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Leading Educational Change and Improvement  
from the Ground Up: What Impact Does the  
Systematic Empowerment of Teacher Agency  
Have on Professional Development and the  
Improvement of Educational Practice?

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PhD

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## Abstract

Much time, money and energy is spent on Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in Further Education (FE) colleges in England, with the aim of enhancing teaching strategies, sharing good practices, and improving the overall quality of education. The problem is that the importance and value placed upon CPD by practitioners is mixed. This raises a number of questions. The most pressing of these is whether the traditional approach to CPD, where “events” are arranged and staff are expected to attend, is fulfilling its purpose? If it is not, then we need to rethink current approaches to CPD in FE colleges across England.

One of the biggest problems in attempts to transform CPD in FE colleges is that CPD managers constantly have to compete with financial and operational priorities. Pressures towards demonstrations of compliance and the imperatives of what Ball (2003) describes as “*performativity*”, appear to be endemic features of a culture within FE, which is often fixated on fulfilling the demands of external bodies (Ball, 2003; 2018; Coffield, 2017; Gregson & Spedding 2020), through mandatory, prescribed CPD “events”. To do otherwise, is to risk losing funding and jobs.

This thesis begins by exploring the concept of gamification and the extent to which this may influence the meaningfulness of CPD, in terms of practitioner motivation, individual training needs, and meeting organisational priorities. The focus of this thesis developed and sharpened as the research progressed and eventually became more of a study of the nature of educational practice and how educational practice actually improves in FE contexts. Influenced by the concept of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), this thesis also offers a deeper critique of the modern FE education system in an “*age of measurement*” (Biesta, 2009), where an obsession with data-driven, prescriptive learning perpetuates a risk-averse culture. In addition,

this thesis investigates whether a different model of professional development might be developed, which puts practitioners in control of identifying their own CPD needs in order to rise to the challenges of improving their own educational practice, rather than being required to attend and engage in CPD events and activities organised and directed by others. Practical examples of what this alternative model might look like are also presented.

From an ontological perspective, the thesis adopts a constructivist point of view regarding assumptions surrounding the form and nature of the social world. Epistemologically, this study follows a pragmatic- interpretive perspective in relation to how, what is assumed to exist in the social world can be known. Taking an insider role within a practice-focused research context, this thesis employs the method of action research to present accounts of experiences encountered and reported in this research. Data are collected through illuminative surveys and semi-structured interviews. This allows for the representation of the lived experiences of the practitioners who participated in this study as well as my own.

**Key Words: CPD; Gamification; Digital Technology; Agency; Professional Learning; Online Learning.**

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I must acknowledge the role of the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and Association of Colleges (AoC), who have supported me financially with bursaries and scholarships on the Practitioner Research Programme (PRP) and as a Research Further Scholar respectively. I would particularly like to recognise the role that AoC colleagues have played in supporting me to share and disseminate my research more widely, and my fellow practitioner

researchers and research scholars from whom I have learnt so much about the power of sector-based research.

Finally, but by no means least, all my love and sincere thanks must go to my wonderful wife and two amazing children who have been, and always will be, my inspiration for trying to make a meaningful contribution to the world of education.

# Prologue

## Author Narrative: The Impact Of COVID-19

It is April 1st 2020. I am sitting at home writing this having just delivered a lesson remotely due to government-enforced lockdown. Remote learning and a reliance on digital technology has become a necessity rather than an option, and I am grateful for having invested the time into learning and developing the many tools I have now become dependent upon.

However, I am conscious that this cannot be said for everyone within education, and this reliance upon technology to ensure we can support our students in completing their study programmes has clearly become overwhelming for many teachers. In the last week alone, I have received 25 individual requests for digital technology support, totalling over 13 hours. The requests have varied, from simple questions about what might be the best app to for a particular lesson or reminders of where to find resources. I have even built a website with tutorial videos and activities to effectively train teachers how to use some of the technology on offer through our subscription to G Suite for Education.

Arguably this substantial need for support is not the fault of teachers, but it certainly illustrates the many benefits of integrating educational technology into everyday teaching, as the norm. Familiarising both students and teachers with digital processes and practice should ensure that, at a time when it becomes the only option, feelings of fear and trepidation are replaced with those of control and confidence in using the technology on offer.

It is clear, in just 2 weeks of delivering and supporting remote learning, that working online is a very different experience to traditional teaching and what would ordinarily be covered in 15 mins in a classroom appears to take closer to an hour online. This, therefore, begs



the question, is online learning, and in the case of this thesis online Continuous Professional Development (CPD) efficient, let alone effective in meeting the needs of teachers and learners?

Looking further into the structure of online learning, Salmon (2013, p. 15) proposes a 5-stage model, clearly stating that *“for online learning to be successful and happy, participants need to be supported through a structured developmental process”*. This certainly resonates with my experiences when considering some of the early pitfalls encountered in moving teaching and learning predominantly to an online model, not to mention the additional training needs of staff. This experience has highlighted the importance of being able to access online content in place of traditional face to face learning. It simply would not be possible for me to effectively train staff at this time without the use of online, shareable technology, which goes some way towards justifying the research questions at the heart of this thesis.

In these unprecedented times some students will undoubtedly be disadvantaged by the enforced closure of colleges and the transition to remote learning. However, what is encouraging is the continued commitment of teachers to do their utmost to support students in achieving their potential. Many hours are being spent, learning and trialling new methods of remote teaching to keep students engaged and ready for whatever they want to do, after this is all over.

Wenger (2011, p. 1) defines communities of practice as *“...groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”*. There is certainly a spirit of community practice developing amongst teachers during this current crisis, with a willingness to share ideas and experiences for the betterment of each other, and an enthusiasm to try new things in what is a normally risk-averse sector. Further Education (FE) is not the easiest sector to work in, there are many factors which make it challenging, yet rewarding, even more so under the current conditions, but those of us who

work within FE know brilliant things happen regardless of the barriers set before us, and I am sure they will continue to do so through the commitment of the teachers, the beating heart of FE.

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## List of Keywords, Terminology and Abbreviations

In this thesis I will use several acronyms, keywords and terminology which are interchangeable to align with key literature and theory from Chapter 2. Please see below for details.

Keyword	Also referred to...
Teachers	<i>Educators, Practitioners</i>
Managers	<i>Line Managers</i>
Continuing Professional Development	<i>Continued Professional Development, Continuous Professional Development, Professional Development</i>
Educational Improvement	<i>Quality Improvement</i>
Observers	<i>Reviewers (in Lesson Visits)</i>

Keyword	Abbreviation	Keyword	Abbreviation
Research Question	RQ	Joint Practice Development	JPD
Further Education	FE	Education Inspection Framework	EIF
Teaching, Learning and Quality	TLQ	General Data Protection	GDPR
Continuing Professional Development	CPD	Sunderland University Centre of Excellence in Teacher Training	SUNCETT
Education and Training Foundation	ETF	Vocational Education and Training	VET
Education Endowment Fund	EEF	Head of Teaching, Learning and Quality	HoTLQ
Newly qualified teacher	NQT	Teaching and Learning Coach	TLC
National Literacy Strategy	NLS	Quality Improvement Plan	QIP
Institute for Learning	IFL	Massive Open Online Courses	MOOC
Action Research	AR	British Education Research Association	BERA
Self-Assessment Report	SAR	Association of Colleges	AoC

# **Chapter 1 - Context & Problem: What's the problem? What's the question? What am I going to do about it?**

## **1.1 What's the problem?**

As someone working in education for over 15 years, many things have changed during that time. However, the general ethos amongst teachers in Further Education (FE) remains the same, to inspire, motivate, encourage and educate learners. During my first year of teaching I embraced many new challenges, teaching everything and anything to develop my skills, knowledge and competence as a teacher. As a newly qualified teacher (NQT) the emphasis shifted from the initial acquisition and development of knowledge and skills to the development of more advanced practice, further training and upskilling through CPD events as I became a more experienced practitioner. Of course, what I did not know and could not know at the time, was that my understanding of the concepts of practice, notions of CPD and models of educational change and improvement were underdeveloped. Other than a rather vague and general appreciation of the value of personal and professional development for teachers, these were not concepts widely covered in teacher training or addressed as part of any formal CPD. What I also did not and could not know at the time, was that, as my understanding of enduring issues at the heart of this research study deepened, the focus of this research would change quite considerably. I will cover this in more detail as we proceed.

Regulations surrounding FE and the professionalisation of FE teachers, have greatly influenced the view of CPD by FE practitioners, particularly with the regulatory requirement for a full-time teacher to complete 30 hours a year of professional development activity, which was

achieved by most teachers across the sector, in the main intuitively or at least without recognising it formally as CPD. Since the removal of workforce regulations within the FE sector in 2012, it is now no longer a legal requirement for teachers and trainers to declare their CPD record each year. Previously, a minimum 30 hours of CPD per year was required for membership to the Institute for Learning (IFL) (college.jobs.ac.uk, 2016). The potential impact of this change is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

As my role within the college has advanced my focus on CPD has moved away from general topics to more specific activities. The CPD I engage with is typically worthwhile, enriching and most importantly based on my own choices. This makes what I do more meaningful to me and valuable to my organisation. However, this cannot be said for large numbers of my colleagues, whose main role as a lecturer, teaching 25+ hours a week limits the opportunities they have to engage in their own choice of CPD.

The role of an FE lecturer extends far beyond the confines of the classroom, which can be particularly daunting for those 'new' to the profession, and who may face unexpected pressures "*...in relation to administrative duties, a comparatively heavy teaching load and organisational familiarisation...[which] does not seemingly disappear with career progression but mutates and evolves along with career stage.*"(Buckley and Husband, 2020, p. 433). The heavier than expected workload in particular would appear to be a fairly consistent concern for practitioners across the sector and a notable barrier for engaging in CPD. As a consequence, the general feeling towards CPD is often instrumental and therefore far from positive, and although pockets of people will identify training as worthwhile this tends to only be those who have requested the training in the first place.

The focus of this thesis and the educational problem which provided the impetus and the context in which it emerged, is set within my own organisation, an FE college in the south

of England, based over multiple sites with approximately 1,000 teaching and support staff. The college has changed exponentially over the last few years. First merging with a local competitor and more recently merging again with a second College, 30 miles away. This has provided many positives; a more varied workforce, opportunity to liaise and share good practice with new colleagues, and being able to combine resources and personnel when required. However, as a Teaching and Learning Coach responsible for facilitating professional development to teachers across three campuses, there was a significant stretch on my time and my availability to deliver traditional face-to-face training. This found me reverting to more online based training methods to reach as many FE teachers as possible. At that point most of the feedback received had been positive. However, a growing concern for me in the early stages of this study was whether the online training on offer would continue to be accessed and positively reported on by staff as being useful and engaging, as the novelty of online learning began to wear off.

## **1.2 Educational Practice and Improvement**

In a post-COVID era which included multiple changes to curriculum and an increased awareness of individual student needs, additional training is required across both A-Level and Vocational Education and Training (VET) provision, and even more so with the increasing number of new and unqualified staff joining the college. Engagement with professional development is more vital than ever, yet participation is troublingly low. A pilot study completed with staff in my organisation indicates that they do not always value the professional development opportunities on offer, causal factors include; part-time working, varying availability of time and general apathy towards traditional face-to-face, and too much top-down focused training. Influenced by the concept of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), an intention of this research is to investigate whether a model of professional development can

be established, which puts practitioners in control of identifying their own professional learning and determining how their individual needs can be met to support the development and improvement of their practice, rather than following CPD direction from others.

Buckley and Husband (2020) discuss teacher's preferences for training and offer practical examples, which can be applied to specific areas of teaching practice, as well as the opportunity to act as reflective practitioners. This focus upon meeting the individual needs and nuances of practitioners and their practice is an essential consideration for the conception of alternative models of CPD, which offer *"a flexible approach to delivering CPD which can be tailored and adapted by individual staff to accommodate the nuances of their specific disciplines."* (Buckley and Husband, 2020, p. 449).

Much time is spent delivering CPD in schools and colleges and the expectation is that staff attend. The purpose of CPD is to support and develop good educational practice and to share good practice in collaborative and cooperative ways to improve the overall quality of provision. However, the value placed upon CPD by practitioners is mixed. Surveys conducted at my college suggest that the root cause of this issue appears to be a lack of control over the content of CPD and how it is accessed and supported.

Questions therefore arise over whether the conventional "events" driven approach to CPD is having a positive impact upon educational practice. We are often reminded that we should differentiate between learners, fulfilling the unique needs of each individual. In contrast we do not appear to always take the same approach with practitioners (Taylor, 2017). Buckley & Husband (2020, p. 434) in particular discuss the need to *"align professional learning aims specifically with career stage and the contextual nuances of individual organisations"*, in order to develop well-rounded practitioners. The above questions including existing models of educational change and improvement are discussed in some detail in Chapter 2.



### 1.2.1 Going Google

In 2020 a new digital strategy for the college focused on *Going Google* was announced, utilising Google's G Suite for Education application. This project spanned all three campuses, with the aim of enhancing teaching, learning and assessment opportunities for our learners. At that stage, in 11 years at the college I had never seen anything newly introduced take off with such positive feedback from practitioners. Of course, not everyone was happy with the shift to a more technology focused way of working and the many barriers as to why teachers may be fearful of something new are well-documented. These include teachers lacking the time, resources, and training to use classroom technology for instructional purposes (Kopcha, 2012).

A positive outlook towards the use of technology in education means I have experimented with several different tools over the past decade. Although not a technical expert, I enjoy utilising digital tools within my professional role to make things easier, quicker and more effective. I am happy to spend time learning how to use the tools available to me and applying them to my teaching practice. In particular, Google for Education and their G Suite for Education applications, which are provided, free of charge, to schools and colleges across the world has been an interesting experience for me.

Having completed online training to become a Google Certified Educator, I successfully applied to become a Google Certified Trainer. In the summer of 2019, I became involved in Google's Certified Innovator program, which "*recognizes and supports top educators around the globe who are using technology to solve meaningful challenges in education*" (Google for Education Teacher Centre, n.d.). The certified Innovator program starts with a three-day, in-person *Innovation Academy* focused on helping prospective innovators define, design and eventually launch a transformative project. Post academy, innovators are offered mentoring

with Google Certified Innovators and trainers around the globe, as well as ongoing learning and development training and an opportunity to attend innovator specific events to share experiences and advocate for their projects.

This CPD opportunity proved to be one the most rewarding and engaging I have experienced to date, despite feeling out of my comfort zone, and at times an imposter! Thankfully I found the imposter syndrome (Clance and Imes, 1978), subsided as my confidence in my own ability began to increase. This experience on the *Innovator Academy* provided me with a chance to work on a self-identified educational issue, with likeminded people from around the globe. The activities felt valuable, I was motivated to learn new things and keen to do well in my year-long project. The experience encouraged me to want to replicate this feeling of empowerment within my own training delivery models. If successful, I was sure that many of the barriers identified earlier in this chapter could be overcome. One incredibly valuable outcome from my Google experience has been membership of a growing community of people I can call upon for support and advice. This is something I would not have actively engaged in prior to the *Innovator Academy* but something I value highly now. The sense of community belonging and collaboration was empowering in itself and will need to be a consideration for me as this thesis develops.

### *1.2.2 CPD in Further Education*

Considerable care must be taken when comparing my experience of CPD in FE to that of others. Fortunately, my experiences have been positive, but for many of my colleagues this has not been the case. This prompted me to ask the questions: Is this because my colleagues don't know about the training available to them? Are they not getting the same opportunities as me? Do they feel uninspired or unable to look for something relevant and enriching? Initial

surveys (Appendix A) would suggest that not everyone has the same intrinsic desire to develop their teaching or take a leap of faith and try something new. I am interested, during the course of this thesis, to discover the root cause of this and whether or not a change in the way CPD is offered, might have a positive impact on practitioner engagement.

Issues with CPD are not a localised problem. In fact, engagement in CPD across the whole teaching profession is a national issue and one which the Education & Training Foundation (ETF) have given their attention. Further Education Workforce Data for England (ETF, 2019a) indicates a number of key findings, for example, over half of teachers spent 26-30 hours per year on CPD in 2017-18, of which 99% spent exactly 30 hours. 25% of teachers appear to have spent fewer than 30 hours on CPD in 2017-18, yet the median number of hours spent on CPD has not changed substantially over time and remains at 29.5 hours, which aligns to the previously discussed, and no longer mandatory 30 hour per year set by the now defunct IFL.

The ETF (2018) report on training needs in the FE sector points to the mean number of hours of training in the last year and for the *lecturer, teacher or tutor* category, the mean is 41 hours. This data indicates that a significant proportion of teaching staff are completing CPD training, however there is no indication as to the value or impact of training or satisfaction levels for practitioners. The same report (ETF, 2018) indicates clearer feelings about the value of CPD with a significant minority (23%) of individual respondents suggesting they did not receive all of the training and development they wanted or needed, with the highest numbers (28%) of these being in colleges.

There is a clear demand for further training which leads to qualification or accreditation and training and development that enhances teaching and learning (12%) was considered most valuable. For colleges the needs of the organisation are a key driver of training needs (36%), in particular, the organisation's desire to maximise the efficiency, performance and

professionalism of its workforce (71%). Around seven in ten individuals working in the FE sector believe they would benefit from training and development over the next year. Teaching and pedagogy were the key priority for training for individual respondents, (44%). Teachers (Inc. lecturers, trainers, tutors) believe that there is a need for more training in teaching and pedagogical skills (74%). The main barriers individuals feel prevent them from undertaking training and development in the next year were; being too busy at work (38%), their employer being unable to supply or fund it (33%), and a reluctance to fund it themselves/can't afford it (31%) (ETF, 2018).

The ETF themselves identified a training gap for teachers in technology and have introduced the Digital Teaching Professional Framework (2019, p. 3), *"...which has been designed to focus on the benefits of good pedagogy supported by technology to enhance learning"*. Training is free, online and delivered in bite-size, accredited modules, utilising a digital badging system. *"The training modules are being designed to support just-in-time and self-identified training needs"* and will include *"a self-assessment discovery tool"*. This online, gamified approach to learning is as a concept that has been explored further in the conduct of this thesis as at the time, and in view of the above, I thought that it might have the potential to increase levels of engagement in CPD.

The provision of free online courses is not something new. However, until fairly recently online courses have met with varying levels of success. The MOOC phenomenon, for example, discussed further in Chapter 2, appears at surface level to possess the potential to go some way in solving the problem of how to deliver high quality CPD training against the backdrop of reduced funding within FE. In my organisation alone, I have seen a dramatic reduction in CPD budgets. Educators are still being told that they need to continually improve their practice, be innovative and open to new ideas in teaching, learning and assessment, yet when it comes to

CPD, organisations appear to be unable (or unwilling) to provide the necessary levels of funding. One revenue stream often exploited is the government money ploughed into new qualifications, the most recent being the T-Level programmes.

These qualifications have required significant investment in infrastructure and technology, but investment in teacher CPD is also of paramount importance, particularly as new teachers, with significant industry experience, but not necessarily experience in teaching or training, are being sought to deliver them. This has led to a number of unqualified teachers in post, requiring significant levels of support. Teachers need to develop and be allowed to develop, but this can take time and sometimes a quicker fix is required. A dramatic increase in the number of staff requiring support may necessitate, for example, a more practice-focused approach to teacher training. Concepts of practice, the processes through which practice changes, and models of educational change and improvement are discussed further in Chapter 2. This study also considers the extent to which online courses provide sufficient training, in a shorter space of time.

From experience, the most important aspect of teacher CPD for me is having a choice, taking ownership of learning depending on your own interests and how you think engagement in CPD will enhance your teaching and the learning for your students. My role at the college tasks me with designing, delivering, facilitating and evaluating professional development for teaching staff. Personally, I struggle to engage with CPD when “asked” to attend events where I am essentially not given a choice. As a teacher I need to be able to identify the purpose and relevance of the content of the training especially when the time taken to engage with CPD diverts my energy and attention away from my many other responsibilities. As a trainer it is hard not to scrutinise the credibility of those delivering CPD courses, events and resources and these must be engaging, be of a high quality if they are not only to be taken seriously, and also

worthy of the title CPD. CPD training must, therefore, be well presented, the tutor must be knowledgeable and trust in their integrity is essential in order to show that they are not simply standing at the front of CPD events because they are being paid to showcase something wonderful they have done.

Credibility is uppermost in my mind when planning and delivering training. Much time is spent developing resources, identifying what is needed and ensuring content is differentiated or bespoke to the group or individual is critical. In the past, a range of methods have been used to deliver training for traditional face-to-face, one-on-one or group activities and where attendance is likely to be low, resources were made available online to maximise the accessibility of training. The training offered, more often than not, involves me working across all 3 campuses. Travelling between campuses is an issue, as is finding mutually agreeable times for training to take place and these have been key reasons for developing online training materials to cover basic training needs remotely.

