echoed by Carla (see p. 105–107).

Carla became energised when discussing her teachmeets attendance. She smiled, spoke quickly and clasped her hands. I picked up on how she spoke of her need to attend, which seemed to be linked to well-being. At times, I could feel her enjoyment (see p. 102). The energy that she conveyed when speaking about teachmeets being her lifeline echoed with the other participants' experiences (see p. 87, 88, 102). The tone in her voice, her gestures and the loud clap called for my attention. Her voice and mannerisms conveyed her appreciation for the supportive conversations and dialogues that she had with others in teachmeets. I noted the softer tones in her voice and her excitement when discussing how ideas, information and pedagogic knowledge were expanded. Her mood lifted and smiles emerged. Carla came alive when she discussed her engagement at teachmeets (see p. 108). They saw them as relaxed places where they could voice, question and discuss their profession and concerns.

Foucault (1984) describes how control is exerted through governmentality, whereby education is the mechanism to channel government policy to change or maintain the status quo. Findings in this study suggest how participants had become disempowered. Yet, during the interview with Carla, I became aware of how teachmeets seemed to reenergise her. Teachmeets were places where participants became energised, self-empowered and equipped to carry on their daily roles as teachers. Now I turn to the third question to explore if teachmeets are a new form of CPD.

5.4 RQ3: Are teachmeets a new form of CPD according to teachers' perceptions?

The findings from the study suggested that teachers' involvement in teachmeets motivated and inspired them (see p. 82–89). They were able to choose to engage in open discussions around

topics they found interesting. They could openly share ideas in a place free from the oppression they experienced in school and with senior leaders. This study suggests that teachers, even in cultures that they describe as toxic, try to do a good job, driven by a desire to do better for the children they teach. Findings suggest that these teachers were committed to CPD and were seeking appropriate CPD opportunities.

These points were echoed in my interview encounter with Carla. When talking about teachmeets, I could feel her eagerness. For example, she said, ‘Here I can ask questions of colleagues’; and she referred to teachmeets as ‘different places’, as ‘friendly, happy and a good stimuli’. When she spoke about these places, she came alive, and her demeanour was very different from when she talked about her working life in school (see p. 102–103). I felt an affect with intensity rippling through her when she spoke of teachmeets. This, in turn, affected my response, and I felt elated.

All participants had recognised the impact of collaboration with like-minded colleagues as positive and had made a difference in relation to knowledge, skills, and self-esteem (see p. 112). They all noted that the community of the teachmeets was powerful in enabling networking and in facilitating opportunities to connect with other practitioners (see p. 113). Accordingly, it seems that teachmeets are alternative venues for CPD. However, they were also far more than that; they were places where downtrodden teachers could become reenergised, feel supported, join in enthusiastic conversations with like-minded colleagues and indeed, feel re-professionalised. My interview encounter with Carla suggests that teachmeets were good not only for teachers’

emotional well-being but also for their professional identities, giving them the energy to carry on in school cultures that they described as toxic.

5.5 Contextualising the findings within the literature

The research set out to explore the phenomena of teachmeets, the experiences of the participants and if teachmeets could be deemed as a new form of CPD. I will now use key literature to further support previously discussed main points. This study showed that CPD was a key factor in participants attending teachmeets.

CPD is an entitlement for all teachers and should be a continuing journey in which professionals can update their skills and knowledge and refine their teaching through research (Day, 2011). Day (2011) noted that CPD should be interactive, conference-based, and developmental. Further, Desimone (2011) argued that CPD is a lifelong process based on individual needs. Findings from this study indicated that bespoke CPD was what the participants desired. However, the key findings are that school CPD was limited and not bespoke. This study suggests that the interest of senior leaders dominates school-based CPD. Furthermore, their delivery of CPD acts as a form of control. Bradbury (2010) noted that there have been considerable changes in education, which have, in turn, changed not only the schools but also the people who work within them. Macphail (2015) noted that the change in management practice and the control exercised by senior managers relates to the loss of autonomy, de-professionalisation and disempowerment of teachers. This study found that relationships between the participants and senior leaders may well be worsening due to a lack of trust. Frostenson (2015) noted that a loss of autonomy leads

to de-professionalisation. He attributed this to an increased level of managerial control, how schools are managed and how staff are controlled through CPD. This study supports this view and amplifies this due to what was found with regard to the high levels of anxiety teachers expressed when faced with contrived, limited and repetitive CPD agendas. It seemed that although CPD was present in schools, it was not enhancing personal needs or skills.