Moving some of my CPD delivery online has provided me with an impetus for investigating how the use of technology might enhance CPD training. This thesis offers an opportunity to investigate whether training based solely online can be as engaging and useful as face-to-face training. The main benefits as well as the potential pitfalls of online training are identified in this study as well as an analysis of the experiences of staff who have engaged in the training undertaken. Of particular interest is finding out if more people access training and resources because they are able to in their own time or whether people feel short-changed by not having someone available in person to meet them.

The absence of a face in the room is certainly a factor to consider, particularly for those less *au fait* with technology, as there is comfort in having someone available for support. Howard (2009) suggests that face-to-face meetings or online conferences can be used

alongside online study to create a sense of community in the online classroom. Furthermore, this may help to, “...mitigate issues with accountability, encourage exploratory discussion, engage diverse learning styles, improve student-instructor interaction, and increase their efficiency as an instructor” (Howard, 2009, p.685). Even if it is not necessarily required, a person is likely to feel more confident to try new things with an “expert” at hand to help them. Some studies, (McAuley et al., 2010; Salmon et al., 2015), investigate remote community building through the use of social media and internet forums to develop online communities. In my own practice, extensive use of *Google Hangouts* to discuss new products and problem-solving with fellow Google trainers and innovators, has proved far more helpful to me than working alone.

Another benefit of online communities is the willingness of members to share practice with each other altruistically. It may be the anonymity of working online, or perhaps the nature of those involved in these online educational forums, which facilitate a greater openness to share with one another, but this is something not always seen amongst teachers, despite the fundamental values of the profession. Having worked with many new staff during college inductions it is surprising to hear how often nothing has been shared with them by colleagues, or that they feel uncomfortable asking for resources. To me, this is one of the most effective ways of picking up new ideas and discussing teaching and learning approaches. Not only that, but it also helps build productive working relationships with one another. Sadly, it appears some teachers are wary of others “stealing” their ideas, which they have worked hard to perfect over the years. This reluctance by some teachers to share their hard work may be linked in some way to how colleges champion “best practice”, a concept I will come back to shortly.

Historic CPD formats involve teachers being subject to presentations from “experts” telling them what to do and how to do it, however research suggests, (Sebba et al., 2012), that this is rarely impactful in positive ways. Instead, collaborative or *joint* practice development

might be encouraged to promote a shared approach to educational improvement. Chen (2022, p. 23) states that a “...different approach to CPD is much needed to rebuild trust and teachers’ autonomy in working together for their professional learning”, promoting Joint Practice Development (JPD), as an example of how we might do things differently. JPD proposed by Fielding et al. (2005, p. 56), can be defined as “The process of learning new ways of working through mutual engagement that opens up and shares practices with others”. The principles of JPD are considered later in Chapter 2, with particular focus on whether or not these can be achieved, through an online learning platform or whether they require face-to-face supported human encounters.

One of the key benefits of online training is the affording of time and opportunities to share and develop educational practice. This allows for greater focus on knowledge transfer versus knowledge exchange, concepts which will be defined and discussed later in this thesis. Lack of face-to-face interaction could be deemed a potential barrier to the collaborative nature of JPD, although many opportunities exist to use initiatives such as shared documents and video conferencing, which were particularly useful during the COVID-19 crisis. Reducing travel and travel time is another potential benefit of online CPD, resulting in lower costs to employers, time saved travelling by teachers, and important environmental benefits, at a time when colleges and us all are asked to consider sustainability.

One thing that is clear in the FE landscape is that policy shapes the way in which we work (Coffield, 2017; Ball, 2018). From organisational structure, curriculum design, budgets, CPD opportunities, down to the roles and responsibilities of individual staff, there are constant and mounting external pressures from regulatory bodies such as Ofsted, the DfE, and awarding bodies, to meet certain standards. These are often determined by league tables or in FE, national averages or Alps, a system that allows schools to measure the value they add to a



student's A-level or BTEC performance compared to what might be expected based upon previously attained GCSE's. Ultimately, this means any changes made at the local level must satisfy organisational objectives which can cause tensions when delivering internal CPD training. Such tensions may well be a reason for people feeling disengaged with the training on offer. This thesis examines ways in which possibilities to satisfy organisational priorities, developed to conform to external pressures such as Ofsted, can be reconciled with CPD opportunities which offer staff choice and agency.

Maslow (1968, p. 15) states *"It is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail"*. As previously discussed CPD must be meaningful, useful and valued by teachers for it to be impactful, and it must be worth the time and effort demanded from both trainers and practitioners. To do this we must try to avoid taking a one size fits all approach to CPD and instead consider the nuances of each individual teacher, their students and what goes on in their classrooms.

One of the biggest problems with transforming CPD delivery is that we are constantly competing with changing organisational priorities. Chen (2022, p. 21) discusses how, as an FE sector *"...we have been enduring an epidemic of education policy, the performative and managerial culture, coupled with teachers' recruitment and retention struggles and the pandemic"*. Chen (2022, p. 23) further discusses how, in an uncertain political and educational environment, *"...the top-down and managerial model of professional development has become embedded in the culture of FE colleges, positioning CPD as a tool with the intention to engage teachers in professional learning but whereby many have fallen into the routine of little more than a box-ticking exercise"*. This sentiment is further supported by Johnston & Johnston (2024, p. 8) who state that *"While CPD must be seen as a positive step, we must ensure that the right type of CPD is being undertaken and not just CPD for ticking a box"*.

Johnston & Johnston (2024, p. 9) cite Boocock (2013) who discusses how “...the ‘top-down’ approaches to CPD...designed to produce a homogenous outcome...fits nicely in a controlled framework as opposed to allowing for a free-thinking approach to teaching and learning”. This propensity for control at the cost of free-thinking appears to be embedded within the culture of FE across the board, and it is the consistent need to fulfil the demands of external bodies such as Ofsted that are themselves problematic. Orr (2020, p. 19) discusses how college managers “in a symbiotic response” to government policy changes “...have pragmatically constructed systems to report achievement of the numerical targets attached to CPD, despite insignificant alteration in patterns of practice” forming an “unequal and undemocratic relationship between colleges and the government”. These statements help to emphasise the complexity of the situation when it comes to teaching and learning development and CPD more broadly, and clearly demonstrate that the top-down agenda, in search of the quick-fix, currently overrides the needs of practitioners when it comes to CPD planning, maybe because of competing external and organisational priorities, or more simply, because it is easier to reach for the nearest ‘off the shelf’ solution.

What is clearer is that under these conditions the attention and energy of managers and teachers can be distracted and diluted from attending to the needs of students, in favour of appeasing inspectors (Ball, 2018; Coffield, 2017). Orr (2020, p. 20) declares that this might only be addressed “when those working and studying in colleges have more control over setting their own collective priorities, including CPD, in a rational rather than a performative manner”. It is possible that the findings of this thesis could support this notion, and go some way in helping to trigger a culture shift within my organisation, although I am aware this is not something which will emerge without considerable effort and a change in direction. As discussed by Sidebottom & Mycroft (2024, p. 12), when working within the confines of a college culture

aligned with a neoliberal educational system“...it is difficult to break out of these frameworks and paradigms entirely”, yet, as I have experienced within the development of my own teaching practice“...micro transformations in pedagogy...can help educators take an affirmative standpoint”, and feel able to imagine an alternative way of doing things.

In September 2019, Ofsted (2019) introduced a new education inspection framework (EIF). A key change from historical inspections was the shift in focus to the “*quality of education*” rather than being data driven. This certainly has a knock-on effect upon the focus for CPD, which now very much centres around improving the four key Ofsted judgements: quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management. This is promoted, by Ofsted, as a positive development with a reduced incentive for colleges to focus on just achieving better published outcomes, and instead investing CPD time to improve the standard of teaching and learning, a mutually beneficial outcome for all, although with a thinly veiled measure of control from those in charge.

There is a certain level of irony inherent within current CPD models which follow top-down approaches, i.e., management telling staff how they can achieve “best practice”, based upon the judgements of people generally very far from the heat and noise of front-line teaching. These decisions are often seen as essential by management in order to create a workforce that will successfully pass an inspection. But to what end? As noted above, despite there being some benefits to inspection, educators attentions and energies are repeatedly diverted away from learning and teaching toward looking after inspectors (Coffield, 2017). Surely, the paramount concern for educators and educational providers must be the experience of students, above anything else, but in the grand scheme of things and in practice, this does not always appear to be the case. Without further change to the focus of the Ofsted EIF and consequentially the focus of college policy and practices, many FE teachers appear to be faced

with only two choices, accepting and conforming to the existing culture of “*hyper-competition*” and “*hyper-accountability*” (Daley et al., 2015), or leaving the sector altogether. Unfortunately, for many, the latter appears to have become the least worst option!

The current focus upon external indicators of success is contradictory to the concept of teacher agency, which is central to this thesis. If the focus of CPD is solely upon performativity and accountability, then why can we not start from the ground up, meeting the requirements of improving educational practice by supporting individual practitioners to improve their approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, rather than providing evidence of compliance in accordance with a pre-set list of requirements given to FE colleges by external investigatory and regulatory bodies? Husband (2015, p. 132) suggests that the FE sector “*would benefit from an enhanced understanding and appreciation of the desires and priorities of the teaching staff.*”, paying particular attention to the “*enhanced industry skills, experience and positivity*” of new teachers who might share this cultural capital with wider college communities, if afforded the opportunity to do so.

It is understandable that certain organisational objectives need to be met and that colleges need to be held to publicly accountable for how they spend government funding. However, as a college, promoting a supportive coaching model in favour of a more autocratic mentoring approach, we need teachers to have control, in order to take responsibility for their own professional development and the improvement of their practice. And therein lies a further problem. How can practitioners be accountable for something they have no control over, being expected to improve their performance without the opportunity to identify their own strengths and weaknesses? How can practitioners be empowered and motivated to engage with activities when they are given no choice as to how and when to do so? One important consideration, as proposed by Husband (2020, p. 64) is that in many cases “*The*

*expertise to support the developing and dynamic [FE] workforce already exists within college communities and with careful planning and investment could easily be deployed more effectively across the sector.”*. This thesis examines the extent to which changes to the way in which CPD is conceived might offer a way of overcoming these issues, whilst at the same time, meeting the organisational objectives set by college management.

### **1.3 What’s the question?**

The aim of this research is to explore the lived experiences of practitioners as they encounter professional development in an FE setting. The primary research questions are:

1. To what extent is practitioner motivation influenced by the gamification of professional development?
2. In what ways can CPD satisfy both the individual needs of practitioners and the priorities of organisations?
3. What do teachers’ stories of their experience of CPD tell us about how teacher agency is enacted?

As previously discussed, in 2019-2020, as part of the Google Certified Innovator Program, I worked on a year-long project which focused upon: *“How Might we create a hunger for professional development through offering practitioners a choice? ”*. The project was designed to support educators to engage with meaningful professional development opportunities, which encourage practitioners to take risks and try new and innovative research-informed projects with their students. This project aimed to create an innovative and exciting environment which observed a collaborative, cooperative and supportive culture and promoted the development, embodiment and enactment of meaningful joint professional

development. This project culminated in the development of a website and mobile app called *inCredible teaching*, which hosted user uploaded content and training resources, making it “for teachers, by teachers’ (Appendix C).

This thesis builds upon this initial project and aims to determine whether or not it is possible to achieve these objectives using a gamified approach to online CPD. The most prevalent concern in using this method of learning was the readiness of users to embrace a new way of doing things. Technology and the use of it in teaching, learning and assessment is not a new concept, yet the levels of proficiency amongst practitioners is varied, bringing with it a number of potential barriers to the success of this project, evermore highlighted by my experience as a trainer during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which remote learning and the use of technology became a necessity. This experience left some staff feeling “behind the times” and completely overwhelmed. Ironically this might contribute a positive outcome for this thesis, in that staff who previously had been “not bothered” or were unwilling to engage with technology focused CPD, might now have developed a basic level of confidence in using technology, whilst gaining a greater understanding of its benefits for learning.

An increase in teacher’s confidence in using technology both as a teacher and as a learner themselves is certainly an important factor for improving engagement in CPD activities. However, the concept of agency, categorised by having a sense of control or influence over their own thoughts and behaviours, is something I feel may have an even stronger influence on teacher behaviour.

Further anecdotal narrative can be seen in my own personal experience of reading as a child. Despite being a competent reader, I didn’t particularly enjoy reading. Instead I opted for television and sport to fill my spare time. As I got older, I struggled to find the motivation to engage in reading and didn’t particularly enjoy English literature lessons at school and even

now I still don't particularly engage with reading as a pastime, I will read news articles, journal articles, and begrudgingly the odd Ofsted report, but it would be highly unlikely that I would pick up a novel. However, I can recall a particular series of books that really did capture my imagination known as *Choose Your Own Adventure*, in which the reader assumes the role of the leading character and makes choices that determine the characters actions and ultimately the story's outcome. These books often centred around the world of science fiction or fantasy, which for many young boys is enough to grab their attention, but for me it was the ability to choose my own way through the story which created such an engaging experience.

This childhood example has greatly influenced the way in which I have approached my Google project work. If it worked for me then, could this work for me (and others) now? If this concept worked for me as a child why not as an adult? As part of this thesis I intend to investigate whether or not the Choose Your Own Adventure concept can be used to design online CPD activities in a gamified approach to delivery. I want to replicate the feelings of interest and the empowerment I felt through having a choice, and apply it to something which is currently seen as not working, to see if a difference can be made.

After presenting my initial idea to colleagues and asking them questions about their current CPD experience, the following summary points were made:

1. CPD is not "always" perceived as relevant to all, which can result in feelings of frustration due to valuable time being wasted.
2. CPD sessions are often focused on sharing good practice and sharing each other's ideas or data and processes.
3. CPD which offers variety and/or a choice in which content to access makes it much more valuable

4. *Meaningful* CPD is that which has an impact on the teacher's ability to fulfil their job role
5. Compulsory, data driven CPD is better delivered online (currently used for Prevent, Health and Safety and Safeguarding training)
6. CPD which has a focus on teaching benefits from the opportunity to share and discuss face to face.
7. Online CPD resources must be of a high standard for staff to willingly engage and stick with it.
8. Time efficiency and the perception of not "wasting" time is important to teachers.

Not a single one of these points come as a surprise to me. As a teacher many of these points resonate and as a Teaching and Learning Coach I am increasingly aware of what does and doesn't work in practice.

There are clearly a number of underlying factors, which need to be explored within this area of research, including the concept of gamification and modes of CPD delivery. The use of rewards to influence motivation and engagement and the design of CPD activities, including the role and purpose of professional development in general. Whether moving CPD content online, as opposed to traditional face-to-face, will be beneficial, or whether a hybrid approach is more desirable are also additional considerations, but the overarching question for me is whether the gamification of CPD is likely to be just another tool for the delivery of teaching or a catalyst for agency and autonomy for teachers.

Drawing upon the work of Sennett (2008), teaching can be seen as a craft and, therefore, an appropriate level of consideration must be given to how we support practitioners in developing their practice. CPD can play an important role in developing teachers' skills and



knowledge, keeping them abreast of current developments. It is vitally important, therefore, to address the methods we use to deliver CPD, offering teachers a choice in what they access and when they can do so.

As discussed above, in order to gain a deeper understanding of teaching and the importance of CPD, the concept of practice itself, and the often-overused terms “Good practice” or “best practice” is investigated. Consideration of the influence that Ofsted and other external factors have upon organisational strategy and decision making, including the impact these decisions have upon practitioners is also be key to this research, as well as an exploration of the consequences of a top-down versus ground-up approach to teachers’ CPD and the impact this has on teacher agency. The place of differentiation within a model of CPD is also of interest, whilst examining whether moving towards online CPD courses affects the ways in which teachers access and engage in CPD is critical.

Considering the overarching purpose of CPD and the ways in which it might maintain or negate an organisation’s overall goal of “best practice” is central to this thesis. A focus solely upon success and performance in order to conform to the pressure of league tables and Ofsted appraisal is surely detrimental, so do we need to start re-evaluating the impact that these factors can have upon an already beleaguered teaching workforce? Gregson and Spedding (2020, p. 198) suggest that “...inspection regimes, target-driven funding systems and league tables operate to shape teachers and their CPD activities in less than helpful ways.” Instead, can empowering staff through a choice in how they engage with compulsory activities actually support them to improve, not only their teaching practice, but their motivation and commitment within the profession? I want to know if CPD has an impact on teaching practice and how we can determine this. It is often said that “*there is no need to reinvent the wheel*” however, in the case of CPD in FE, it would appear to be that the wheel in question, despite

clearly being a wheel, may not be suitable for the job in hand. In this case we may not need to reinvent the wheel but we certainly need to make sure it fits!

#### **1.4 What am I going to do about it?**

As discussed in the opening sections of this Chapter, as part of the Certified Google Innovator programme, I developed an online professional development platform, with a focus on transferring teaching skills and knowledge, whilst incorporating gamified features (Appendix C). This platform was designed to offer a choice of CPD activities and routes that can be followed. Progress is trackable by participants and achievements rewarded through digital badging and certification. An aim of this research, in the initial stages, was to determine if any parallels exist between:

1. FE practitioners on a CPD programme, investigating the impact of supporting practitioners in accessing professional development through an innovative and exciting environment, particularly in regards to their motivation
2. Overall engagement with CPD and the consequences of this upon practitioner willingness to take risks and try new and innovative projects with their students

The intervention I devised was based upon an activity using an online form (Google forms). This allows staff to access content around a particular topic, for example, "*The Challenge of Classroom Behaviour*". Practitioners are able to make a number of choices as they work through the form, engaging with thought-provoking tasks, identifying specific areas of training need (such as the misuse of mobile phones, chattiness in class or non-submission of work) or simply teachers could simply head straight to suggested strategies and resources to try them out.

The form devised includes policies specific to my organisation, including wearing lanyards for safeguarding purposes and the college disciplinary procedures, in order to meet the organisational objectives which ultimately will always need to be appeased. Practitioners using the intervention can choose to engage with content for as little as 10 minutes or up to 2 hours, returning at any time to access the content again. On completion of the form, practitioners receive digital badging as a reward displayed on a published leader board and an automated certificate sent to their email address.

One thing I had to consider when testing the intervention, is that comments on the content of the session are irrelevant. Here I am not looking for practitioner views on content, but instead looking for feedback regarding the method of learning and the concept of agency. Analysis also needed to focus on accessibility, barriers to participation, enjoyment and any changes in motivation and engagement, with instant feedback post-intervention, using an online survey as part of the training activity.

## **1.5 Summary**

Before concluding this chapter, I feel it is important to clarify some of the changes which might have been made regarding RQ1 and the corresponding intervention I have just described. Indeed, as my research evolved some conflict arose between the RQ1 and the overarching aim of this thesis, “leading educational change and improvement from the ground up”, which sits within a paradigm perspective aligned more with interpretivism and the lived experience of practitioners. This would appear juxtaposed to the technical-rational model of educational improvement so characteristic across much of the education sector and somewhat represented in RQ1, which focuses on the implementation of a ‘tool’ to fix a problem. However, I decided not to make any significant changes as the inclusion of RQ1 plays an important role in

demonstrating an argument I will make in more detail later regarding the propensity for educators to reach for the 'silver bullet' when addressing educational improvement policy and processes. In starting with a question which implies that a 'tool' might be the panacea I was searching for, I have shown how predisposed educators and leaders are in reaching for the quick fix and retaining RQ1, therefore, provides an opportunity to discuss later in this thesis why this is so often the case.

The next chapter in this thesis explores a wide range of literature, summarising the findings to date regarding the key concepts and theories likely to impact on my research including; Gamification; Online Learning; Models of CPD; Models of Educational Change and Improvement; Concepts and Definitions of Practice and How Practice Improves; Communities of Practice; Ofsted and Organisational Influences; and Concepts of Agency.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review begins with an exploration of the concept of “gamification” and to what extent this may influence the meaningfulness of FE teachers’ professional development. This includes the use of reward systems, such as certification and digital badging, to improve practitioner engagement. This review also offers an examination of online learning methodology and models of CPD, which are ever evolving, particularly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 2 then moves to a review of literature surrounding concepts of practice and the process through which a practice changes, competing models of educational change and improvement, communities of practice, joint practice development, and agency. Finally, literature regarding the impact of external influences such as Ofsted and government policy are also evaluated alongside FE sector specific data on training needs, derived from surveys conducted by the ETF.

### 2.2 Gamification

The concept of gamification does not lie solely within online content and computer games and indeed it is not a new phenomenon, *“but a traditional and well-tested approach to deep and effective learning”* (Gee, 2013, p. 16). Deterding (2011, p. 9) defines gamification as *“the use of game design elements to motivate user behaviour in non-game contexts”*. According to Kapp (2012, p. 10), gamification is *“using game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems.”* Gamification is a concept most of us are likely to have experienced throughout our lives,

drawing on it to cajole children, develop relationships or plan activities. In educational contexts, it means introducing game-like elements such as levels, badges, leader boards, points, and rewards, and providing incentives for engagement (Davies, 2019). A gamified approach can be applied to many methods of teaching, learning or assessment, if it incorporates these key principles.