Day (2020) noted that if teachers have no choices about CPD, it impacts their autonomy and eventually leads to de-professionalisation. Findings from this study suggested that CPD was curtailed, and the agenda was very much controlled by senior leaders, which seemed to relate to strong feelings of loss of autonomy. Many participants described a culture of fear, which appeared to be the result of the policies implemented by senior leaders.

Drawing on Foucault's (1984) concepts of control and dominance, findings suggest that participants just wanted to do a good job, but there was a fear of failing if management expectations were not fulfilled. The fear of failure, underpinned by the surveillance of lessons through observations and scrutiny of data reporting, seemed to contribute to an oppressive culture.

This study found that surveillance acting, through the compulsory requirement to report data used to measure children's progress and the subsequent use of data to judge teachers, seemed to relate to the feelings of oppression that led teachers to attend teachmeets. Bradbury (2010) refers to this as 'datafication', the constant regime of testing, monitoring, and judgment. This, in

turn, can be viewed as one of the many technologies of control that relate to schools having oppressive environments. Participants spoke of becoming disempowered, worn down and disconnected from senior leaders. A significant senior leader-teacher gap was evident, and this study goes beyond just a gap through fear; teachers became disassociated and disinterested in senior leaders' visions. Bradbury's study (2020) found that teachers were expected to be something different, impacting both their relationships and practice. Simpson (2018) suggested that the collection of data in schools for comparative purposes facilitated toxic environments. In this study, participants left the toxic internal environments of school to go to the external teachmeets, to have meaningful discussions about what mattered to them professionally. Findings suggest that they were seeking forms of CPD that would be useful in their classrooms. This supports Biesta's (2015) study that teachers require space to develop and use their professional autonomy in classrooms.

Teachmeets were informal spaces where teachers could meet. In this study, participants described them as positive, energising spaces that are free from the scrutiny of school and the watchful eyes of senior leaders. McConell (2006) also found that teachers see these spaces as being free from the constraints and formalities of school. Findings in this study support this and Basnett's (2021) work where she noted that teachmeets enable informal spaces and non-judgmental conversations. I now turn to the contributions to knowledge that this study has shown.

This study found that for the participants, teachmeets were inspirational places where they could refine and develop their teaching skills. Participants were seeking and finding sources of motivation, companionship, and care. Teachmeets facilitated networking (Basnett 2021), and networking with other colleagues was highly valued. Through collaboration, conversations and discussions, participants felt they were extending their professional knowledge as well as refining their professional identities. This study was different from other studies as it looked at the experiences of teachers at teachmeets. Participants experienced teachmeets as a form of continuing professional development, yet it was so much more than this. The CPD was holistic and increased knowledge and skills to progress careers, unlike the instrumental government-directed, school-based CPD. Furthermore, this study shows that teachers did not engage with the CPD in school; rather, they disengaged. A further contribution of this study in relation to Foucault's concepts of power, control and dominance seems to be evident in the way classroom observations and the obsessive collection and use of data act as technologies of control. Judgments seem to have become tied to these technologies, and as with the panopticon, teachers seem to have internalised fear and anxiety. By referring to Foucault's work and demonstrating how some of his concepts were operationalised, tentative links can be made between state control and teachers' experiences in classrooms, which seems to align with biopower (Ball, 2013). It is when I paid attention to Carla and what her mannerisms and body seemed to communicate beyond words that we might see how biopower is viscerally and corporally experienced. The effects of the toxic school culture seem to have seeped into her body, and this seems to manifest in the interview.

To summarise, this study shows teachers being controlled through lesson observations, data and CPD. Importantly, it demonstrates teachers becoming detached and removed from the senior leadership visions. Furthermore, this study shows the relationality between school toxic cultures and the growth of teachmeets; it seems that one fuels the other. In addition, this study shows a different approach to paying attention to what is more than spoken in the interview with Carla; it gives a feel for the visceral effect of policy directives as they are being implemented by senior leaders in schools—also, the passion and joy that accompanies attending teachmeets.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

As with all small-scale qualitative studies, the findings from this study cannot be generalised to the whole teaching profession. However, many of the findings in this study amplify findings in prior studies. All research has limitations, and listed below are the limitations linked to this study.

In relation to my methodology, I had chosen to undertake an LHT; this really did not serve the purpose; as I quickly realised during the pilot scheme that it was not used for the main study, as noted in chapter 2. It was lengthy and time-consuming; however, it did serve as a good icebreaker prior to the semi-structured interviews (Somekh and Lewin, 2011). Chapter 2 discussed the strategies used to ensure research rigour and to ensure that my study was trustworthy. This was a study of 12 participants who agreed to take part in this doctoral study. Having a larger pool of participants would have enabled me to find further themes or to have been confident that the interviews were exhaustive of the topics that might occur.

Future research should focus on a wider scale, including all those who attend teachmeets and covering a broader geography beyond the Northwest and over a longer period. This would highlight trends and variations in relation to the experiences of teachers attending teachmeets. This would provide a broader perspective on their reasons for attending, their experiences at teachmeets, the factors driving attendance and finally, the impact on their continuing professional development.

The doctoral study focused on the opinions and experiences of the participants from their settings. However, this study did not include the opinions of senior leaders or teachers who chose not to attend the teachmeets. Their participation may have given a more holistic view of the situation and would be worthy of future research.

5.7 Recommendations

1. Considering the research undertaken through this study, the first recommendation is that teachers should be given their autonomy back to plan, deliver and teach in a way that concurs with their knowledge of the children, to teach at the point of need using their skills and subject knowledge to do so and allowing professionals to be professionals and not micromanaged or micro-controlled by management.
2. Considering the findings of this research in relation to teacher CPD, senior leaders should review their policy in relation to a school-led agenda for CPD. The research highlighted that the CPD offered in school was repetitive and limited with choice and had limited impact.

Therefore, CPD should be structured over the year, not only taking into consideration essential items but also building time and space for choice and personal development to be nurtured.

3. For senior leaders, I would recommend that they should support the teaching staff by allowing time for informal meetings outside of school with colleagues, away from the formality of regular school staff meetings.
4. A further recommendation is for senior leaders to reduce the number of meetings in relation to checking data and child progress, to have less focus on raising attainment and viewing children as numbers and focus more on the individuals. This would result in better relationships, both personal and professional. The workload would be reduced, as the data collection process within the school was deemed by the research to be a key driver in control of CPD agendas and contributing to the complex and toxic working environments.
5. In addition to this, another recommendation would be for senior leaders to consult more with the teachers in relation to their personal needs. Senior leaders should ensure they listen to the needs of the teachers and act upon this, ensuring the teachers' bespoke training requirements are met.
6. A recommendation for policymakers is the requirement to reflect on the accountability measures that are driving policy, specifically those that are related to data and monitoring procedures. The data-driven mechanism should be relaxed. The policy should reflect the duty of care to professionals and children. Teachers should be trusted in the choice of data collection methods they use with their classes. For senior leaders, a recommendation would

be to trust their teachers when they report on attainment and achievement, to allow them to speak and to listen and act upon this—to respect their professionalism.

7. In relation to the limitations of this study, over a longer time scale, the recommendations would include research with senior leaders to gain their perspective. Additionally, interviewing the teachers who chose not to attend the teachmeets. Further research in relation to these topics could be interesting and provide comparative data that would enhance the findings.
8. As the literature is limited in relation to the impact of teachmeets on teachers' experience and continuing professional development, I would recommend that there is a need to conduct research connected with various factors related to teachmeets as a community for teacher development. Through this independent study, I hope to have added a new dimension to focus on.

5.8 Policy implications

I believe that the research from this study has policy implications. Firstly, for policymakers, I would like to recommend that they consider teacher autonomy and place this high on the agenda. That when initiating policy, they consider the impact of this on the role of the teacher. Teachers should be encouraged to use their own professionalism to teach, and their assessment knowledge should be valued. Secondly, to consider through policy the role of senior leaders in school and to guide and supervise them through policymaking so that surveillance is reduced and when observations are necessary, they are timely and of a constructive nature, e.g., learning walks. Finally, government policy supports the profession, trusts professionals to be professionals

and, through policy making, suggests that teachers require a national forum where teachers can meet, feel valued, regain their self-worth and be given credibility for their knowledge.