Gamification uses game metaphors, game elements and ideas in a context different from that of the games to increase motivation and commitment, and to influence user behaviour (Marczewski, 2013), *“making non-gaming products and services more enjoyable and engaging”* (Deterding, 2011 in Botra et al., 2014, p. 2).

Looking more specifically at educational gamification, Botra et al. (2014) view this as the design strategy of using game design elements in educational contexts to support teaching and learning goals. Gamification does not imply creating a game. It aims to make education more fun and engaging, without undermining its credibility (Muntean, 2011):

*“Educational Gamification is not to be confused with Game-based Learning, Simulation, or Serious Games. These focus on creating games (and game-like experiences) which impart an educational benefit and include software such as simulators. This is the direct opposite of educational gamification, which seeks to add game-like concepts to a learning process.”* (Glover, 2013 in Botra et al. 2014, p. 4)

The prevalence of gamification strategies within teaching and learning is increasing, however the success of this approach in online (also referred to as e-learning) can be mixed. Urh et al. (2015, p. 389) suggest that many e-learning systems *“do not achieve the desired objectives”*, in part due to non-compliance but also due to insufficient knowledge of techniques and methods for the development of online learning materials. A number of studies (Lewis,

2002; Arbaugh and Duray, 2002; Chen & Bagakas, 2003) find that there may be as many as six factors that have an impact on student's satisfaction with online learning materials: students, teachers, course, technology, system design and environmental factors. Urh et al. (2015, p. 391) state that *"effective online learning environments should encourage contact between students and faculty members, reciprocity and cooperation between students, prompt feedback, time on task, active learning techniques, communication of high expectations and respect diversity and ways of learning from each student"*. Fundamentally, educational gamification still must focus on learning and learning outcomes, with the development of such activity grounded in good educational practice and sound pedagogic principles. (Botra et al., 2014).

Within teaching and learning, gamification can be seen as an effective approach to encourage behaviour change and attitudes. Kiryakova et al. (2014, p. 4) argue that a gamified approach may influence student motivation and engagement as well as overall outcomes, suggesting that *"The results of the change have bilateral nature – they can affect students' results and understanding of the educational content and create conditions for an effective learning process."* Hsin-Yuan Huang and Soman (2013) suggest that gamification may not have a direct association with the development of knowledge and skills, yet it may have a greater effect on student behaviour and motivation, which in turn may develop knowledge and skills. Buckley and Doyle (2016) claim that gamified learning interventions have a positive impact on student learning, yet Kopcha (2012), Dede et al. (2016) and King et al. (2018) all cite that there remain several barriers as to why teachers are fearful of new ways to teach and learn, in particular teachers say they lack the time, resources, and training to use classroom technology for instructional purposes

A key feature of a gamified approach is the use of extrinsic rewards such as digital badging and certification (Gamrat, et al., 2014; Brauer and Siklander, 2017). However, Dicheva,

et al., (2015, p. 84) suggest that *“finding and sharing of new ways of applying gamification to learning contexts which are not limited to extrinsic rewards like achievements and badges and are more meaningful to the students”*. It is difficult to qualify in one sweeping statement that extrinsic rewards are not a meaningful motivator to learners. However, the contrast between this key feature of gamified learning and individual learner perceptions of their meaningfulness is likely to be linked to the relationship between the intrinsic versus extrinsic factors affecting a learner’s motivation. This issue is discussed in some detail later in this chapter.

A perceived benefit of using a gamified approach is identified in the literature as personalisation, offering the customisation of content and related services, based upon individual user requirements. Urh et al., (2015, p. 394) discuss the importance of personalisation for adapting to individual needs, which has an impact upon the learner’s level of satisfaction, *“Common examples of personalization can be found on websites that recommend news items or products based on the past behaviour of users or the similar behaviour of other users”*. It is also suggested that advances in technology and computer software, combined with a deeper understanding of the concept of gamification may support and offer even greater personalisation of learning (e-learning). The issue of personalisation is multi-faceted. There are many individual nuances which differentiate the requirements of individuals, including the important question, what do people want? The efficacy of personalisation is therefore something to consider when employing a gamified approach to learning with Peeters et al. (2003, p. 303) suggesting that *“Personalisation can increase the learning efficacy of educational games by tailoring their content to the needs of the individual learner”*.

Buckley and Doyle (2016), consider the impact of motivation within an on-line gamified learning intervention. They identify a clear difference in students’ participation between those



who are intrinsically motivated versus those who are extrinsically motivated. The psychology behind the positive effects of gamification are highlighted in Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and his work on Flow Theory. Urh et al. (2015, p. 390), draw attention to how Csikszentmihalyi defines “flow” as the “...the mental state a person assumes when they are completely focused on, involved with, or immersed in a particular activity such as playing a game”. They go on to point out, with reference to the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Michaelis, (2019, para 5) that in order to achieve a “flow state-of-mind” a number of important parameters must be adhered to when applying a gamified approach. These include, clearly defined goals; identifiable rewards; a challenging activity or task that requires a certain level of skill to complete; a balance between a user’s ability level and the challenge put in front of them; the merging of action and awareness to create a sense of flow; a sense of control over the situation; direct and immediate feedback; and delivery of rewards as expected.

Newman (2017, para 5) states, “...it’s not meant to turn work into a game. It plays on the psychology that drives human engagement—the drive to compete, improve, and out-do—and to get instantly rewarded while doing so. It’s the carrot on the stick that keeps the rabbit keep chasing. The technology is merely the means to put that psychology to work.” This further supports the notion that gamification is more than just a mode of delivery and that an understanding of the psychology of learning is a paramount to its use as a tool for learning.

Giang, (2013, para 1), highlights how the use of game mechanics can improve a person’s ability to learn new skills by 40%. This is because game-based approaches lead to higher levels of commitment and motivation from users. Instead of creating full games, gamification’s guiding principle is to use elements of game design in non-game contexts, products, and services to motivate desired behaviours. Deterding (2012) raises an important issue in that there must be some way to use the power of games for other purposes and further identifying

the “serious games” movement in the early 2000’s which focused on building full-fledged games to train, educate and persuade users. The sudden rise of gamification in the recent years has been supported by several enablers, including activity tracking technology, a shift in web analytics focus to individuals and their behaviours, and a general cultural interest in video games.

Angelovska (2019) identifies a development in the maturity of gamification as a learning strategy, with a shift from extrinsic motivation design (rewards and incentives) to intrinsic motivation design (making the tasks meaningful). This is an important consideration because rewards and incentives can be an effective motivator for a person to start an activity, but it does not last long without continuous upgrading of the rewards. Intrinsic motivation ensures a longer-term motivation, encouraging learners to complete activities because they see them as meaningful and rewarding without the necessity for tangible, external recognition because doing the task itself feels meaningful and rewarding. The gamification process cannot solely rely upon the use of game aesthetics and mechanics, nor can the overall success be dictated by an individual’s craving for recognition. The system being gamified needs to have some intrinsic value already, providing a reason for users to engage with it (Deterding, 2012).

Gamification has been shown to improve motivation towards studying (Muntean, 2011), with one of the key motivational factors being the positive feedback received (through achieving points, grades, and badges), which stimulate an interest in learning. Yunyongying (2014) suggests that an online curriculum designed using principles of gamification holds the promise of solving one of the perennial issues in curriculum design namely the question of, how to sustain a learner’s interest to practise something without them becoming bored or burning out in the process. Gladwell (2008) put forward the theory that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to develop expertise in complex tasks. Yunyongying (2014) suggests that the amount

of practice required to develop expertise is well within reach when employing a gamified approach, making particular reference to the effect gamification has on learning more complex tasks or processes. However, Schatten and Schatten (2020, p. 704) sound a note of caution when suggesting that *"...gamification is not a "silver bullet" and just by introducing it into the classroom does not necessarily increase student's motivation to learn..."*.

### **2.3 Digital badging and Game design**

As previously discussed, the ideal game design elements for gamification, include points, badges, leader boards, levels or virtual rewards (Werbach & Hunter 2012). These elements have the potential to support the development and acknowledgement of competence, offering a level of autonomy and impacting upon motivation and consequently engagement with CPD, the latter being integral to the potential "success" of professional development activities. Sailer et al. (2017) offer an experimental study in these design elements which indicates promising results regarding work competence development and motivational outcomes.

Sailer et al. (2017, p. 795) make links between learner motivation and the use of rewards systems such as digital badging suggesting that *"...these elements help to develop work competencies and to address psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness and thereby increase learners' motivation in working or learning context"*. Web-enabled credentials for learning are frequently presented in the form of open or digital badges. These are often rewarded to illustrate competency or participation in learning and can be shared across digital networks. Within education, digital badges have reignited the debate over

rewards for learning, with many characterising them as inherently “extrinsic” motivators (Hickey & Schenke, 2019).

Hickey and Chartrand, (2018, p. 792) suggest “*A study of 30 funded efforts to develop badges found that none of the efforts to develop competency badges (for demonstration of specific competencies) resulted in thriving badge-based ecosystems, while four of the five efforts to develop participation badges (for engaged participation in social learning) resulted in thriving ecosystems*”. This is an interesting finding as surely competence is more important than participation. Although participation is important, if activities are seen simply as markers of attendance then this suggests that participation cannot automatically be taken as a proxy for learning. This points to the importance of determining the overall purpose of digital badging within any training activities, particularly in relation to why and for what badges are being awarded.

Several studies (Unger et al., 2013; Perryer et al., 2016; Suh et al., 2017), examine the impact of gamification on employees in the workplace, where factors such as motivation are key, while the focus is often upon productivity (i.e., sales). Although clearly a different industry with alternative goals and measures of success, productivity, in terms of both output and the meaningful learning taking place, is a concept which can also be applied to education.

Two key factors of digital badging, identified by Botra et al. (2014) are freedom to fail and rapid feedback. Freedom to fail, linked to formative assessment, suggests that there are multiple opportunities for learners to achieve a level of competence that corresponds to the set goal or to their own goal. This freedom to fail offers a greater sense of agency over the outcomes of the learning process. Secondly, Rapid Feedback indicates that courses are delivered so that learners receive feedback on each goal as a badge that they attempt and submit for accreditation. This feedback offers users the chance to learn from their mistakes and

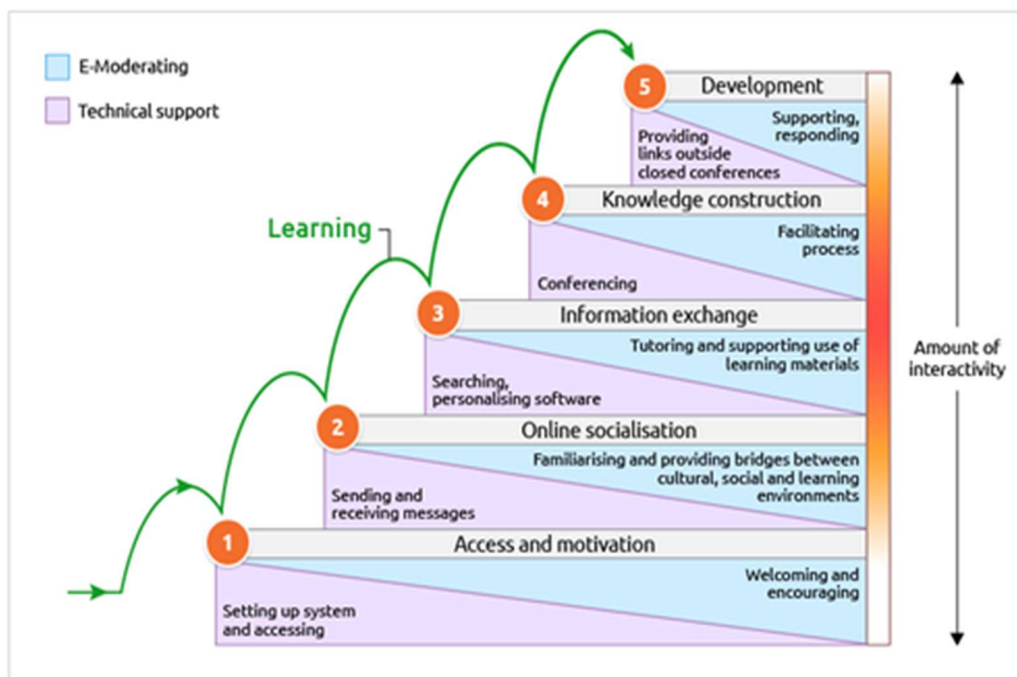
continue to develop their competencies. Feedback also provides a more personalised, intrinsic element to what is a potentially detached process of online learning. Deterding (2012, p. 16) suggests that intrinsic rewards may be more significant than the more tangible badges and certificates, "*powerful social psychological processes such as self-efficacy, group identification, and social approval provide rewards*". Deterding goes on to suggest that it is these intrinsic feelings which drive consistent participation.

## **2.4 Online Learning**

Online learning continues to evolve with advances in technology and computer software, where the correct use of technology plays a significant role in education, developing both opportunities for communication and the implementation of new systems for teaching and learning (Bedrule-Grigoruta & Rusua, 2014). Sometimes referred to as distance learning due to the asynchronous nature of delivery, online learning is heavily reliant on the commitment of the learner to access and engage with the available content. Rowntree (1995, p. 214) states, "*Distance learning has always favoured the highly motivated, well organised and accomplished learner*", suggesting that there may be some limitations to the implementation of online learning models. Professor Gilly Salmon has produced extensive work on the different approaches to online learning culminating in a proposed Five Stage Model:

**Figure 2.1.**

*Model of teaching and learning online through online networking (Salmon, 2013, p.11)*



Salmon (2013) suggests, *“For online learning to be successful and happy, participants need to be supported through a structured developmental process”*. The five-stage-model offered by Salmon (Figure 2.1), presents a clear structure to online learning activities, designed to support both the practitioner and the participant in ensuring that the process is both productive and meaningful, utilising a collaborative approach to learning to mitigate some of the potential engagement and motivation issues which are often linked to “distance” learning models of learning.

In contrast, a considerable development in the design of online learning has occurred in the rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). MOOCs are free online courses available for anyone to enrol. *“Millions of people around the world use MOOCs to learn for a variety of reasons, including career development, changing careers, college preparations, supplemental learning, lifelong learning, corporate eLearning & training, and more”* (mooc.org, para 2).

McAuley et al. (2010) draw attention to how MOOCs are open and invitational. No one is excluded if they wish to participate. Users negotiate the nature of their participation according to their individual needs and wishes, regardless of whether those needs are defined by personal interest or workplace requirements. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe how collaborative learning offers opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation, allowing individuals to learn from observation and dialogue while at the same time, being drawn into the community of practice in a way which they find both inclusive and encouraging. In this way MOOCs provide, *“access to large numbers of people who might otherwise be excluded for reasons ranging from time to geographic location, to formal prerequisites, to financial hardship.”* (McAuley et al. 2010, p. 54), which suggests that the MOOC platform provides opportunities for participation, collaboration and cooperation. However, this does not necessarily indicate the quality or value placed upon the courses by learners.

Palmer et al. (2017, p. 1) state that, *“Student feedback shows that the most valuable learning activities are those with clear instructions, delivered in a dynamic and engaging way, which give students the opportunity to do things and experiment”*. The same study also suggests that there is a danger that online tasks can be dismissed by learners as not suiting a preferred learning style. Coffield et al. (2021), is highly critical of the existence of learning styles which he describes as an outdated concept which from the student’s perspective can be used to justify their own disengagement in learning where they may be other reasons for their failure to engage including lack of effort, irrelevant content, inappropriate pedagogy, and inauthentic assessment. Users are, therefore, more inclined to engage with online or blended learning when the materials are of high quality, engaging, well-designed and interactive.

Levinson (2013) describes the experience of some MOOC participants as depersonalised and lacking a meaningful student-teacher relationship. Although appealing, in terms of their

open, accessible, and asynchronous nature, MOOC learning is not problem free. The sheer size of these online courses can result in participants feeling overwhelmed and unsupported as just one of many “faceless” students. Students in MOOCs may feel anxious that they are missing valuable information and discussions. The many online opportunities and “spaces” of the course can cause students to feel confused and overwhelmed (Knox, 2014). Salmon et al. (2015) suggest that MOOC participants found that too many options of engagement and different online platforms were overwhelming. Participation in MOOCs can provoke anxiety in a learner about their participation and direction in relation to large-scale, impersonal activity (Kop et al., 2011), and can cause a feeling of loss of identity and individuality (Knox 2014).

To support learning and avoid these heightened levels of anxiety, Salmon et al. (2015) show that online collaboration through social media, assisted participants by enhancing their learning. Participants were found to enjoy and benefit from using social media platforms to communicate with a diverse range of people with whom to network and exchange knowledge. Despite the positive intervention of social media platforms in Salmon’s work, the potential detachment of learners from the social experience of learning is something which must be considered as a potential limitation of online CPD. This requires me to look more deeply into what good online CPD might look like.

## **2.5 CPD and Online CPD**

Professional development for teachers has been described by Sims et al. (2021) as *“structured, facilitated activity for teachers intended to increase their teaching ability”*. Professional development can support a shift in teaching practice through both the learning of new skills and the “unlearning” of unconscious bias or beliefs towards certain methods of delivery (Dede et al., 2016). This is not an easy result to obtain particularly with more



experienced teachers who may be more reluctant to change, and moving away from what they perceive as tried and tested strategies. An understanding of how times have changed, and the consistent development of individual learner needs and attitudes are important points to discuss. We should also consider, whether clear purpose for the delivery of CPD can support teachers to be more receptive to change.

Professional development is seen by most institutions as the primary means for improving classroom instruction and consequentially, student outcomes. Professional development also provides an opportunity for continued growth, after qualifying as a teacher. Dede et al. (2016) discuss the issue that too few teachers engage in professional development on a regular, extended basis throughout their career. Another consideration is that engagement in CPD does not necessarily correlate with meaningfulness and impact. In the absence of these factors, CPD can at times prove to be superficial in both time and content.

Dede et al. (2016) further discuss the cost/benefit ratio of professional development and whether a good return is seen is an important consideration for educational establishments. With the drop-in government funding within the FE sector, a fall of 16% per student in real terms from 2009-10 to 2017-18 (Foster, 2019), and an increase in the number of FE college mergers (a total of 70 college-to-college mergers have taken place since 2015 [AoC, 2020]), funding pots and in turn, budgets for professional development have become a lot more controlled. The successes of professional development are not necessarily dictated by the method of delivery, be that online or face to face. Instead, it is more likely to be the pedagogical design, who the participants are, its duration etc. which determines the extent to which CPD activities are valued by teachers (Dede et al., 2016).

**Table 2.1**

*Spectrum of CPD models (Kennedy, 2005)*

Model of CPD	Purpose of model
The training model The award-bearing model The deficit model The cascade model	Transmission
The standards-based model The coaching/mentoring model The community of practice model	Transitional
The action research model The transformative model	Transformative

The model of CPD employed should be matched to the purpose of activities. Kennedy (2005, p. 248) proposes a “spectrum” of CPD models (Table 2.1) which suggests *“increasing capacity for teacher autonomy as one moves from transmission, through transitional to transformative categories”*. Unfortunately, in many cases, the parameters of CPD are often determined by an external party, such as senior leadership (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). In these instances, even activities designed with a transformative purpose, perceivably offering collaborative and autonomous learning experiences, are still controlled by the “powers that be” which, in turn, limits the capacity for teacher agency to be enacted. This raises the question of the extent to which the mode of delivery or the teaching and learning strategies employed, have significant positive impact upon and “buy-in” from users? Henderson (2007) notes that most of the existing literature reveals that neither face-to-face nor online professional development sustains engagement. Instead, teacher participation can be secured by designing for the purpose of, *“...community of practice cohesion, in a blended mode of delivery with small groups of participants”* (Henderson, 2007, p. 162).

Carpenter (2016) explores a range of literature which demonstrate that professional development to be a crucial mode of enhancing teaching and learning (Stigler & Hiebert 1999; Guskey, 2009; Opfer & Pedder 2011). The value placed upon this by organisations is evident in the work of Lawless and Pellegrino (2007), who indicate a clear rise in the quantity of professional development delivered. ETF (2018) identifies that around seven in ten individuals working in the FE sector believe they would benefit from training and development over the next year. Teaching and pedagogy were the key priorities for training for individual respondents, with the majority (74%) of lecturers/teachers/trainers/tutors reporting their need for more training in teaching and pedagogical skills.