5.9 Personal reflections

The research process for this study was conducive to reflective thought. I actively sought opportunities to reflect throughout the research. Working from the data, the interviews, the notes, and the observations made during and following the interviews, revisiting these alongside the literature review enabled me to reflect on the themes of this study. The process of analysing the interview transcripts, organising the themes, ordering, and ranking the themes, being entangled and feeling the effect from Carla aided reflexivity.

The doctoral education journey has offered me several opportunities and challenges. Through my doctoral studies, I have developed and deepened my knowledge and understanding of a range of philosophies and theories related to level 8 study. I have also deepened my knowledge of various methods, in particular, reading and developing my understanding of the socio-material paradigm. In addition, I have gained a deeper understanding in relation to positionality. My position changed in relation to my biography, which, through shared knowledge and educational experiences, enabled me to be part of the participant's world; however, this shifted throughout the research. From the perspective of being a teacher educator undertaking research into their world, I no longer shared those commonalities, so my position was removed from their world. When interviewing Carla, I became entangled in her world. I was affected by her gestures, utterances, tone, and movement; she affected me, and in return, I affected her. I was tied up,

meshed, and entwined within her world. Hence, my positionality changed throughout the process. I enjoyed conducting my research in the field. This was exciting, and because of this, I have developed a research module that is going to be incorporated within the new undergraduate degree starting in September 2022.

Furthermore, my knowledge and understanding have impacted within and across the modules that I teach. Additionally, my research gave me the opportunity and access to practitioners within the field, which enabled me to make connections and create communities that have since impacted the training programme. The connections made within the settings have led to practitioners and children coming to the university to work with student teachers. Some practitioners have since engaged in further study and entered a postgraduate degree programme. In reviewing my literature, I feel this has also deepened my knowledge of authors and research, which not only developed my subject knowledge but also enabled me to enrich my content within seminars. I believe that in and through my reading for this research, I have developed different perspectives and now have a different set of skills with which to be critical and to question, as things never appear to be as they are.

Undertaking the research was a long journey, a journey with twists for example, the technicalities of chasing the participants up during the interview process. This highlighted to me the messiness of research, demonstrating how, sometimes, things are not straightforward, and as a researcher, you need to be flexible, bend with the twists and demonstrate patience. Sometimes, the research journey surprised me. I was surprised by the human emotions displayed throughout the

interviews—the emotions beyond words. Even though participants had been fully informed, I continually kept them updated and shared all information in relation to ethics and consent (Appendix 5). Prior to each interview being undertaken, there was time to raise queries; however, I felt it necessary and ethically responsible to check on the participants a few days following the interview.

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7. Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Participants

Participant		**Age**	**Years in Teaching**	**Type of School**	**Age Group Taught**	**Gender**	**Region**
1. Jenny		32	10 years	Primary	Year 6	Female	Northwest
2. Cara		29	7 years	Primary	Year 2	Female	Northwest
3. Kim		36	14 years	Primary	Year 3	Female	Northwest
4. Carol		45	23 years	Primary	Year 3	Female	Northwest
5. Wendy		52	30 years	Primary	Year 5	Female	Northwest
6. Carla		36	14 years	Primary	Year 6	Female	Northwest

7. Jonny		27	5 years	Primary	Year 5	Male	Northwest
8. Jo		53	25 years	Primary	Year 4	Female	Northwest
9. Maggie		45	18 years	Primary	Year 4	Female	Northwest
10. Louise		46	17 years	Primary	Year 2	Female	Northwest
11. Sarah		33	11 years	Primary	Year 1	Female	Northwest
12. Sylvia		40	18 years	Primary	Year 2	Female	Northwest