An increase in the frequency of CPD opportunities is one thing, but the gold standard test of CPD must lie with practitioner satisfaction. Several researchers argue (Smylie, 1989; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Carpenter, 2016) that the quality of CPD is mixed. For example, some practitioners criticise the “traditional” approach of formal face to face instruction handed down from an “expert” (Kennedy 2005). Furthermore, there are continuing questions over the impact of this form of delivery with its focus on knowledge transmission and delivery. Criticisms are clearly aimed at the time it takes to attend events, limited opportunity for active learning and the general relevance of session content (Hawley & Valli, 2007). This lack of relevance may well be a notable factor in the value placed upon CPD by sector practitioners. Another potential barrier to the effectiveness of CPD is the accessibility of sufficient CPD for some educators. ETF (2018) suggest that the main barriers individuals identified as preventing them from undertaking training and development in the next year were, being too busy at work (38%), their employer being unable to supply or fund it (33%), and a reluctance to fund it themselves or can't afford it (31%).

As discussed earlier in Chapter 1 the ETF (2019a) provides us with workforce data for English FE colleges, which demonstrates that the majority of teachers are engaging in a median number of 29.5 hrs of CPD annually. However, the preceding ETF (2018) report into Training needs in the Further Education Sector indicated that a significant minority (23%) of individual respondents did not receive all the training and development they wanted or needed, with the highest numbers (28%) of these being in colleges. There was demand for future training which leads to a qualification or accreditation, training, and development that enhances teaching and learning (12%) was considered most valuable. For colleges, the needs of the organisation itself are the key driver of training needs (36%) the organisation's desire to maximise the efficiency, performance, and professionalism of its workforce (71%).

Mor and Mogilevsky (2013) identify the dominant model of teacher CPD as being one that assumes teachers need to be provided with a "*solid theoretical curriculum*", which can then be applied in practice. However, they propose that an alternative, more collaborative model, in which teachers become the primary "change agents" of educational improvement, may yield more positive outcomes for teachers, by developing both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in tandem rather than as abstract concepts. Similarly, Opfer and Pedder (2011) support the suggestion that CPD activity should be dictated by context, building upon teacher knowledge and perceived training needs. Further support for this can be seen in Stigler and Hiebert (1999) and Kennedy (2014), who suggest that features such as collaborative teacher enquiry, which provide teachers with autonomy and agency, have transformative potential.

Carpenter, (2016, p.78) proposes the concept of Edcamps, described as a "*voluntary, democratic form of unconference*". This model proposes a considerable amount of teacher collaboration, something which is a desirable goal in transforming professional development. Although the underlying principles of collaboration have positive intentions, collaboration is

not without its challenges. Carpenter (2016) discusses how the pitfalls of group dynamics can be detrimental to the effectiveness of teacher collaboration citing Grossman et al. (2001), Gunn and King (2003), and Nelson and Slavit (2007) as supporting this claim. Carpenter (2016) further suggests that in order to be effective, teachers must be able to understand colleagues' perspectives on a variety of issues, particularly when opposing opinions are evident. This is something to be considered further with regards to whether CPD should be about learning from an "expert" or more of free flowing and "shared endeavour" between colleagues.

The culture of a school or college could therefore be seen to be a key factor in how CPD might be offered and influence how it is engaged in by teachers. It cannot be assumed that by simply creating the space for collaboration and discourse between colleagues that professional learning will simply take place. In professional learning we must recognise how experience informs practice, and when learning takes place under conditions which support agency to be enacted, professional judgement or *Practical Wisdom* are most valued (Aristotle, 1955). Conversely traditional models of CPD focus on meeting objectives and outcomes. Being outcome driven means the focus is often on "impact", but of someone else's agenda.

For professional learning to take place, teachers need to buy into an alternative way of doing things. This could be particularly challenging when teachers might perceive the alternative to be a challenge or contradiction of what has gone before. Carpenter (2016) suggests that by eliminating spatial and temporal restraints on collaboration, educators have greater opportunities to engage with informal professional communities, taking greater charge over their own professional learning. Examples are provided including "participatory cultures" and "affinity spaces" which use modern technology to connect educators from around the globe, who share similar interests to share and learn from each other.

My own experience of these collaborative processes during the Google Certified Innovator Academy, provides further anecdotal evidence of the inspirational nature of collaborative approaches. My continued participation in social media groups and educator communities, both in the UK and globally, since completing the program, consistently offer me the opportunity to develop my own professional practice, sharing ideas and reviewing the effectiveness of teaching and learning strategies. The pressure put upon practitioners at all levels of education can leave some feeling isolated and under-supported. This is a time when an informal and collaborative approach to professional development can bring those isolated staff in from the cold and offer multiple perspectives in how to tackle the issues around remote learning. This provides a two-pronged approach in which staff are adequately supported and teaching and learning improves.

Desimone (2009) identifies five critical characteristics of professional development - active learning, coherence, collective participation, content focus and duration. These characteristics are further supported in the work of Opfer and Pedder (2011). It is also suggested by Garet et al. (2001) that a greater collaborative focus during professional development may ensure a clearer link to curriculum intent within each separate organisation. Collin and Smith (2021) offer guidance on “Effective Professional Development” through their work with the Education Endowment Fund (EEF), making the attempt to be clear in what professional development is, and is not (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2**

*Effective Professional Development (Collin & Smith, 2021, p7)*

<b>Box 1: What is PD?</b>	
<b>Professional development is...</b>	<b>Professional development is not...</b>
School-wide, monthly twilight sessions on how to improve formative assessment in the classroom.	A briefing provided to practitioners on how to use new smartboards.
A training day provided by a nursery school headteacher on how to use strategies to improve children's language.	An information session for teachers on the new school admissions code.
A series of online webinars delivered by an external provider on how to improve behaviour management in the classroom.	Teachers receiving a new curriculum programme via email, complete with schemes of work and assessment materials.

In addition, Collin, and Smith (2021, pp. 8-9) also summarise three recommendations for professional development design and implementation, including.

- 1. When designing and selecting professional development, focus on the mechanisms.*
- 2. Ensure that professional development effectively builds knowledge, motivates staff, develops teaching techniques, and embeds practice.*
- 3. Implement professional development programmes with care, taking into consideration the context and needs of the school.*

These recommendations, particularly the consideration of context, are supported by Sims et al. (2021) in their systematic review and meta-analysis of the characteristics of effective teacher professional development, which suggests that understanding the school context, as well as making the right choice of support system and intervention design, are integral to ensuring CPD is effective. In addition, they call for a considerable emphasis on meeting the needs of the school and individual teachers.

## 2.6 Pedagogic Rights and the Purpose of Education

Bernstein (2000) in McLean et al. (2013 p. 36) proposes three “pedagogic rights” (Table 2.2), “*enhancement in the personal realm; inclusion in the social realm; and participation in the political realm*”. For each of these rights to be “fulfilled” the relevant conditions must be set out. The right of enhancement ensures that every person is enhanced and not diminished. Through enhancement, Bernstein (2000, p. XX) reports the experiencing of new possibilities as “*tension points condensing the past and opening possible futures*”. The right of *Enhancement* promotes individual confidence on which they can embrace these “*tension points*” in order to challenge the boundaries of what they already know, and “enhancing” their view of the world around them. The right to *inclusion* is to feel that you belong and have a say, to be “*...included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally*”. (Frاندji and Vitale, 2015 p. 15) and part of a community through which social interactions may occur. The right of *participation* refers to the right to participate in discourse and reflection as well as the level of practice, “*...whereby order is constructed, maintained and changed*” (Bernstein, 2000 p. XXI). *Participation* brings civic discourse and political involvement, and the opportunity to exercise judgement with agency.

**Table 2.2**

*The concept of “pedagogic rights” (Adapted from Mclean et al. 2013)*

<b>Right</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Capability</b>	<b>Human development capabilities</b>
Enhancement	Personal	Confidence	Practical reason; senses imagination and thought
Inclusion	Social	Communitas	Affiliation; social relations and networks; narrative imagination
Participation	Political	Civic discussion and action	Rationality and reasonableness



Although we are able to discuss generally the pedagogic rights of all learners, the work of Biesta (2010b) can be used to further discuss the importance of not necessarily subscribing to any singular paradigm. Through taking a broader view of education and focusing on the “purpose” of education, Biesta suggests that the “how” of education is predicated by the “why”, further constructing 3 domains of educational purpose (Figure 2.3), which suggest that education has multiple purposes, sometimes working in harmony, at other times they are in “tension”.

**Figure 2.3**

*Three domains of educational purpose (Biesta, 2010b)*



Using the foundations of Bernstein and Biesta, it is possible to develop a new vision of “good education”. One which may differ significantly from the confines of Ofsted standards and the judgements of policy makers, many of whom are abstract from the reality of teaching (Coffield, 2017). Instead the responsibility for asking the question “For what purpose and for whose needs?” could lie with the teacher themselves, but to what end? In the “culture of

measurement”, which we see across education in the 21st century, have the “purpose” and “needs” of children been met according to the external goals and standards set by Ofsted and the like, if the “correct” knowledge is not received and retained as a result of the alternative decisions made on pedagogy and curriculum?

These tensions are certainly worth exploring in order to do what is right for our learners but in the cold reality of education as it currently stands this responsibility falls to a few “visionaries”, who are willing to put their heads on the block to move away from data-driven targets. *“If all we are doing is preparing our children to “go on and do something” – to conform to the existing social paradigm – in a way that fails to reveal to them the richness and complexity of life, that fails to inspire them to question their own purposes, then we are failing them profoundly”* (Phillipson, 2022, para 8).

Biesta (2009, p. 2) brings rise to further criticism of the “*age of measurement*” stating that *“The rise of the measurement culture in education has had a profound impact on educational practice”*. Further indications of a move to an “*evidence-based*” profession is highlighted in the way these measurements play a role in identifying failing schools and failing teachers as part of an “*improvement movement*” which advocates the idea that educational outcomes can be measured.

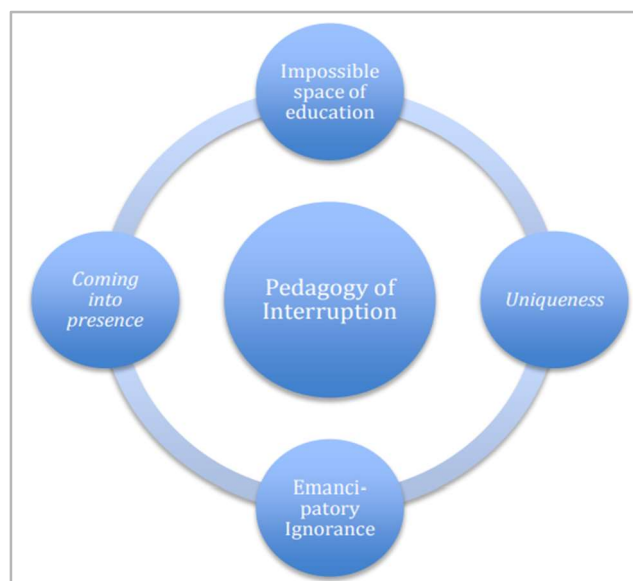
It is this desire to measure outcomes which limits the autonomy and accountability of practitioners which is offered only through a very specific set of criteria without very little inclusion. Bringing us back to Bernstein’s pedagogic rights, inclusion should be fundamental in how we discuss the effectiveness of education, but this democratic dimension is currently lacking in an “*age of measurement*”. *“Instead of simply making a case for effective education, we always need to ask ‘Effective for what?’ – and given that what might be effective for one*

*particular situation or one group of students...we also always need to ask 'Effective for whom?'*" (Bogotch et al., 2007 in Biesta 2009, p. 5).

Biesta (2010b) proposes a philosophical praxis, which is developed around four interlocking themes (Figure 2.4), two of which relate to the conditions/modes of education: first that education takes place in an *"impossible space"*, an in-between space of difference and plurality, which, paradoxically makes education possible (Vanderstraeten and Biesta, 2001), and secondly that education involves an *"emancipatory ignorance"*. Within these modes, two interlocking notions are found: *"uniqueness and coming into presence"*; these concern the continual birth and re-birth of the subject (person).

**Figure 2.4**

*Four themes of Biesta's educational theory*



Biesta (2015, pp. 2-3) argues that long standing measures of *strong* education are associated with the successful achievement of pre-defined learning outcomes and that this measure of strength portrays a *"fundamental misunderstanding of what education is about"*.

Biesta (2015, p. 139) further argues that education involves more than just “qualification” and “socialisation” and that “subjectification is also an important consideration. *“Subjectification is not about responsibility but about freedom, including the freedom not to be responsible, the freedom to walk away from one’s responsibility”* (Biesta 2020, p. 101)

Bertelsen et al. (2023) discuss how subjectification may be seen as somewhat of a radical concept, in that it represents a resistance to both curriculum (qualification) and social norms (socialisation). Indeed, subjectification it is far from guaranteed, and it is this unpredictability which provides a *risk* to education. It is because of this risk or *“emancipatory Ignorance”* (Biesta, 2010b), that education can avoid being a means of social reproduction and perpetuation of the existing order of things. Subverting the notion of strong education Biesta (2015) endorses *weak* education characterised through *“subjectification and emancipation facilitated by professional judgement”* (Yosef-Hassidim, 2016, p. 224). Instead of focusing on perceptions and practices of education, a *weak* education champions seven themes (creativity, communication, teaching, learning, emancipation, democracy, and virtuosity), in order to overcome the subservient *“desire to make education strong, secure, predictable, and risk-free”* (Biesta, 2015, p. 2).

## **2.7 Forms of Knowledge**

In contrast to Plato who believed that concepts had an ideal form, Aristotle believed that each instance of a concept had to be analysed on its own, dismissing the suggestion that experimentation and reasoning was proof of the qualities of an object, in favour of direct observation and experience. Aristotle’s belief that all our knowledge comes from our senses (perceptions) led to him dividing the whole complex of human knowledge into three forms (Table 2.3).

**Table 2.3**

*Aristotle's Forms of Knowledge and associated activity*

Form of Knowledge	Type of Knowledge	Activity
Techne	Knowledge of Craft	POIESIS (Making, Production)
Episteme	Scientific Knowledge	THEORIA (Contemplation)
Phronesis	Ethical Knowledge (or Practical Wisdom)	PRAXIS (Action, Practice)

Episteme (scientific knowledge) is a form of knowledge which tries to make sense of the world around us in an effort to understand that which already exists in the universe. These are concepts which we understand as truth or scientifically proven such as Newton's law of gravity. In this example the knowledge is not about the creation of gravity but understanding how it works. Through scientific reasoning, intellectual questions and analytical philosophy are employed to determine the truth using scientific fact and pure mathematics.

Techne (knowledge of craft) is the realm of knowledge which involves some form of creation, which cannot be made possible without employing knowledge. For instance, to create a machine, technical knowledge is a must and without it the process of creation couldn't take place. Techne is, therefore, a practical skill which involves the use of tools to create something concrete. Technical reasoning presupposes a given end which can be obtained through the following of "known" rules, and given materials. Practical reasoning (phronesis) on the other hand does not assume given ends or given means and does not require rules for application (Aristotle, 1955 in Carr, 1995).

Phronesis (practical wisdom) involves the use of practical wisdom to make ethical judgments in your everyday life and to acquire a strong moral character and habits. Phronesis

refers to the branch of knowledge which probes us to act in a certain manner with the aim of living a “good life”. It’s the wisdom required to make judgments when put in a conflicting position. Such moral judgements are not formed in isolation but are a product of the ethical knowledge which you have acquired over time. Drawing upon experience, practical reasoning uses given historical circumstances as a baseline for actions. For example, a teacher faced with having to discipline a misbehaving student may decide to use the “educational opportunity” to discuss the nature and repercussions of this kind of behaviour in order to avoid a recurrence. The balance here is between the potential benefit of education and the time, money and effort required to do so (Aristotle, 1955 in Carr, 1995).

Dunne (1997) explains how Aristotle aligns the knowledge of *techne* with a kind of activity called “*poiesis*” which involves “making” or “production”. The outcome of such activity is durable and can be precisely specified by the maker before engaging in the activity. *Techne* offers a clear conception of what and why through a rational and technical approach where there is a right and wrong way to act, associating the activity of *poiesis* with mastery and perfection. In contrast the form of knowledge that is *phronesis* is more personal, experiential and less formulaic, than that of *techne*. With this form of knowledge, the activity of “*praxis*”, conducted in a public space, invokes a person to elicit qualities and virtues which demonstrate a worthwhile way of life. A person’s relationship to *praxis* is more intimate than the uncompromising, certain nature of *poiesis*, and due to the involvement of others, emotions come into play, offering a more heterogeneous outcome (Dunne, 1997).

According to Habermas, empirical-analytical science employs the kind of technical reasoning identified by Aristotle with its means to an end character. The hermeneutic sciences advocated by Habermas (amongst others) employ the practical reasoning approach with an interest in guiding, informing and education through interpretation of the world and our

understandings of it (Carr, 1995, p. 12). Habermas also reconstructed the activity of “theoria” away from pure science to focus on more “materialist grounding” in the actions and practices of social scientists and critical social science which aims at ideology critique, enlightenment in social groups and societies, social and political action to improve the world offering a collective social action as opposed to individual enlightenment (Carr, 1995, pp. 12-13).

Theorising often occurs outside of practice to inform action and suggests a relationship between thought and action. This links closely to the notion of “reflective practice” (Schön, 1987). Carr (1995), however, argues that theory originates in practice. The ability to reflect on aspects of practice including a relationship of ideas to action supports the suggestion that practitioners are guided by theory in the form of their own ideas but not necessarily that they “have” a theory (Carr, 1995). Although this may be a narrow and individuality view of the relationship between theory and practice with a one’s sides rationalistic view and an emphasis on ideas rather than how actions shape our ideas and our understanding of the actual circumstances in which we find ourselves (Carr, 1995)

Who has what role? Is there a disconnect between the theorists and practitioners in social constructs or do they play their own significant roles in a more distinctive manner. Theorists contribute from the outside and the practitioner through face to face actions - just because they appear distinct does not mean their impact is mutually exclusive. *“Theory and practice cannot be separated...it is by being theorised that practices have meaning and it is by being practised that theories have historical, social and material significance.”* (Carr, 1995, pp. 14-15).

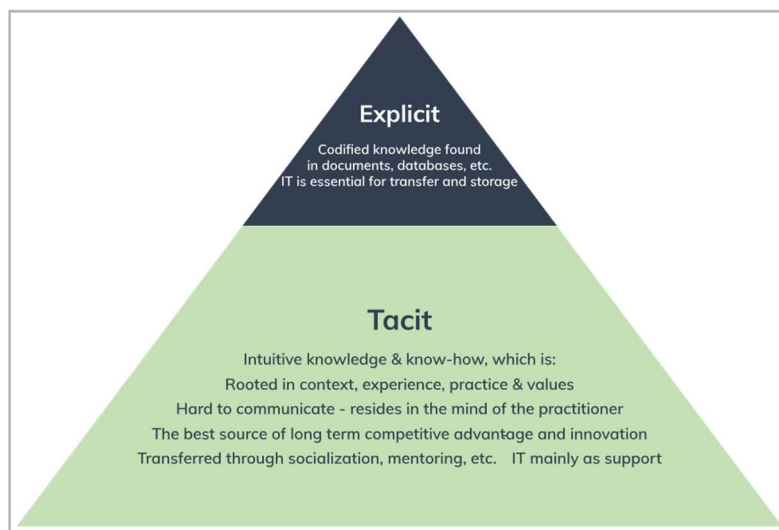
*“In general, practices of theorising educational practice are related through practices. They are related through human and social activities which understand themselves to be related to theory; for example, the application of theory, or the decision to act in a certain*

*way on the basis of a certain perspective, or, at best through public processes - practices - of critical reflection and self-reflection.” (Carr, 1995, p. 15)*

Theory and practice are mutually constitutive of one another. Macintyre (1981) in Carr (1995, p. 15) argues that *“practices are judged by reference to publicly share criteria and traditions; by reference to the lives, virtues and excellences of practitioners as the bearers of these traditions; and by reference to the work of institutions created in order to nurture and sustain these activities and values, virtues and excellences they embody and express”*. In more recent theorisation of knowledge Leonard and Sesnsiper (1998) discuss the constructs of explicit vs tacit knowledge (Figure 2.5), first introduced by Polanyi (1967), with specific reference to the role the latter plays in innovation.

**Figure 2.5**

*Michael Polyani (1967)- Forms of knowledge*





Explicit knowledge is codified and expressed in documents, software, hardware, and processes. Whereas tacit knowledge is characterised as intuitive know-how, which is rooted in context, experience, practice and values. Residing within the mind of the practitioner, in order to benefit from tacit knowledge, conditions must be created through which it can be communicated.