Appendix 2: Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

1. Why have you invited me to your teachmeet?

2. Why do you attend teachmeets?

3. Do you attend all teachmeets?

4. How frequently do you attend?

5. What are your expectations?

6. Are your expectations met, and if so, why?

7. What do you learn?

8. Are you not able to learn this from your school setting? Why?

9. What is your CPD like in school?

10. Do you attend any CPD offered by the school or the Local Education Authority?

11. Do you choose these courses, or does the Senior Leadership Team suggest you attend?

12. What are your views on current government education agendas?

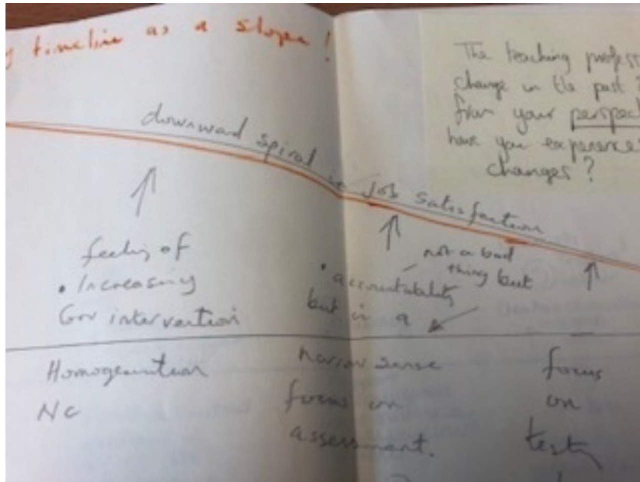
13. Are there any government policies that you would like to comment on?

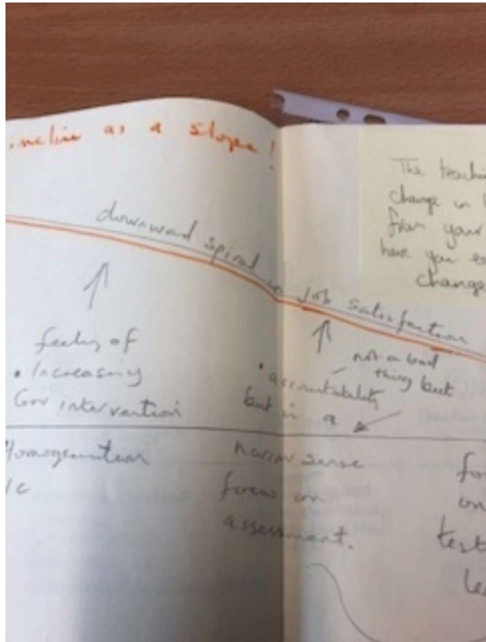
14. How has attending teachmeets impacted you personally and professionally?

Appendix 3: Reflections on the Pilot Phase of the Semi-Structured Interviews

- I appeared nervous.
- I noticed I went through the questions quickly.
- Thinking a lot during question and answer.
- I was aware I felt the process and procedure could be better.
- Not sure if I was capturing what I should be.
- A significant thought was should I be following the question up, if so with what?
- Would I be misleading the information?
- How do I carry on without impacting on the data?
- Did I, as the researcher, make the participant feel at ease?
- Asked questions at a quick pace.

Appendix 4: Example of Life History Timeline




as a slope!
downward spiral
job satisfaction
feelings of
• increasing
Gov intervention
• accountability
not a bad
thing but
but in a
narrow sense
focus on
assessment.

Appendix 5: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: To what extent does teachers attending teachmeets impact on their career development?

Name of Researcher: Sue Harrop (doctoral student)

Please initial all boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected. ☐

3. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

____________________	____________________	____________________
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

____________________	____________________	____________________
Name of Person taking consent.	Date	Signature

Appendix 6: Transcription Example

I have been given permission by all the participants to use the data generated throughout this study. I have acknowledged in an earlier chapter the ethical considerations concerning the use of data. I can state that the participant cannot be identified by the information provided.

In the following, the interview question is followed by the participant response:

Why attend teachmeets?

Participant Response:

Update myself professionally, catchup with colleagues, add a sense of purpose to what I do. The last part gave words to the shift I was noticing in the attitude currently displayed by the participant.

Do you attend all teachmeets?

Participant Response:

Mostly I have only missed one from a minor op.

How frequent do you attend?

Participant response:

1 per term they are so interesting, it is my lifeline, out of the factory I mean school. It is just so busy, full on, chasing paperwork, jumping through hoops it’s madness. I think for me it is the constant demand about where your children are at. What are your results? The looking at data

all the time. It makes life hard and difficult. Then attending 1-1 meetings with Senior Leaders. Then staff meetings looking at how other schools are delivering the curriculum and looking at their results. I feel like screaming (long pause) nothing to do with my class, my children or me.

So, what do you expect to get from going to teachmeets?

Participant response:

Support, colleague support, from people who are experiencing the chalk face, living with it on a day-to-day basis. Talking and sharing experiences it’s helped to get me back on track with why I go every day, why I turn up it’s about the children.

So, are your expectations met?