## 2.8 Educational Practice

*“Teaching may be compared to selling commodities. No one can sell unless someone buys...perhaps there are teachers who think that they have done a good day’s teaching irrespective of what pupils have learned.” Dewey (1933, p. 35–36)*

So far, we have explored the concept of practice in relation to contributions to the discipline of education from the discipline of psychology, and the field of ICT in education in relation to developing teaching skills and educational knowledge. However, I remain conscious that this view may be too simplistic and perspectives derived from literatures reviewed to date may be too limited. So, let us now turn attention to contributions to concepts of practice from the disciplines of sociology and philosophy. Some studies (Broudy, 1956; Eble, 1988; Chance, 2008; Thoilliez, 2019;) discuss the concept of teaching as a craft, with the pursuit of the associated skills and qualities involved in achieving mastery of a practice described as *“craftsmanship”*. Sennett (2008, p. 52) identifies *“three troubled ways craftsmanship is organised”*. The first being, the attempts of institutions to motivate people to work well. The second lies in developing skill and the third refers to conflicting measures of what we mean by quality work. Sennett (2008, p. 268) also contends that *“nearly anyone can become a good*

*craftsman*” and that *“learning to work well enables people to govern themselves and so become good citizens”*.

This line of thought is questioned by Thoilliez (2019) who suggests this may only be true under the assumption that crafted abilities are innate and when rightly stimulated and trained, they allow craftsmen to become more knowledgeable. Thoilliez, (2019) further discusses the potential dangers of a fixation on achieving craftsmanship, highlighting Sennett’s (2008, p. 11) claim that *the “...craftsman’s desire for quality poses a motivational danger: the obsession with getting things perfectly right may deform the work itself”*. The notion of crafted abilities being innate is not something I would subscribe, particularly within the context of education and teaching practice. For me Sennett is clear in arguing that craft is learned in collaboration and cooperation with existing practitioners who care enough about it to continually improve it.

According to Aristotle, teaching is an activity that finds its results in the learner, not in the teacher. Were there no need for learning, there would be no need for teaching (Noddings, 2003). This suggests that the practice of teaching can be defined by the perceived need for learning. MacIntyre and Dunne (2002, p. 9) suggest that *“teaching is never more than a means”*, but with the argument that there is more to education than teaching. Teaching is therefore a means toward the realisation of the purpose of education – i.e., not only to:

1. Learn how to do things in the world (to practice a craft)
2. Think critically, carefully for ourselves and with each other
3. Become and be the best human beings that we can be

Education is essentially a human encounter not simply a technical or mechanical one. Noddings (2003) supports this notion stating that although the teaching-learning connection must be means orientated, the involvement of a relationship, very close to friendship, between

the teacher and learner, offers the argument that it is not solely means-oriented, and that learning is not the only end sought in teaching. Noddings (2003) proposes teaching to be a form of relational practice, in that a respectful and reflexive approach is taken to inquire into and consider a learner's live experiences and individual needs.

The concept of practice is also linked to the concept of professionalism. Tyler, (1964); Strike, (1990); Runte (1995) all investigate the concept of professionalism and whether teaching can be called a profession, with Runte (1995, p. 7) noting *"There is no such thing as a profession. The only feature that ever really distinguished the professions from other occupations was the 'professional' label itself. What we are is knowledge workers, and as such we have a responsibility to both ourselves and to the public to become reflective practitioners"*.

If we continue to focus on teaching as a "practice" then the term "best practice" would signify the ideal approach to teaching. Lefstein and Snell (2013) suggest that the "best practice" approach to educational improvement involves identifying, capturing, and disseminating proven teaching methods. Coffield and Edward (2009, p. 375) offer an alternative view, that *"Best practice also implies that there is only one approach which, if used, will solve any difficulties. The notion of a single, optimum solution to a wide range of complex problems has also been seen by some commentators as the beginning of the slide into authoritarianism."* I am inclined to agree with Coffield and Edward (2009) in proposing that the varied context of educational establishments, makes the idea of a "blueprint" for teaching and learning or "best practice" a difficult thing to support when considering the reality of the individual classroom. The perpetual quest for excellence in teaching, as defined by an objective list of criteria and competencies is directly aligned with the Ofsted model of grading schools and colleges, itself a contentious issue and something which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

An example of this relates to the 1998 National Literacy Strategy (NLS), which sought to radically transform curriculum content, lesson structure and teaching methods in all primary classrooms across England. Lefstein and Snell (2013, p. 4) state *“The idea of best practice has become part of international educational common sense. In England, for example, it sits at the heart of ambitious and wide-reaching governmental reforms of teaching”* Lefstein and Snell (2013, p. 4) further draw attention to how, the then Chief Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education on School Standards, Michael Barber who said:

*“For years and years, primary teachers have been criticised for the way they teach reading. But then nobody ever said to them: ‘Here’s the best practice, based on solid international research and experience. If you use it your children will make progress’.”*

Fielding et al. (2005) also challenge notions of best practice, pointing out that the transfer of “best practice” is not only questionable but also may not be as simple as Michael Barber suggests. The traditional model of an expert transferring knowledge simply by transmitting information to others in order to enable them to change their practice frames knowledge transfer simply as; a new edition to a teacher’s toolkit, a new principle or concept, developing a set of skills, or activities and materials to support the delivery of a curriculum. To accept this position is to miss the point and ignore the obvious. Changing and improving educational practice involves much more than some people telling other people what to do for “the best”:

*“Good practice depends both on sustaining motivation and on a more analytic monitoring capability that spots areas of student inattention or difficulty and adopts a problem-solving approach to improving student learning.”* (Fielding et al., 2005, p. 56)

Fielding and his colleagues argue that through sharing good practice teachers may become increasingly motivated as they engage with new practices and begin to realise their potential. In the long-term, professional growth depends on teachers collaboratively engaging with relevant educational change (where the improvement of student learning occurs) in ways which challenge them to improve their teaching practice without reducing the quality of what they currently do (Fielding et al., 2005).

Gregson and Spedding (2018, p. 167) offer an important review of research conducted in England in the school's sector (Fielding et al., 2005; Ball, 2017) and in the FE sector (Gregson & Nixon, 2009). Coffield (2017) highlights a concern with prescriptive, top-down approaches with further education management, notably through the use of league tables and inspection, stating that the climate of fear constructed in this approach dramatically impacts the trust relationships between teachers and education leaders and in turn encourages instrumental "performativity" (Ball, 2003), and "game-playing" in a fabrication of compliance. Coffield (2017) goes on to discuss how completing all the necessary activities to meet expectations of inspectors, awarding, and regulatory bodies consumes time, morale, and energy, in a way that limits the ability for teachers and education leaders to make real improvements to their educational practice.

It appears that since the development of the "best practice" model and discourses surrounding it, there have been mixed responses to the impact it has had on teaching and learning. In particular the additional pressures heaped upon teachers to conform to notions of "best" or worst still, "perfect" practice model. "Best practice" would appear to be a term which has emerged from the default top-down, expert-led approach to professional learning and development. Yet, any approach which regards, "*Solid theoretical curriculum*" (Mor & Mogilevsky, 2013) as the blueprint to success, and one which supposes that solutions for any

problem can be easily found and prescribed like medication for a sick patient, needs to be viewed with some caution. “Good practice”, on the other hand, in particular the sharing of innovative ideas relating to educational practice in context or management strategies, particularly amongst peers, may offer a more relatable delivery model for professional learning and CPD.

The term practice can be used to identify an activity undertaken to acquire skills and competencies, such as teacher training or professional development, as well as an activity which demonstrates these skills and competencies, such as teaching a lesson (Carr, 1995). Both examples offer the opportunity for practice development but from very different perspectives and it is the relationship between theory and practice which is at odds. A predilection for theory, with its universal, context free generalisations, and abstract ideas, offers a complete contrast to the practice which is associated with particular context-dependent instances and concrete realities (Carr, 1995).

What is important here when making a distinction between the primacy of theory or practice is that practice is associated with a certain situation at a certain time whereas theory is likely to provide greater ambiguity in where it should be applied. However, Carr (1995, p. 63) notes that practice is not opposed to theory in that all practice is theory-laden, governed by an implicit theoretical framework, which structures and guides activity. *“Practice is not the step-child of theory...efficient practice presides the theory of it”*.

There are occasions where theory may be “relied upon” to provide a theoretical framework to “guide” teachers in their practice. As a set of general beliefs theory provides a sense of control and clarity on what it takes to do a good job. Conversely, practice is grounded in context and therefore cannot simply be guided by pre-determined principles or “rules”. Practice cannot be simply defined by how it relates to theory as it is not a stable or static

concept. This is evident within teaching practice where the nuances of the classroom environment often overrule the theory “learnt” during training, indeed *“Educational practice always involves much more than “knowing how” to do something”* (Carr, 1995, p. 64).

## **2.9 Communities of Practice**

Professional development for educators has long been regarded as the key enabling factor for transformation in education (Chai & Kong, 2017). Key aspects of this development include the knowledge, beliefs, and design capacities of educators (Tsai & Chai 2012). Professional development for educators should, therefore, primarily involve *“transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their learners.”* Professional learning communities may play some part in supporting this process (Kong & Song, 2015), particularly when making the connection between theory and practice, by providing a forum through which lived experiences may be shared and discussed.

Wenger (2011, p. 1) defines communities of practice as *“...groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”*. This is a concept which is certainly already growing within my organisation, although not explicitly labelled as “communities of practice”, through the use of Google Classroom and G Suite online tools, training bootcamps and practice sharing workshops, remote learning Google hangouts and meets, as well as research collaboration groups. The implementation of such activities may have been advanced through necessity after COVID-19 restrictions were implemented but the continuation of these and the further developments since are observed and chronicled throughout this study. Evidence of communities of practice within my organisation are not limited to technology-focused development but currently the use of technology in the classroom is of particular interest.

Originally developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), communities of practice all have the three elements of a domain, a community, and a practice, yet they come in a variety of forms; small or large, core or peripheral membership, local or global, face-to-face, or mostly online, within organisation or across multiple organisations, formal or informal. The first applications of communities of practice were in teacher training and since then, peer-to-peer professional development has become desirable across a wider audience. Communities of practice ensure that the learning environment does not remain a self-contained space, shut off from the rest of the world, where learners acquire knowledge to be applied outside. Instead, they offer a much broader learning experience (Wenger, 2011):

*“The perspective of communities of practice affects educational practices along three dimensions: Internally: How to organise educational experiences that ground school learning in practice through participation in communities around subject matters? Externally: How to connect the experience of students to actual practice through peripheral forms of participation in broader communities beyond the walls of the school? Over the lifetime of students: How to serve the lifelong learning needs of students by organising communities of practice focused on topics of continuing interest to students beyond the initial schooling period?” (p. 1).*



Wenger (2011, p. 2) suggests that communities develop their practice through a variety of activities (Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4**

*Community practice development activities (Wenger, 2011)*

Problem-solving	<i>“Can we work on this design and brainstorm some ideas; I’m stuck.”</i>
Requests for information	<i>“Where can I find the code to connect to the server?”</i>
Seeking experience	<i>“Has anyone dealt with a customer in this situation?”</i>
A brief introduction	<i>“I have a proposal for a local area network I wrote for a client last year. I can send it to you, and you can easily tweak it for this new client.”</i>
Reusing assets	<i>“Can we combine our purchases of solvent to achieve bulk discounts?”</i>
Coordination and synergy	<i>“What do you think of the new CAD system? Does it really help?”</i>
Discussing developments	<i>“We have faced this problem five times now. Let us write it down once and for all.”</i>
Documentation projects	<i>“Can we come and see your after-school program? We need to establish one in our city.”</i>
Visits	<i>“Who knows what, and what are we missing?”</i>
Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps	<i>“What other groups should we connect with?”</i>

Some studies (Mutch, 2003; Marshall & Rollinson, 2004; Handley et al., 2006), critique the communities of practice approach. Roberts (2006) states:

*“it is important to remember that the communities of practice are, in a sense, still an evolving approach to knowledge management. Over the coming years, as communities of practice are applied and studied in an increasing number of organisational contexts we will gain a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach.”* (pp. 636-637)

Lave and Wenger (1991) make it clear that communities of practice cannot simply be formed, instead, they may become established, for example, from a team of practitioners working on a particular project, through the supporting and allowing of practice to develop. For communities to be effective Wenger et al., (2002) foreground the importance of an insider’s perspective to lead the discovery of what the community is about, in other words, its purpose. Wenger et al. (2002) offer seven principles to guide the formation and establishment of communities of practice. These include, design for evolution; open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives; invite diverse levels of participation; develop both public and private community spaces; focus on value; combine familiarity and excitement; and create a rhythm for the community.

These principles resonate with my own experience and imply that entering a community of practice offers teachers and education leaders the chance to obtain a wide range of perspectives from a trusted group of peers to engage in the “*shared endeavour*” of changing and developing their own practice (Fielding et al., 2005). Educational issues and emerging problems or even the simpler desire to just be better at an element of practice, can then become mutually owned by more than one member of the community. The value that

communities of practice might bring to professional learning and development, in particular, the community practice development activities described by Wenger (2011), appear to be worthy of serious consideration in the design and construction of the educational interventions employed in this research.

## 2.10 Ofsted and Organisational Influences

Syed (2016) quotes the inventor James Dyson as saying:

*“We live in a world of experts...The expertise we have developed are crucial for all of us. But when we are trying to solve new problems...we need to reach beyond our current expertise. We do not want to know how to apply the rules; we want to break the rules. We do that by failing – and learning.”* (p.226).

As previously discussed, Biesta (2015, pp. 2-3) argues that long-standing measures of, “Strong” education, are dependent upon the successful achievement of pre-defined learning outcomes and that this measure of strength portrays a fundamental *“misunderstanding of what education is about”*. Biesta goes on to discuss how a risk-tolerant culture in which failure is supported rather than punished, provides opportunity for educators to innovate and try new things, learning along the way regardless of outcome, as suggested by James Dyson. Objective-laden assessment of practice, which deals with absolutes, causes and putative effects, discounts variability and practitioners can switch off or even be diminished by negative experiences, dogma and diktat. Believing in a singular truth, such as the existence and authenticity of a “blueprint” for teaching and learning, can stunt the evolution of educational practice, inhibiting/overlooking the importance of professional judgement, and discouraging practitioners from going “off-piste”, even if going “off-piste” is the right thing to do (Dunne,

1997). This kind of risk-averse culture works to limit the innovation and free thinking required to find the solutions to the ongoing, complex and unfolding problems teachers and education leaders face in day-to-day practice education. Instead, such approaches encourage “*performativity*”, which, ironically, acts to disguise the reality of what is required to be labelled as outstanding (Ball, 2003).

Ball (2003) notes that “*performativity*” within education, a concept which emerged because of education reforms in the 1990s, creates:

*“a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change, based on rewards and sanctions”.*

(p.216)

The title of Ball’s work “*The Teachers Soul and the Terrors of Performativity*” accurately expresses the feeling most educators have towards Ofsted, terror, often with the added sentiment that Ofsted’s methods are invalid, unreliable, and unjust (Coffield, 2017). Despite reported attempts to change their approach, Ofsted has a habit of “*overpromising and under-delivering and being quite disingenuous in the process*” when it comes to Education Inspection Framework (EIF) reform (Carr, 2021, para. 8). The perception of an “overlord” critiquing their teaching practice is enough to cause a great deal of stress and anxiety, but to what end? Gregson and Speeding (2020, p. 188) describe the top-down, micro-managed approaches to evaluation and improvement used by Ofsted as being “*expensive to maintain*” and “*...increasingly difficult to justify in terms of empirical and robust evidence of educational improvement.*”.

Ball (2018, p. 207) continues to critique the negative influence of external bodies encouraging educational reform stating, “*the current iteration of school reform perpetuates and*

*exacerbates the messiness and incoherence...that have always bedevilled education policy in England". In my own experience it is the lack of clarity for all stakeholders that is one of the key contributors to the additional stress external bodies such as Ofsted are cited as causing teachers and college leaders. As Gregson and Spedding (2020, p. 190) point out "...the demands of highly prescriptive, top-down systems of accountability, performativity, inspection, league tables and so on introduce a climate of fear and distrust between teachers, education leaders and evaluators, which in turn directs the instrumental behaviour and fabrications of compliance discussed above."*

Coffield (2017) suggests that despite some benefits, Ofsted's methods are invalid, unreliable, and unjust. More importantly he argues, teacher's attention is diverted away from students and more focused upon the appeasing inspectors. This is a notion further supported by Orr (2020, p.17) who discusses how a symbiotic relationship between targets and systems creates a "*a mutually dependent ecology of performance indicators and systems to indicate performance*". As college leaders we are often willingly, or even unknowingly, fixated upon being "outstanding" and this affects the decisions we make, particularly around the assessment of teaching practice and our aversion to risk. This preoccupation with meeting Ofsted "expectations" is often driven by those managing FE organisations through messages sent down from the top, remaining detached from the people and problems on the front line, meaning "*performativity flourishes separate from professional practice.*" (Orr, 2020, p. 18).

Internally, policies and processes, often focusing heavily on preserving an objective-driven approach to the "measurement" of education. This adds an element of fear of failure, of being found wanting or somehow in deficit in the development of teaching practice. These fear factors are grounded in the external influence of Ofsted as the omnipotent overseer and judge of education provision across the UK, who still seem focused on maintaining an EIF that

encourages an audit culture, which is “*driving out innovation*” and “*destroying trust*” in educators (Coffield & Williamson, 2011).

## **2.11 A Void of Context**

*“Education is being reduced to the narrow pursuit of competitive advantage in international trade, an objective rightly close to the heart of any Chancellor of the Exchequer but not one likely to inspire staff or students”.* (Coffield, 2008, p. 59)

As previously noted Biesta (2015) argues that education involves more than just “*qualification*” and that “*subjectification*” is an important consideration. The detached nature of observing and verifying objectives as fact is also criticised by Dunne (1997), as lacking familiarity with a teacher’s situation or background and therefore any judgement against said objectives is void of context. Retaining an objective-led quality improvement model only serves to solicit a technical-rational view of action that can be systematically and instrumentally applied. Any judgements are then based simply upon a desire to achieve putative empirical “*truth*” rather than being content with contextualising the outcome through open and honest discourse in the light of various forms of evidence. In contrast, by first understanding the context in which colleges are situated, before exploring the microcosm of the individual classroom, judgements of teaching practice may be made with a far greater degree of credibility, trustworthiness and truthfulness

In 2013, the focus on performance-based outcomes took a further turn with the introduction of performance-based pay progression within schools. Ball (2017) discusses the advice the DfE published indicating that:

*"... every school will need to have revised its pay and appraisal policies setting out how pay progression will in future be linked to a teacher's performance. The first performance-linked pay increases will be made from September 2014. It will also help schools across the country recruit and retain excellent teachers". (p. 160)*

This strategy, with the focus of recruiting and retaining excellent teachers does not appear to have had the desired outcome with annual retention rates of teachers in FE having dropped from 84 per cent in 2012 to 79 percent in 2018 (TES, 2020), and despite a national recruitment strategy underway retention rates continue to decline, particularly within the first few years of teaching (Department for Education, 2021).

Coffield and Williamson (2011) suggest that maybe the education system we have is not the one we need as conflict continues to arise between educators at the chalk face and the decision makers within education, be it the senior leadership groups within organisations or central government. As Foster (2005) cited in Coffield (2006) suggests:

*"The current fashion for over-regulation has one further, and hopefully fatal, weakness: the very countries whose higher productivity we are seeking to emulate achieve a high level of quality and standing without the heavy central control and complex accountability operating in our FE system". (p. 15)*

My professional experience together with anecdotal feedback within my organisation lend support to this idea, with most staff indicating that there is far too much focus on organisational priorities such as meeting business and external objectives, in place of teaching and learning development which at times seems to be offered as a token gesture. It is evident

that objective assessment of practice, such as that seen in Ofsted inspection and graded lesson observations, can lead to some practitioners feeling locked in a cycle of “empty rituals”. This is further reinforced by the propensity for one-off CPD ‘days’ or ‘events’ in order to ‘tick the box’ before inspection but with very little tangible impact on the quality of education. Gregson and Spedding (2020, p. 188) highlight that “...*despite considerable levels of public investment in the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers in the sector, return on this outlay has not produced value for money in terms of improved levels of achievement for learners.*”

Ferlie et al. (2008) make the point that one way to tackle this issue would be through reconceptualising training deficits with the development of more ground-up or grassroots models of policy implementation. Gregson and Spedding (2020, p.197) also support this notion and suggest “*Reducing constraints on teachers to enable them to exercise professional judgement in a wider range of circumstances is called for.*”

Maintaining the status quo will only serve to continue to limit the open-mindedness and deaden the potential of teachers and college leaders. Inevitably this is likely to result in the predictable failure of the default top-down, expert-led approach to educational change and improvement, which proposes that solutions for any problem can be easily found and prescribed like a “just add water” recipe for success.

If a good job in education is not seen to be good enough by Ofsted, despite real and positive changes being made, then the education sector will continue to push its staff to breaking point for what many would consider the fool’s errand of the pursuit of excellent or outstanding practice. However, I also recognise that it takes courage and commitment from educational leaders and policymakers to see that it does not have to be this way.



## 2.12 Action Research

*“Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.” (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 162)*

One of the ways in which individual practitioners, colleges, and the wider FE sector might demonstrate alternatives to existing policy and processes is through action research, or more specifically, practitioner-researcher action research. Zuber-Skerritt (2021) discusses why action research has become so important within education, explaining that when practitioners work and learn actively together they can transform their organisations into *“critical action research systems”*. The important factor here within the practitioner-researcher focused model, is that the act of research is not confined to ‘experts’, ‘theorists’, or ‘outsiders’, but instead becomes the role and responsibility of those at the heart of the practice itself and as Kemmis (2012, p. 893) explains:

*“The ‘practice’ which is the object of detached observation, the one seen only by the spectator, is not the same ‘practice’ that the insider-practitioner sees. I believe that practice seen from the inside is the most important version of practice to connect with, to engage, and to develop if we are to change the world by researching educational practice or praxis.” (Kemmis, 2012, p. 893).*

The opportunity to explore the perspective of the ‘insider’ through practitioner-focused research is *“in direct contrast of the top down outside in approach to educational improvement, instead promoting an inside out approach...which begins with the practitioner and values their*

*direct experiences in practice.*” (Gregson and Spedding (2020, p. 199). Organised practitioner-research programmes (PRP), for example, provide a unique opportunity for educators themselves to investigate and improve their own practice. This ground-up approach to educational improvement also offers a degree of agency to the individual in addressing their own practice related issues more sustainably. Newman et al. (2024, p. 17) discuss how practitioner research helps educators to “...take ownership of educational leadership for sustainable change and quality improvement”.

The literature reviewed (Kemmis, 2012; Gregson, 2020; Gregson & Spedding, 2020; Zuber-Skerritt; Newman et al., 2024) reasonably infers that for educational improvement policies to be effective, practitioners must be able to reflect honestly upon their practice and work collaboratively on solutions to problems which are contextually attuned. Practitioner-researcher action research can play an important role in creating these conditions and “encourage and enable teachers to engage in the systematic investigation of educational practice...which other approaches to educational evaluation and improvement (including external inspection regimes) struggle to do”. (Gregson, 2020, p.1).

Having been a part of a PRP at the start of my own research journey, and indeed at the beginning of this thesis itself, I now fully appreciate the impact that this form of action research can have, and has had, on educational practice in mine and many other organisations. Gregson (2020) provides several examples of this through a series of case studies, which illustrate the impact that PRP can have locally, in the classroom, and more widely in terms of career enhancements, personal progression and even sector wide acknowledgement of alternatives to existing policy and practice. The resurgence of practitioner-focused action research in further education, has also seen the arrival of several other FE research focused initiatives such as FE

research meets, FE research networks and FE research podcasts, which work to disseminate existing practitioner led research whilst advocating for others to join the movement.

One particular example is the FEResearchmeet, which is described as “...*collaborating individuals seeking to reposition their voices and knowledge...challenge norms and barriers to research by creating safe spaces for the development of expertise*” (Jones et al., 2024, para 1). The idea that practitioners might be empowered to challenge the status quo by taking risks and innovating within their own practice is once again juxtaposed to the previously discussed technical-rational model of educational improvement ordained by Ofsted and embodied within FE colleges around the country, with its predefined objectives and homogenised approach to teaching and learning. However, I am becoming increasingly more confident as momentum begins to build that we might see a shift towards a ground-up, context attuned approach to educational change and improvement, and it is my intention that the contents of this thesis might go some way to contribute to that.

## **2.13 Agency**

The concept of agency has been central to educational thinking surrounding models of educational change and improvement for many years, with the aim of developing teachers, learners and citizens capable of independent thought and autonomous action (Wenmouth, 2014). This thesis investigates the role, nature and value of agency in models of teacher’s professional development. The role of the teacher as a student and the role of the teacher as curator of learner agency is closely linked to matters surrounding the encouragement and cultivation of *teacher agency*, an agency that is theorised specifically in respect of the activities and judgements of teachers in schools (Biesta et al., 2015). Student agency, in comparison,

refers to *“learning through activities that are meaningful and relevant to learners, driven by their interests, and often self-initiated with appropriate guidance from teachers”* (Ballou, 2020).

Put simply, agency in educational contexts offers both teachers and learners a voice and often a choice in how they teach and how they learn.

Priestley et al. (2015) cast some doubt over the definition of agency suggesting that it is often not clear whether agency refers to a capacity to work “agentially” or merely related to dependence upon how individuals engage with their environment. Agency is, *“something that occurs over time and is about the relations between actors and the environments in and through which they act”* (Biesta et al., 2017, p. 40).

Teacher agency allows for high degrees of professional judgement and discretion and is dependent upon both the individual capacity of teachers but is also influenced by the cultures and structures of schooling. Priestley et al. (2015, p. 25) state that, *“agency can therefore be characterised as an emergent phenomenon, something that occurs or is achieved within continually shifting contexts over time and with orientations towards past, future and present, which differ within each and every instance of agency achieved”*.

Agency, in other words, is not something that people can have or be “given” – as a property, capacity or competence. Agency is something that people do. Agency is influenced by the past experiences, observations towards the future and engagement with the present (Biesta et al., 2015). Priestley et al. (2015, p. 27) draw attention to how teacher agency is often, *“conceived as a slogan to support school-based reform...one regularly hears teachers referred to as agents of change...this provides a one-dimensional, and even misleading, view of agency... suggesting that to be agentic is to follow lines laid down by others”*.

It is therefore important that teachers feel genuinely in control of their learning and development and take initiative from the ground up. In most cases this presents a model of

educational change and improvement grounded in teachers' CPD. This stands in stark contradiction to the model of educational change and improvement currently in existence. An alternative approach to educational change and improvement not only presents a level of challenge to the teacher in learning new ways to improve their practice, it also challenges leaders and managers to accept that there is an alternative way of doing things. As discussed previously, this is often made more difficult by the relentless quest for colleges to be recognised as "outstanding" further education providers, under which conditions, risk taking (e.g., handing control of two teachers) becomes a much less attractive proposition.

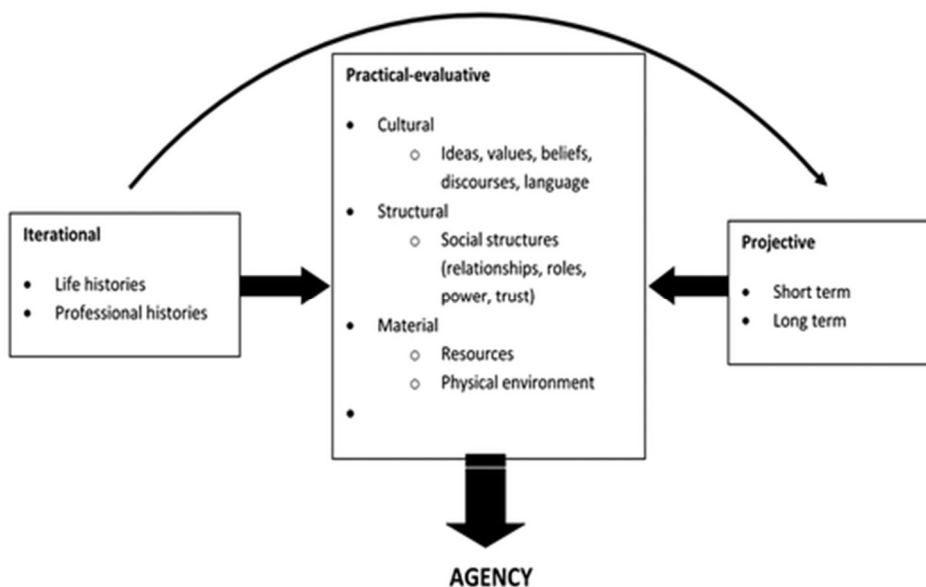
For those in support, teacher agency is seen as "*an indispensable element of good and meaningful education.*" (Biesta et al. 2015, p. 624). However there remains an undercurrent of tension between educators and "decision makers" and the element of control they have over their own work resulting in a tension between teacher agency and a focus upon evidence-based and data-driven approaches. While research suggests that beliefs play a key role in teachers' practice, there appears an apparent mismatch between teachers' individual beliefs and values, and wider institutional evaluative discourse and cultures of improvement. A relative lack of a clear and coherent professional vision of the purposes of education indicates that the promotion of teacher agency does not just rely on the beliefs that individual teachers bring to the improvement of their own educational practice, but also requires collective and collaborative institutional development and consideration.

The lack of a clear process for supporting the development and exercising of teacher agency in their own professional learning may be one of the reasons why there remains some hesitancy on the part of education leaders and managers. The promotion of teacher agency is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, a "return" to teacher agency is discussed in Biesta et al. (2015, p. 624) who indicate that there has been a significant shift given several decades of policies that

worked to “*de-professionalise teachers... with prescriptive curricula and oppressive regimes of testing and inspection*”. Biesta et al. (2015) correlates the achievement of agency and past experiences, an orientation towards the future, and engagement with the present (Figure 2.6). Biesta et al. (2015) also highlights the influence of social, cultural, structural and material factors.

**Figure 2.6**

*A model for understanding the achievement of agency (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 627)*



Teacher agency is highly dependent upon the personal qualities that teachers bring to their work including their professional knowledge and skills. The beliefs and values that teachers bring to their work is also an important consideration although these appear to be influenced by the, “*the often-confused discourses encountered in schools, and in teachers’ often superficial understandings of such discourses*” (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 636). There is some

suggestion that the absence of “robust” professional conversation may be a factor which limits a teacher’s capacity to adjust their beliefs making certain choices inevitable:

*“Access to wider discourses about teaching and education would provide teachers with a perspective on the beliefs they and their colleagues hold and would provide a horizon against which such beliefs can be evaluated”* (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 638)

Fielding et al. (2005, p. 77) are critical of the role of school CPD co-ordinators and senior staff, insisting they should ensure that both the content and promotion of professional development programmes consider individual teacher identity. *“They should not assume that teachers know what they need or that they will go out and get it if they do.”* The advised strategy involves inclusive design of CPD, accounting for those less likely to articulate their needs, making engagement and accessibility more achievable. This begins to highlight a connection with the differentiation strategy employed to ensure all teachers’ and learners’ needs are considered and addressed.

## **2.14 Considering Adult Learning Theory**

Teachers are often encouraged to ensure the “differentiation” of learning is addressed in their lesson planning. Differentiation is used as a means for meeting the individual needs of teachers and learners and involves responding to the existing knowledge of each teacher and learner. The aim of differentiation is to address the often-diverse needs of learners, stretching from those labelled as “gifted and talented” to supporting those with learning difficulties and additional learning needs (Munro 2012; Nightengale-Perry, 2019). Teachers are expected to offer multiple learning opportunities, in which learners can engage in a way most appropriate

for them. To be used comprehensively, differentiation must consider a range of **pedagogical approaches in order to address potential factors** influencing student knowledge and attainment such as gender, culture, and socio-economic background (Munro, 2012; Taylor 2017). Differentiation can be linked back to Vygotsky's (1978) intervention theory, which centres on the importance of focusing on learners as individuals and support for their academic achievements rather than on the curriculum (Nightingale-Perry, 2019). Differentiation means customising teaching to focus a specific student's needs and the way they learn (VanTassel-Baska, 2012).

VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005) suggest a number of reasons for the lack of differentiation by teachers in their lesson planning. The most transferable of these to differentiated CPD provision being; lack of belief that students differ in the way they learn, not having the planning time needed to adjust the curriculum and not feeling supported or encouraged by the school leadership to value and guide differentiated strategies. Another argument is that differentiation as described above is an impossible task and that the most realistic approach a teacher can take is to employ a wide variety of approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in order to accommodate the diverse needs of learners.

Nightingale-Perry (2019, p. 1) states *“Educators do not have a class full of children...that all learn, work, and achieve at the same level. Rather, teachers graciously welcome a room full of students who are anxious or even nervous for a new school year, eager for success, and working at a wide variety of ability levels.”* This is not dissimilar to the room full of educators attending CPD sessions. They all have a different skill set, different experiences, and a different reason for attending.

There appears to be little if any research focusing specifically on differentiation within CPD delivery, yet we might refer to Adult learning theory or “Andragogy”, defined as the “art



*and science of helping adults learn.*" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43), in order to consider some of the nuances of working with adults (or teachers in the case of CPD). Knowles (1984) presents six characteristics of adult learners that are thought to influence how they approach learning:

1. *Adults need to know why they need to learn something*
2. *Adults need to build on their experience*
3. *Adults need to feel responsible for their learning*
4. *Adults are ready to learn if training solves an immediate problem*
5. *Adults want their training to be problem focused*
6. *Adults learn best when motivation comes intrinsically*

Knowles (2013, p. 64) recognises the significance of andragogy in stating that "*Adults enter into education with a different perspective from children, which in turn, produces a difference in the way they view learning*". When planning and delivering CPD we must therefore consider the difference between traditional pedagogical approaches as a 'teacher' and the nuances of andragogy, in particular what Knowles refers to as '*certain conditions of learning*', which are most conducive to growth and development in adults. According to Knowles (2013, p. 69-70), these include:

- A. *The learners feel a need to learn.*
- B. *The learning environment is characterised by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences.*
- C. *The learners perceive the goals of a learning experience to their goals*
- D. *The learners accept a share of the responsibility for planning and operating a learning experience, and therefore have a feeling of commitment toward*
- E. *The learners participate actively in the learning process*

F. *The learning process is related to and makes use of the experience of the learners.*

G. *The learners have a sense of progress toward their goals.*

Knowles's definition of andragogy can be defined as a constructivist approach to learning that might encourage adult learners to draw upon their personal experience and in turn create new learning based on previous knowledge or understanding. If we look more critically at the nuances of adult learning we might consider *"how adults learn to recognize and challenge ideological domination and manipulation... to counteract the continuous reproduction of blatantly unequal structures and create more inclusive democratic arrangements."* (Brookfield, 2001, p. 7). We must, therefore, consider andragogy as a means by which to support the exploration of learning, being mindful of the 'characteristics' of adult learners and conscious of the potential pitfalls, as Brookfield (2010, p. 215) suggests too much critical reflection can result in *"distinctive emotional rhythms – impostor ship, cultural suicide, road running, lost innocence and community"*.

Important here is the recognition that not all learners are the same (differentiation). Some will have the confidence to challenge existing constructs whereas others will need support in developing the ability to do so. Therefore, In order to exploit the valuable existing knowledge of adult learners effectively, Cox (2015) discusses how Knowles's (1984) theory of andragogy might underpin 'coaching', a *"constructivist intervention through which adults can gain support for their self-directed learning"* (Cox, 2015, p. 37), as a method of teaching and learning, particularly in relation to self-direction or autonomy in the learning process.

Cox (2015, p. 33) discusses how *"inconsistencies and conflicts"*, brought about by coaching conversation *"contradicts expectations, frustrates intentions, or challenges values and beliefs...[and] create openings for learning"*. Key to the success of coaching as a learning

method is recognising the importance of conversations being contextually attuned to the learner rather than an institutional agenda. Through non-judgemental listening and open questioning (Cox, 2013), coaching can support the characteristics of andragogy set out by Knowles (1984), however, as Cox (2015, p.36) suggests even through coaching, confidence in adults to challenge the status quo is not a given, especially where inexperienced coaches may find it *“easy to allow the program agenda to take precedence over the learner’s real needs”*.

A further consideration of coaching as a method for adult learning is recognition that *“the majority of learners are not ready for coaching until the easiness and familiarity of their everyday life is interrupted in some way... and the potential for some form of change or transformation becomes apparent”*. (Cox, 2015, p. 33). These points are important considerations which need to be taken into account during the intervention stage of this thesis where coaching conversations play an important role in helping practitioners to be critically reflective of their practice.

## **2.15 Summary**

Gamification is already widely prevalent in teaching and learning but has not so widely been applied to teachers’ professional learning, beyond individuals engaging with MOOC style courses. There are some concerns around the accessibility of technology for users, particularly with tight college budgets. However, the use of gamification techniques could offer some potential benefits to learners, notably a potential increase in motivation and a commitment to engage with learning content. Although this may not necessarily translate into the development of knowledge and skills.

A gamified process cannot solely rely upon the use of game aesthetics and mechanics. Personalisation of the learner experience remains of paramount importance when using a

gamified approach but there is some debate over whether extrinsic rewards such as digital badging and certification are helpful in motivating learners. Although frequently used to recognise competency, digital badges may also be measures of participation. The tensions and contradictions here, between learning tangible skills and/or knowledge and simply completing tasks leads to issues and a debate around what is being “measured”: learning or participation? It may well be that factors such as the maturity of the learner become the deciding influences in whether these extrinsic motivators are helpful or otherwise. In any event, there appears to be a need for some intrinsic reason for users to engage with learning in a gamified way, to ensure prolonged engagement in learning and greater opportunities for learning and improvements in learner achievement. Future research might focus on exploring the potential of gamification and digital badging as a potential approach to delivering CPD in different contexts, and more specifically the field of education in order to develop more nuanced theoretical frameworks to better understand the impact, if any, upon teacher motivation and engagement with CPD.

Online learning in general offers an alternative to traditional in-person delivery and if implemented in a structured developmental process, it has the potential to elicit successful outcomes. However, the nature of online learning as a typically asynchronous experience can impact upon levels of learning, engagement and motivation, where the social elements of learning, such as collaboration and debate, are absent. An example of successful online delivery can be seen in the MOOC platform approach. As long as the technology is available to support it, MOOCs have been shown to improve access for groups who might otherwise be excluded from the educational opportunity, due to factors such as time, finance or geographical location, although there is still a great dependency on these courses being well defined and dynamic in their delivery for them to be deemed as meaningful. This large-scale model of delivery is not

without its pitfalls as issues such as learner anxiety and a lack of social interaction have been reported as flaws of a large distance learning model. These are all valuable points for consideration as we move into Chapter 3 and discuss potential interventions.

According to the literature in this field of study, professional learning and development are seen as primarily instruments for improving classroom teaching and subsequently student outcomes. However, there is more to consider when designing and implementing CPD, whether it be through online or more traditional face-to-face channels. There is no doubt that CPD is crucial in developing teaching and learning, however in educational practice, the quality of CPD provision is, to say the least, mixed. Funding streams often dictate what can and cannot be spent on CPD, but this does not need to be to the detriment of quality. A clear purpose for the delivery of CPD can support teachers to be more responsive to change regardless of their level of experience particularly if the CPD involved does not feel superficial in both time and content. Whilst studies such as Collin & Smith (2021) and Sims et al. (2021) have discussed what “good” CPD might look like, offering some examples in practice, few studies seem to offer clarity on what alternative models of educational change and improvement might look like in practice, particularly in relation to pedagogical (or andragogical) design, if we are to make the wholesale changes such as those advocated for by Ball (2003; 2017;2018) and Coffield (2006; 2008; 2017).

Pedagogical design has a greater influence over the meaningfulness of CPD than whether it is online or in-person, with purposeful activities considering who the participants are and what the participants need being of significant value. Practitioners appear most critical of expert-led, top-down approaches to professional development, which are potentially costly in both time and money, yet yield mixed results with regards to participant satisfaction. External bodies such as the ETF and the EEF are actively looking to address the quality of

opportunities available to educators but with some sources suggesting that CPD activity should be dictated by content, internal CPD has a significant role to play and it may be individual college policies and processes which need to adapt to meet the needs of their workforces. Consideration must therefore be given to the culture of a college and the reciprocal relationship benefits a positive, collaborative and cooperative culture and model of educational and change and improvement based on teachers' CPD can present, particularly if it involves the provision of opportunities for teachers taking control of their own professional learning.

The topics of teaching and educational practice offer further opportunities for discourse, particularly around the view of teaching as a craft or even a relational practice in contrast to the idea that such a thing as "best" practice exists. The notion of "best" practice is fiercely contested in some literature from the disciplines of education, sociology and philosophy. Less contested is the concept of good practice, which when shared can facilitate more sustainable changes in teaching educational practice, particularly amongst peers. This in turn, can lead to the development of communities of practice, through which teachers can share their lived experiences of educational practice and develop their knowledge and skills whilst addressing enduring educational issues. This collegiate approach to professional development offers an invitation to engage in more of a *shared endeavour* between all those involved, beneficial for both the teacher and their peers who can take on the role of critical friends.

In this thesis, I aim to align the CPD recommendations from contemporary research with the foundational theories of established work on educational practice, pedagogy, and the purpose of education (Dewey, 1934; Carr, 1995; Bernstein, 2000; Biesta, 2015; Dunne, 2021). This offers insights into perspectives regarding how we might approach educational change and improvement differently from the current approach, which is heavily shaped by the Ofsted EIF.

Ofsted's EIF clearly holds influence over the decisions being made within schools and colleges, CPD related or otherwise, with the instrumental technical-rational "measurement" of education still commonly "achieved" through objective-driven observation and inspection policies, which are rooted in belief that there is "empirical truth" which enables inspector to determine "outstanding" teaching and educational practice. This approach has been seen to have a detrimental impact on the actual development of teaching and learning, in the main, due to the lack of encouragement for risk-taking and the prevalence of measures and pressures for the demonstration of teacher's performativity in its stead. Couple this with the top-down, expert-led CPD, which is often the default approach of colleges looking for a "quick fix" in order to tick the right box on the Ofsted checklist, and we end up with policies and processes which are set up to inhibit the identification, development and realisation of good educational practice, stunt teacher innovation in context, and destroy trust between teacher and college leaders. This is certainly not the best environment for supporting and encouraging teacher agency.