Participant response:

Yeah, my sanity is restored. I had a 1-1 meeting to review my results I was asked where the evidence was to in my tracking and monitoring how did I test them, how was I sure that the children understood inverse operations. It felt like I was in a parallel universe I think that Senior Leaders have forgotten everything they were told about how children learn. All they seem to ever ask me is about data, stats, and percentages, oh and attendance how do I make up the missed learning for children who are off. It makes my life hard sometimes I consider just applying for a teaching assistant job. They make me feel like I do not know what I am doing no thanks. I feel nothing like a professional there is no praise, no thanks I do not feel valued.

What do you mean?

Participant Response:

Everything I trained to do does not seem to apply I 'm not even sure they know what to do with the data information except to set me stupid targets, that compromise me as a teacher. So going to teachmeets helps me. I feel solidarity. I get a pat on the shoulder. I come out of the teachmeets feeling revived and ready to go back into the class, taking on board the support of my colleagues from the teachmeets.

You say a pat on the shoulder, can you explain what you mean?

Participant feedback:

Yes, supportive conversation allows me to reflect and unpick what I do, what that means to me as a practitioner and what it means to the children in my care. They make me feel good about what I do.

Do you receive this from school?

Participant feedback: No, it's always about what you are not doing and what you need to do more of. Never well done you are doing well, or your children look happy and engaged well done!

Would you say you receive praise?

Participant feedback: Yes, but not from staff the parents and children are grateful.

I can understand it must be difficult to give your all in a situation like that. So, what do you learn from teachmeets?

Participant response: Lots of ideas. Tips that you can try out and use them straight away in the classroom. Friendship confidence has been huge for me in continuing to be confident in what I do and how I teach and that confidence enables me to want to continue. If I did not attend the teachmeets I feel I may lose the commitment to work as hard as I can.

So, you feel you do not gain this from school?

Participant response: No definitely not school is about the results of what happened last year, and what's happening now. Comparing cohorts of children. It's nothing about the now and positive environments all of that is what you learn when you are training. It's almost like the managers only see school settings as a data machine.

So, what is the CPD like for you in school?

Participant Response: It's not aimed at my personal development; it's set up around the needs of the school. Where there have been dips in my school performance—usually around data, which then generates what the staff meetings, insets will be about.

Do you attend CPD offered by the school or the LEA?

Participant Response: Only when I have to attend a staff meeting or go to another school to get new ideas or to see how another teacher is doing it I usually related to better results. I never get to choose for myself what courses I would like to attend.

Do you ever ask?

Participant response: Yes, I wanted to go on a Forest School Course. I gave my rationale for why this would be good for my development and how it would be useful to the children and the school's needs. However, it didn't fit the development plan and school focus. When I questioned it, the Senior Leader's response was, "As part of your performance management, you were asked to select targets in relation to the priorities of the school". So, I no longer bother.

So, are there any courses you would choose, or are they selected for you?

Participant Response: Yes, I am directed to them, no choice really.

What are your views on government policy and education?

Participant response: They are to blame; they just mess with education. I do not feel valued as a professional; they do not trust us to do a good job. They set the agenda which means for me, this constant focus on the assessment of my performance. Heads and senior leaders just drive it. In a nutshell, the government does not care about teachers or children.

Are there any government policies you want to comment on?

Participant response: They are not worth the paper they are written on. The curriculum is too narrow; there's no freedom to extend knowledge just very constraining.

How has attending teachmeets impacted you personally and professionally?

Participant response: Personally, it has helped me to hold onto and nurture my identity as a teacher. It has supported me in my knowledge, role, and duty as a professional. Professionally, I have more knowledge and ideas. I now know, through tips and talks with colleagues, that I will keep at it, and I think in 2 more years I will move on, perhaps think about a middle leadership position.

Thank you for your answers.

Appendix 7: Themes from Coding

The following are themes that emerged from the data analysis:

- Control
- Surveillance and fear
- Control by data
- Shared free space
- Cohesive inspirational community

Appendix 8: Priori and Posteriori Codes

Control / CPD	Research Question	Data	Number
Confidence / CPD Development	RQ1, RQ2 & RSQ 3*	Key people, events	10
Control by Data	RQ2 & RQ3*	Key events, choosing to attend teachmeets, wanting to do a good job, wanting to do well	12
Cohesive Spaces	RQ1, RQ2*	Key events people, senior leaders	11
Collaboration	RQ3*	Key people, dislike of senior leaders, collaboration	12