Literature reviewed in this chapter supports the argument that teacher agency should be a key consideration in the design and construction of CPD for teachers. It also supports the view that the persistent role Ofsted plays in influencing decision making within colleges, has the potential to limit the potential for agency unless college leaders feel willing and able to push back. In many cases, agency may be promised but not actually achieved as it is dependent upon the individual capacity of teachers and the culture of the organisation. Key to this is the opportunity for robust conversations around teaching, learning and pedagogy as well as other emerging and enduring educational issues. Agency is not about letting staff loose or "off the hook", but about providing conditions through which teachers have an element of choice in how they learn and develop their knowledge and skills in relation to good educational practice.

It also cannot be assumed that teachers know how to do this so the model of CPD plays a significant role in guiding and supporting practitioners in realising educational change and improvement.

Finally, the differentiation of teaching and learning strategies and resources should also apply to CPD delivery as it is not significantly different to imperatives to consider the individual learner needs within a classroom. An understanding of adult learning theory can support with CPD differentiation but there are still gaps in knowledge relating to methods of differentiating CPD for teachers. Further consideration for the context in which teachers find themselves in and what might be done to support their development, in relation to that context, may provide a further point of productive discourse as this thesis progresses.

There are many points for consideration here and there is a wide range of literature available in relation to the three key research questions and associated areas of interest. The above review of the literature underpinning this thesis indicates that CPD involving teacher agency, differentiation, collaboration and cooperation can offer an original contribution to knowledge by exploring the lived experiences of CPD for existing teachers in an FE setting. This involves considering the internal and external influences faced by teachers, before proposing a model of professional development which addresses the need for teacher agency and a differentiated mode of delivery. In addition, the role that online learning can play in supporting this is examined and discussed further in later chapters of this thesis. The process by which this will happen is further detailed in the next chapter, Methodology.



## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter critically discusses competing philosophical paradigms in the field of educational research. It then moves to a description and justification of the research methods and processes employed in this study. Consideration is then given to the purpose of educational research, followed by an examination of the ontological and epistemological positions underpinning this investigation. My intention here is to provide both a grounding for and clarification of decisions made regarding the adoption of these ontological and epistemological positions, the design of this research study, the research methods employed and the ethical considerations guiding this research.

### **3.2 Considering characteristics of research**

Coe et al. (2017) identify a number of key characteristics that they argue all research must exhibit. An understanding of these common elements of research may aid comprehension of the overarching aim of the educational problem that is being explored in this research. Educational research can be described as critical in that it attempts to question the claims and assumptions of itself and others. Even the most obvious and popular perceptions deserve to be challenged while at the same time avoiding irrelevant and confusing discourses. The appropriate choice of research methods in any study is essential (e.g. focus groups and semi-structured interviews) to ensure that the opportunity to scrutinise perceptions through detailed discourse is secured.

Furthermore, educational research must be systematic, deliberate and planned, focusing on a specific topic for debate and ensuring that the direction of travel is clear. A structured approach helps to facilitate the disassembly of research questions in order to provide comprehensive answers and corroborative evidence. Much care has been taken in this thesis to pose research questions which frame a careful and structured debate yet at the same time offering participants the opportunity to discuss their own feelings and perceptions around the subject of CPD and their own professional learning. It is also important to note that a systematic approach does not inhibit free discussion of lived experience, especially when considering an interpretivist epistemology.

Being “*evidential*” is a separate characteristic observed by Coe et al. (2017, p. 11), who suggest that educational research must appeal to “*evidence, not opinion, authority or common sense as the basis for its justification*”. This closely aligns to the empiricist notion of experiences and the *authentic* representation of data and provides clear and logical justification. The pragmatic approach adopted in this thesis makes it possible to be evidence-based while at the same time admitting and working with opinions. For example, within the field of law, “*opinion evidence*” refers to evidence of how an individual think, believes, or infers in regard to facts and their own personal experience (Law, 2014). This form of evidence provided is dependent on the credibility of the account provided and the ability of the reader to be judge and/or jury, regarding the extent to which I as researcher have been able to accurately interpret the “truth”. The context of this investigation and the role of participants as working practitioners provides a level of credibility and authenticity to their personal accounts and therefore in this case opinion evidence becomes highly relevant.

Transparency is another aspect to consider when conducting educational research. Aims, methods, assumptions and arguments must be explicitly stated and results

complemented by clear justification of findings. Conflicts of interest, beliefs or prior assumptions must be shared openly and efforts to make the process of data analysis subject to scrutiny from other researchers. I have in previous chapters and continue in forthcoming chapters, to bring to light any conscious bias I may have as well as recognising the assumption that a level of unconscious bias is also plausible. One way to reduce the impact of bias is to ensure the research is guided by, and tests out theory in the arena of practice, be that existing thought or new supposition, which can be built upon and tested in order to make sense of experiences and allow further predictions to be made in future research. I have already discussed theoretical influences in the literature review and in this methodology chapter, which have continued to change my mind, and I apply the same level of scrutiny to the theories of data collection and analysis in Chapter 4 with the intention of continuing to ensure transparency.

A final proposed characteristic of research is originality. This does not imply that all research must be ground breaking or different in entirety. Instead the suggestion is that research should aim to make new discoveries, in new and different contexts in order to confirm or challenge previous findings or to formulate new theories. This allows research to enhance our understanding in a way that is more than just re-presenting existing knowledge. Each of these characteristics are carefully considered in the course of this research to ensure that all existing questions are sufficiently answered and new ones raised as we go forward. The credibility of this research relies upon the authenticity and trustworthiness of both researcher and practitioner experiences as they are reported and nurtured through a systematic, transparent and evidential approach to educational research.

### **3.3 Considering types of educational research**

The aim of educational research has been identified by Coe et al. (2017) as being potentially scientific, political, therapeutic or aesthetic in nature. I initially expected that this research would be empirical in nature, through building and testing a theory, based upon a formulated plan of action. However, as I continue to understand the nature of methodologies in educational research with more clarity, the aim of this investigation now appears to be a blending of varied research intentions.

This research is scientific in the sense that I want to systematically understand the reasoning behind individual research and educational preferences and broaden my own knowledge of digital and online learning. There is to me, an obvious undercurrent of political direction, with the intention of providing an intervention which changes the way in which professional development is identified, focused, designed and delivered, with the purpose of directly and indirectly improving education. The notion of “impact” within the title of this thesis implies a need for change in terms of model of educational change and improvement, which is representative of political aim (Coe et al., 2017).

This research could be described as incorporating therapeutic aims as it sets out to support individual teachers in accessing CPD which both develops and improves their teaching practice and meets their own individual needs. The action research model employed (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), offers both the practitioners and researchers’ opportunities to address existing issues regarding the perception of CPD and its delivery. Finally, this research has an aesthetic purpose, in that it intends to represent individual lived human experience, telling the stories of individual practitioners and the impact certain professional learning interventions have on their personal and professional growth.

This research can be categorised as “applied”, as far as its intention is to question both existing methods of practice in the field of teachers’ professional learning and educational policy, and it is my intention that this applied approach will help to both inform and improve CPD provision in further education in general, or within my own organisation at the very least. Both empirical and theoretical viewpoints are explored in this study, in order to understand the impact of this research and the underlying philosophical arguments surrounding this research.

I do not expect that this research will unearth a set of golden rules or a “one-size-fits all” of “just add water” quick-fix solutions to complex educational problems. I suggest more of an idiographic rather than nomothetic approach to understanding what is unique and distinctive about the particular context, case or individuals being investigated, where the concerns of practising teachers remain central in all of this. My persistent use of the word intervention when referring to the methods employed in this research might seem to suggest its intention is to employ a new method of delivery and study the reaction of participants. It is not. The intervention reported in this study is in fact intended to support my understanding of the issues surrounding the nature of educational practice and the processes through which educational practice improves. As stated by Coe et al. (2017, p. 10) “*we can only fully understand the world if we understand how to change it*”. This stands in contrast to the alternative descriptive approach which more simply describes a situation as it is, without attempting to change it.

### **3.4 Understanding Educational Research**

*“It is not enough that teachers’ work should be studied: they need to study it themselves”.*

(Stenhouse, 1975, p. 143)

Mindful of the words of Stenhouse above, this thesis takes the form of an investigation into my own practice as a teacher, a researcher and an education leader. It focuses on the lived experiences of further education lecturers as they continue professional development activities in a college of FE in England, and as a practitioner-researcher, my own experiences of conducting this research are also an integral part of this thesis. Experiences of teaching, research and professional learning contribute to the arc of the narrative of this study as it evolves. The twin focus on practitioner-researcher and teachers' experiences add significant value to this research as they present direct accounts of educational experience from the "inside". By taking everyday experience as its starting point, this thesis is grounded in the practical pedagogic lifeworld of teachers and education leaders in FE and the potential meanings and conclusions that can be derived from those experiences. My intention is to respect the reality of human experience-as-lived and the meaningfulness of our lives. Research studies such as this in the discipline of education, do not constitute a pursuit of certainty but a quest for richer understanding and deeper knowledge through careful interpretations of human experience, beliefs and feelings.

Scott and Usher (1996) remind us that research is a social practice and not just a technical enterprise (i.e. an applied set of techniques, methods, skills and processes). The distinction between educational research and other forms of research requires us to look beyond the fundamental characteristics and deeper into the nuances of education itself, and the underlying issues surrounding agreement on research methods, questions, rules and criteria to be followed by educational researchers. Coe et al. (2017) suggest that it may be easier to avoid such conflicts and classify educational research as any research seeking to inform or improve the practice of education. It is important to consider that the field of education and educational

research are subject to historical, political and socio-economic factors, each of which are capable of influencing a paradigm shift. The acceptance of an agreed definition of educational research is still under debate and like many aspects of education, there are polarising opinions despite attempts to provide a unified set of assumptions to inform and guide research (Lincoln et al., 2013 in Coe et al., 2017). Moses (2002) makes a distinction, between philosophy “in” educational research and philosophy “as” educational research:

*“Philosophy in educational research refers to the kind of philosophical analysis that takes the practice of empirical educational research as its point of departure. It involves critical discussions of research methodology and how empirical educational research is framed. Philosophy as educational research is relatively more autonomous and more long standing, and it construes “educational research” more broadly...to determine how to frame and analyse philosophical problems peculiar to education”.* (p. 1)

Scott and Usher (1996) suggest that most research is systematic in nature, empirical, and involves the collection, analysis and presentation of data. They argue that Research is dependent upon descriptions, explanations and generalisations, allowing *knowledge claims* to be made alongside predictions for future research. Kuhn (1970) coined the term paradigm to explain the shared understanding of new ideas in science and a particular way of seeing the world.

The 3 major research paradigms under consideration here include, positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory. These can be seen to run along a continuum between positivism and interpretivism with critical theory challenging the claims of these dichotomies. Coe et al. (2017) illustrate research as being framed by a series of related assumptions and formulated around 4 key questions:

**Question 1** - Ontology, questions “what is the nature or form of the social world?”;

**Question 2** - Epistemology, questions “how can what is assumed to exist be known?”

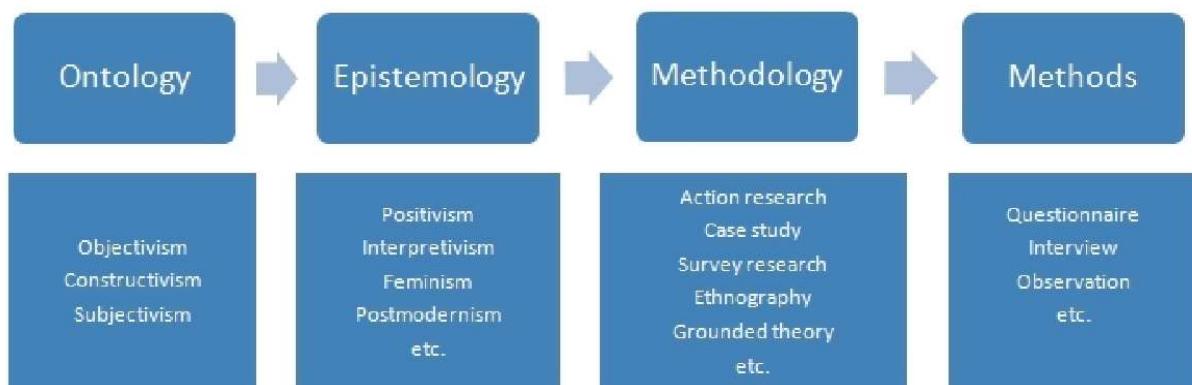
**Question 3** - Methodology, asks “what procedures or logic should be followed?”

**Question 4** - Methods, asks “what techniques of data collection should be used?”. (p.16)

These key research questions are further represented in Figure 3.1, which also includes some example “answers” for each.

**Figure 3.1**

4 key research questions (Brown, n.d.)



### 3.5 Ontological Views

Delving deeper into the term ontology, we can categorise this as the nature of things that exist or an inventory of assumptions regarding what is real in terms of the nature and form of the social world. Ontology can be defined as the study of reality or things that are assumed to comprise reality (Slevitch, 2011). Broadly, the three main ontological positions are realism, idealism and materialism (Snape & Spencer 2003). Realism lays claim to an external reality



independent of human perceptions, whereas, idealism dictates that reality can only be understood through human perceptions and social construction. Materialism is similar to realism in that it claims that there is a real world, but with the caveat of this being dependent on physical or material things. Other phenomena such as beliefs, values and experiences may arise from a material world but play no part in shaping it.

As discussed above, this thesis aims to interpret the value of the individual experiences of teachers and the representation of multiple realities. This signifies a considerable shift away from the original ontological and epistemological positions I held at the outset of this research. When this thesis was in its infancy, I had expected to focus almost solely upon the measurable impact of a proposed intervention. This reflects a viewpoint far more akin to realism and a singular objective reality, independent of perceptions. However, it would appear that ontologically the roots of this thesis are more aligned to the idealism end of the spectrum, specifically constructivism, which claims that objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective and that knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind. "*The constructivist or interpretivist believes that to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it...[to] clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors*" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 222). A constructivism ontology supports the notion that realities are multiple and socially constructed by the individuals who experience them.

### **3.6 Epistemological Views**

Epistemology deals with how we can know what is assumed to exist. Epistemology denotes knowledge built upon, perception, sensation, intuition and reason. The two main perspectives regarding knowledge are positivism and interpretivism with the former reflecting the adoption an objective approach and the latter being subjective in nature (Scott & Usher,

1996). According to Bryman and Bell (2013) epistemology concerns the question of what is regarded as acceptable knowledge. It must also be considered as to whether it is possible to study the social world according to the same principles as those employed in the study of the natural sciences.

Epistemologically, this thesis broadly follows an interpretivist approach. This approach perpetuates the idea that knowledge is a human construct which we interpret in order to make meaning and therefore research should investigate the lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. From this standpoint, qualitative methods are used to understand people, not to measure them. Interpretivism argues that if we want to understand social activity we need to investigate the reasons and meanings that activity has for people (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). Using an interpretivist approach supports the interpretation of participant interaction, providing justification and authenticity of their experiences and how meaningful these are.

**Table 3.1**

*Fundamental differences between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms.*

*Adapted from Bryman (2008) in Kuluchumila (2022)*

	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>
Principle orientation to the role of theory to research	Deductive; testing theory	Inductive; generation of theory
Epistemological orientation	Positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological orientation	Objectivism	Constructivism

Positivism and Interpretivism paradigms at first glance (Table 3.1) appear to offer a polarised view of how research should be conducted, which can be characterised as a matter of objectivity versus subjectivity or more simply facts versus values. However, it may be that these paradigms are better suited at alternate ends of a continuum, in which it is possible to

adopt a mixed methodology to ensure research questions are addressed. When addressing the ontological and epistemological standpoint of this research it is important for me to avoid instigating an unnecessary polarising paradigm dispute. Positivism has served me well to date, with my roots in scientific research, but I begin to wonder if perhaps the time has come in the conduct of this research for a shift in viewpoint which is more relevant to the line of educational research pursued in this thesis.

Despite the tendency to construct a dichotomy between positivist and interpretivist approaches, the importance of authenticity and trustworthiness should still be of paramount concern. Authenticity and trustworthiness are important within research yet difficult to achieve in full. Epistemological and ontological assumptions can make it difficult to protect anonymity, hide authorship of work and avoid unconscious bias (Scott & Usher, 1996). In the next section of this chapter I outline and discuss my understanding of the 2 main paradigms, their aims and intentions, and areas of criticism. I also provide my reasons for adopting a more interpretivist approach to this thesis and serve to promote authenticity and trustworthiness.

### **3.7 Empiricism and the Positivist Paradigm**

Empiricism is a form of epistemology, which presents the idea that knowledge is derived from and relies upon sense experience distilled from experimentation and observation. It forms the bedrock and structure of most “traditional” scientific research methodology and encourages measurement, testability and looks for answers based upon facts. In this sense, science can be seen as a privileged model of investigation, a search for certainty to ensure validity. Empirical methodologies are intolerant of difference. It is possible that most research is based upon an empiricist epistemology but with the underlying reasons taken for granted. It is often the assumption that these are the “approved” way of working. According to empiricism,

not all knowledge claims has the same status and some knowledge must be demonstrated through measurement and observation. In essence being logical means being valid. Empiricism relies upon objectivity and requires researchers to be unbiased in their application. However, yet again, this is an assumption which can often be taken for granted.

### *3.7.1 Positivist and Empiricist Assumptions*

Scott and Usher (1996) propose a series of assumptions underpinning a positivist/empiricist approach to research:

- 1. "The world is objective in that it exists independently of knowers ... Through - systematic observation and correct scientific measures i.e., by being "objective" it is possible to discover this lawfulness and to explain control and predict phenomena.*
- 2. There is a clear distinction between subjects and objects the subjective knower and the objective world. There is also a clear distinction between facts ... and values*
- 3. Validity of knowledge claims is a matter of whether these claims are based upon the use of senses, on observation enhanced by measurement ... Different observers exposed to the same data ... should be able to come to the same conclusions. This is intersubjective validation ...*
- 4. The Social world much like the Natural World. Thus, there order and reason in the social world, social life is patterned and this pattern has a cause and effect form things do not happen randomly or arbitrarily. The goal of research, to develop general and universal laws that explain the world is therefore common to both the natural and social sciences.*
- 5. All the sciences are based the same method of finding out about the world. The natural and social sciences share a common logic and methodology of enquiry*

6. *Epistemological inquiry and critique about the research process is a pointless exercise. So long as the right methodological procedures have been properly applied questions of reflexivity need not be considered". (p. 12)*

From an empiricist perspective, logical rules and explanations are regarded as being independent of the world and social practices, this is universal rationality. There are however issues with the idea of "total" empiricism. The need for and process of justification does involve a potential social dimension in terms of collectively held conceptions by communities of researchers, which can lead to empiricism being used to influence politics despite the lack of neutrality. The validity of data can be questioned with generalisations purporting to offer truths, yet in some cases being too general in their assumptions.

Scott and Usher (1996) point out that making a knowledge claim is not simply a matter of appealing to logical and universal rules because, since all knowledge claims involve justification, they all have social dimensions. They argue that:

*"Claims are justified within collectively held conceptions about the world, and how to relate to it and know it. It is these underlying conceptions are embodied in particular epistemologies. Of course, some conceptions have more credibility. and therefore, more power than others. The most powerful conceptions are those of positivist/empiricist epistemology which holds up the methods and procedures of the natural sciences (scientific method) as the model for all research. One implication of this is that a positivist/empiricist is as much a matter of politics i.e. power than of mere logic. In other words, the rules themselves are not neutral". (p. 13)*

As Scott and Usher illustrate, a highly problematic issue here is that the social world, unlike the natural world, is not lawful, orderly, or predictable. Social events are complex and it is often neither straightforward or easy to determine their outcome. However, if positivist/empiricist predictive generalisations are imposed on the social world treating it as a determined and closed system when it is not, then the very status of knowledge generated in this way (predictive generalisations) becomes questionable.

### 3.7.2 Critiquing Positivism

Scott and Usher (1996) discuss Kuhn's (1970) critique of positivism suggesting that knowledge from a positivist perspective is often seen as a linear, cumulative journey. Kuhn (1970) argues that data and observations are influenced by theories before research even begins. The norms and boundaries of empiricism offer control, yet Kuhn suggests that scientific research can be critiqued just as social practices can, with research communities offering cultural influence and science therefore being contingent rather than necessary. Scott and Usher (1996) turn to the field of quantum physics to support Kuhn's critique of empiricism. They point to the error of seeing the physical world as being independent, mechanistic and orderly. Instead, they argue, a more apt way is to see it as holistic, indivisible and in flux:

*"In quantum physics, events do not have well defined causes since they occur spontaneously, their occurrence depending on the dynamics of the system rather than on a single cause/effect, part/whole interconnectedness. Furthermore, phenomena require an observer in order to be observed - so decisions about how to observe will determine is observed. Hence the subject-object separation and the assumption of a knowable independent existing world becomes harder to maintain."* Scott and Usher (1996, p. 17)

Research, therefore, is not simply a technical process and researchers are ultimately influenced by normative consensus and community commitment, not necessarily by pre-set immutable boundaries.

### **3.8 Hermeneutics and the Interpretivist Paradigm**

Another influential but not dominant epistemology in social and educational research, is *hermeneutic-interpretive*. This paradigm opposes the idealised and universal logic of scientific research suggesting that it is inappropriate for social research. Instead proposing that:

*“...knowledge is not concerned with generalisation, prediction and control but with interpretation, meaning-making and illumination.”* (Scott and Usher, 1996 p. 18).

Scott and Usher (1996, p. 18) point out that above all, hermeneutic-interpretive epistemology reserves its strongest criticism for what it describes as *“scientism, the view that the natural sciences are a supra-historic natural enterprise ...and the sole model of acquiring true knowledge”*. Citing the work of Gadamer (1975) Scott and Usher (1996) go on to argue against the placing of science outside of history and human life. They note how, for Gadamer:

*“...the main problem with scientism is the imperialistic claim it makes on behalf of the natural sciences. In opposition to this, he wants to argue that there is more to truth than scientific method and the natural sciences do not provide the one single model of rationality. There is a major problem with the scientific model of rationality. In positing a universalistic, abstract model of rationality, there is a forgetting of the conventionality of reason, the reason is forged in specific historical practices, and thus operates through traditions, rather than being, an overcoming of tradition.”* (p. 18)

Rooted in the study of social practices is the assumption that all human interaction is meaningful and is influenced by social, historical and political contexts. The application of empiricist methods is therefore discounted in this study on the basis that they do not consider human actions (Scott & Usher, 1996). Within the context of this thesis, for example, which focuses on individual teachers' experiences of CPD activities, human actions are highly likely to be influenced by a person's perceptions of the social, historical and political factors influencing CPD provision.

The interpretation of observed human actions can be sense-checked by schemes or frameworks. In some cases, interpretations may be provided by both the researcher and participants, therefore offering what is known as a "*double-hermeneutic*" approach. This approach considers both the subject (the researcher) and object (other people) of research to have the same characteristic of being *interpreters* or *sense-seekers*, strengthening the determination of meaning with the dual perspectives (Scott & Usher, 1996). This is certainly a consideration in this thesis, where data collection methods such as focus groups offer the potential to involve participants in the interpretation process as well as detailing my own perspective and narrative.

The concept of a hermeneutic circle of interpretation is based upon the discovered meaning of each part of a whole. Scott and Usher (1996, p. 19) liken this to understanding the individual chapters of a book contributing to the overall meaning of the book as a whole, through an iterative cycle. "*As well as being perspectival and partial, interpretations are always circular*". This again provides evidence of a dichotomy between interpretivism and the linear, cumulative knowledge formation of positivism. Interpretivism is not, however, the unorganised free for all, which may be expected from an alternative to positivism. It is of course still important that research is systematic and takes place against a background with a consistent



set of assumptions, beliefs and practices known as traditions, in place. These traditions need to be kept hidden from the objects of research to avoid the need for defining laws that govern human behaviour, something that is deemed essential in a positivist methodology (Gadamer, 1975 in Scott & Usher, 1996, p. 18).

Kuhn (1970) supports an interpretivist/hermeneutic epistemology with his critique of empiricism and its individualism, suggesting that individual researchers do not work alone and are often supported by invisible communities, which although often fragmented and inconsistent, influence the research. Interpretivist-hermeneutic epistemology plays an important role in celebrating the influence of socialisation in assisting the "*philosophical reconfiguration*" of science, bucking the traditional and long held empiricist belief of universal truths (Scott & Usher, 1996). Kuhn (1970) suggests that concepts such as rationality are likely shaped by socialisation, conformity and faith, and cannot truly be empirical in nature.

### 3.8.1 Critiquing Interpretivism

Despite the perceived benefits of working outside of empiricist boundaries of logic and truth there are also criticisms of the interpretivist approach. Take the notion of objectivity. Scott and Usher, (1996, p. 21) discuss how historical situatedness and pre-understandings make it "*difficult for researchers, as interpreters to be objective about the meanings produced when researching*", with the suggestion that interpretivist researchers must temporarily "*set aside preconceptions, suspending subjectivity and assuming the role of a disinterested observer*". This notion is not supported by Gadamer (1975) in Scott and Usher (1996, p. 21), who states that it is "*impossible to escape from our "pre-understandings" even temporarily*", but instead it is the interaction between or interpretations and pre-understandings that give meaning to research and development of knowledge, through a more open-minded approach. This is a critically

important factor in this thesis which includes researching my own practice and the practice of colleagues.

Gadamer does however offer some support to the idea that interpretivism can be objective, discussing the hermeneutic circle as a "*fusion of horizons*", in which knowledge is sought whilst grounded in perspective. This perspective offers the limitations required for a standard of objectivity, comparing and contrasting varied interpretations and arriving at a general consensus. Scott and Usher (1996) describe this as a "*learning experience*" involving dialogue.

### **3.9 Considering Contrasting Viewpoints**

There is suggestion from Kuhn (1970) that the nature of investigation (methodologies) are not always immutable. Kuhn discusses the possibility of a paradigm shift - suggesting new ways of working or a "*scientific evolution*", where new paradigms become dominant through conversion of new scientists and the degradation of old paradigms. Coe et al. (2017) discuss the many different paradigms which exist and ways in which they may be reconciled through; incommensurability, compatibility and pragmatism.

Incommensurability encourages full commitment to the fundamental nature of each paradigm. With this approach it is not possible to deviate from the pre-set boundaries of each one. A belief in the fundamental structure of the chosen paradigm is enough to discount all alternative options. Compatibility dictates that a philosophical stance is taken on fundamental issues of reality and knowledge. However, other choices are not necessarily constrained, particularly in relation to speculations and methods employed. Gage (1989) cited in Coe et al. (2017, p. 8) states "*Paradigm differences do not require paradigm conflict*". This approach

suggests an ability to employ polarising concepts, without dispute. In essence, a sliding scale of methodologies may be more appropriate, dependent on context.

Pragmatism offers this “*mixed methods*” approach, and is suggested by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) as a potential paradigm of its own. In essence, pragmatism implies that the notion of paradigms is problematic and challenges the whole notion of paradigms (Coe et al., 2017). Choices may be influenced by the values or beliefs of the researcher, as will the questions they raise, rather than being dictated by immutable, predetermined boundaries. Pragmatism allows for operational decisions to be made based upon “*what will work best*” when finding answers to the questions under investigation. The opportunity for innovation and adaptation within the research, offers a degree of flexibility when finding solutions to research problems. This is especially useful in understanding contradictions between quantitative results and qualitative findings, of which there will be an opportunity to collect both during this research. Interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data would aid in the clarification of participants’ points of view, with findings grounded in participants’ experiences. Pragmatism is therefore considered as a valuable option within this thesis in the event that research conditions change.

### **3.10 Critical Theory**

With its origins in the 1930’s and closely associated with the theory of pragmatism (James, 1904; Dewey, 1905), critical theory has become increasingly popular and influential following the work of Habermas (1972). Habermas, recognised that traditional methods of empirical research are linked too heavily with particular social or technical interests involving predetermined outcomes through known rules of pre-given means and allowing for prediction and control. Habermas further identified the Hermeneutic approach, in which predetermined

outcomes are not accepted and known rules of method are not followed, suggesting that outcomes are dependent on appropriate decisions and judgements and offering opportunities for enlightenment, understanding and discourse. Neither positivism or interpretivism, it is argued, has an interest in changing the world, which is the aim of the more pragmatic, critical theory approach, focusing on freedom of thought, justice and democracy. Habermas does maintain distinction between critical theory and pragmatism, concluding that it is the spirit of pragmatism, rather than its detail, which might help research with a critical theory focus.

Critical theory therefore challenges both positivism and interpretivism suggesting that a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches offers a more pragmatic approach to research (Coe et al. 2017). Critical theory aims to expose the ideological boundaries that maintain balance and control and increase awareness of material conditions which moderate knowledge-gains (Scott & Usher, 1996). Critical theory encourages the recognition of enduring dictatorial forces and a "*call to action*", either individually or collectively, to inspire change.

The focus of critical theory is upon the development of praxis (moral practice) rather than the development of empiricist rationality or hermeneutic human understanding. Furthermore, critical theory rejects the notion of outright objectivity suggesting that it is not possible to obtain an impartial perspective because all judgements are influenced by the ontological standpoint of situatedness and knowledge is influenced by technical, practical or critical interests. There is, however, some alignment between critical theory and the hermeneutic approach in that a level of objectivity can be achieved through having the right arguments, and through an awareness of pre-understandings of all participants, rather than the right methods sought with an empiricist approach (Scott & Usher, 1996).

### 3.10.1 Critique of Critical Theory

Habermas (1972) in Scott and Usher (1996, p.2 3) discusses the issue of “*systematically distorted communication*” and how this can lead to issues with the validation of claims in critical theory. To argue this point, in favour of critical theory, it is suggested that all communication must make the following claims:

- A. *What is being said is intelligible or meaningful*
- B. *The propositional content of what is being said is true*
- C. *The speaker is justified in saying what he or she is saying*
- D. *The speaker is speaking sincerely*

If communication is shown to be meaningful, true, justifiable and sincere then it can be said to be “*undistorted*” and therefore successfully valid. It is also integral that all participants of conversation are offered an “*ideal speech situation*” in which there are no external constraints or controls put in place (Habermas, 1972). This allows for a level of scrutiny to be maintained over the quality of interaction, providing some regulation of knowledge gains.

The potential ambiguity of using a pragmatic approach, inter-mixing both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, may be problematic in being able to derive meaning from research as well as interpret the application of methods. However, Biesta (2010c) does offer some guidance on how these issues may be addressed, including the combination of opposing ontological and epistemological views.

Overall, I have found it an important part of the methodological process to review and critique the dichotomy of epistemological viewpoints. I feel better informed about the nature and purpose of investigation and the “quest” for knowledge that is the substance of this

research. My ontological and epistemological perspectives have deepened and expanded in the course of this study, and although not necessarily an easy or comfortable process for me, it is likely to support the conduct of a much more authentic, credible and meaningful research study.

### **3.11 A Change of Perspective**

*“Fundamentally, research is about disciplined, balanced inquiry, conducted in a critical spirit.”* (Thomas, 2013 in Coe et al., 2017, p. 17)

Grix and Watkins (2010, p. 62) in Coe et al. (2017, p. 19) states that it is important *“to question and explore the “shady” areas between research paradigms”*. Now familiar with the various perspectives of multiple paradigms as a researcher, I feel capable of identifying aspects of each within this thesis. Throughout these first few chapters I have witnessed a shift in my willingness to accept alternative viewpoints to the formerly unconscious bias I have held, and through consistent questioning of the aims I have predetermined for this research, I am able to take a more measured and methodical approach to addressing my research questions.

The most considerable change is my acceptance of both positivist and interpretivist perspectives. Previously, I have been more accustomed to the positivist approach often taken in “scientific” research as part of my undergraduate degree, however, since engaging more with educational research and aspects of educational philosophy, I have a greater understanding of the role of interpretivism and understanding of social constructions. At times I still find myself craving the comfort of empirical and logical quantitative data, yet when exposed to the variety of perspectives obtained through qualitative research methods I am able to question whether the logic and methods of natural science can be effectively imported into social study. It is,

therefore, my intention to draw upon both positivist and interpretivist methods within this thesis. Regardless of approach, the overall goal of my research remains the same.

I would argue, therefore, that neither positivism or interpretivism can be solely identified as “ideal” methodologies. Instead I suggest that research methodologies are dependent upon the pragmatic flexibility of an individual, their mindset and their commitment to the methods of working that they are accustomed to or which are most appropriate in the context of the research problem and the surrounding questions. It may even be possible to apply these methodologies to a sliding scale as an alternative to presenting them as polarising concepts.

I find some comfort in the words of Coe et al. (2017 p. 19) in that “...it is discerning while at the same time encouraging to know that many researchers experience and acknowledge confusion over the terminology employed in this whole paradigmatic debate”. If academics and scholars with many years of experience between them still struggle in their application of research paradigms, then the conflict I feel between where I am and where I need to be is somewhat reduced.

The idea that researchers must conform to the confines of certain philosophical positions is something which has been keenly debated, with the work of Sparkes (1987) and Lincoln and Guba (1994), championing the adoption of various positivist and interpretivist assumptions. Yet, as Weber (2004) discusses, the rhetoric surrounding these approaches has become increasingly outdated. It may be that researchers have recognised that they have little impact on the practice of actual research. Instead, there has been a shift in paradigms in order to maintain focus upon the research questions and what it takes to answer them, rather than discussions about the nature of reality and the possibility of truth. Maybe this would substantiate the view of Pragmatism or critical theory, discussed earlier in this chapter, which

can largely be attributed to the work of John Dewey and his pioneering work of the early 20th century.

Brown (2012) discusses Dewey's opinion that modern science has not only given us a different view about reality, brought about by an approach to the "*scientific experimental method*", but also that it has given us a false one. A pragmatic methodology may provide me with the opportunity to utilise a range of methods to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1 (Clarke & Visser, 2018). Nevertheless, I must continue to consider the complexities of educational research and my exploration of debate around the most appropriate methods of inquiry. Coe et al. (2017) suggest that despite the dichotomy of the paradigmatic assumptions (Table 3.2), the same fundamental questions associated with ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods, frame all research and research processes.

Although inclined to follow an interpretivist approach to this research I do not want to automatically exclude the use of quantitative methods. It is still my belief that no singular methodology serves best in the overall attempt to answer research questions and it is clear that throughout most studies a crossover can be seen particularly in the research methods employed. In this thesis, for example the use of surveys and questionnaires may be highlighted as a more positivist approach to data collection. However, where these include a mix of open and closed questions, and are then succeeded by focus groups and individual semi structured interviews, a more interpretivist viewpoint is employed. This thesis therefore predominantly follows an ethnographic research design with the methods employed helping me to understand social experience from the point of view of those being studied (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). The methodology chosen aims to create an environment in which conditions foster conversation which is open and honest, and a positivist approach does not allow this.



**Table 3.2***Comparison of positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism (Adapted from McBride et al., 2022)*

	<b>Ontology</b>	<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Methodology</b>
Positivism	Objective reality	Knowledge is real and objective, obtainable via measurement and statistics (reductionism)	Surveys, experiments, statistical analysis
Interpretivism	Subjective reality	Knowledge is dependent on beliefs, values, and lived experience (constructivism)	Field studies, case studies, hermeneutics, phenomenology
Pragmatism	Objective/subjective	Knowledge is obtained by doing and acting	Mixed methods research, action research, design science

Mack (2010, p. 8) suggests that *“one of the limitations to interpretive research is that it abandons the scientific procedures of verification and therefore results cannot be generalised to other situations”*. However, this is countered with the suggestion that the impact of interpretive educational research resides with findings resonating directly with the experiences and knowledge of teachers. The adoption of the action research method in this thesis represents an attempt to make connections to the experiences of other teachers in similar contexts. In view of the above I arrive at the decision that this research must be essentially pragmatic, ethically sound and trustworthy and truthful in order to remain authentic, credible and dependable. It is often said that *“Statistics don’t lie”* but at the same time they don’t always tell the whole truth. Sometimes the absence of context to affirm statistics can lead to them being misinterpreted or misunderstood, leading to decisions which have a considerable impact on education for both teachers and students. It may be more appropriate to state *“Statistics don’t lie. They’ll tell whatever truth you want them to”*. My intention in taking a pragmatic approach to this study is to help me to avoid assumptions based solely upon quantitative data

and putative variables. Instead I want to focus upon the real-world experiences of practitioners.

### **3.12 Why qualitative research**

*“To be accepted as trustworthy...data analysis [must be] conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematising, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail...to determine whether the process is credible”.*

(Nowell et al., 2017, p. 1)

Nowell et al. (2017) make the point that while qualitative research is a valued paradigm of inquiry, the complexity that surrounds qualitative research requires qualitative researchers to use rigorous, careful, transparent and systematic approaches to data analysis in order to create trustworthy and useful results. Qualitative research is focused on the pursuit of the knowledge of human experience (Sandelowski, 2004). It is dependent upon the ability of the researcher to analyse and interpret data appropriately. Thorne (2000) describes data analysis as the most difficult phase of qualitative research.

Within quantitative research the data collection methods employed can be identified as the “instrument” of analysis. However, when conducting qualitative data analysis, it is the researcher who becomes the instrument for analysis, making judgments about the identification of categories as well as the coding and contextualisation of data (Nowell et al., 2017). Hallinger (2018) recognises the limitations of contextualisation when employing the quantitative paradigm, with qualitative and mixed methods studies more likely to elaborate observed themes in context, with the intention of building theory in place of simple description.

Undertaking qualitative research puts great responsibility upon the researcher to assure data are analysed with rigour and trustworthiness, in ways which can be made transparent through the complete disclosure of the methods of analysis and the means through which judgments are reasoned

Qualitative data are predominantly collected in the form of participants' actual written or spoken words, as is the case in this study. Data analysis therefore involves the interpretation of these words, including what they imply and what they presume. Consideration is also given to the context in which they have been spoken (Denscombe, 2017). As discussed in Chapter 3 it is assumed that through analysis of actual and written words it is possible to construct a picture of social life. However, it is important during this process to read between the lines, unearthing the meaning behind what has been said, and interpreting the hidden meanings and inferences behind words in text or conversation is an essential skill of the qualitative researcher (Denscombe, 2017).

There are many proposed methods for conducting qualitative analysis such as content analysis and grounded theory. These offer a range of advantages and disadvantages depending on the data being collected, and as discussed in Chapter 3, the ontological and epistemological standpoints adopted by the researcher. Regardless of the methodology and methods employed, a number of key factors feature in systematic data analysis. These involve the identification of units/categories, codes and themes.

Denscombe (2017) and Nowell et al. (2017) both discuss the importance of identifying "units" or "categories" of data. These may take the form of individual words, sentences, paragraphs or even whole passages of text. It is pertinent at this stage to consider and make clear how each unit or category of data has been isolated from both the words around them and the social context in which the words were used (Denscombe, 2017).

The process of coding allows the researcher to simplify and focus on specific characteristics of the identified units or categories of data, supporting a transition from unstructured data to the development of ideas about what the data convey (Denscombe, 2017). During coding, units of data are designated labels relating to a particular theme or issue (King, 2004). It is essential that codes are explicit in their inclusion criteria to ensure clear comprehension of the data, supporting the evolution of key themes. DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) in Denscombe (2017, p. 362) suggest:

*“A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole”.*

### **3.13 Research Methods**

I am aware, and sensitive, that I have taken on an insider role within this practice-focused research study, which is, in part, an investigation into my own professional practice. My role as an education leader and facilitator of CPD requires me to design and deliver regular professional learning development opportunities for all staff. In this role, I have had significant opportunities to access willing participants for this study. More specifically, lecturers from three separate departments within my college were invited to participate in the initial stages of research. This sample was a purposefully chosen case study group which included a variety of practitioners, part-time, full-time, experienced and inexperienced, teachers with potentially contrasting views of the current professional development offered.

This thesis employs a practice-focused approach to action research (AR), which centres around a particular intervention which aims to achieve educational change and improvement. The intention is to provide theories for practice as opposed to more general, objective findings

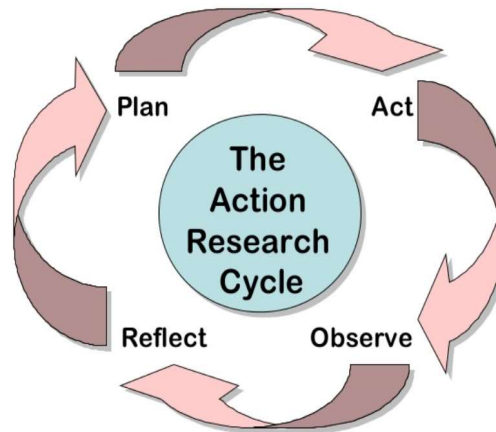
(Mack, 2010). In this research the initial intervention involves delivering professional development opportunities using a gamified approach. However, as discussed above, my chosen intervention has been modified and adapted in the process of this research:

*“Action research is a form of collective, self-reflective inquiry that participants in social situations undertake to improve: (1) the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices; (2) the participants’ understanding of these practices and the situations in which they carry out these practices...The approach is action research only when it is collaborative and achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members.”* (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 5)

Zuber-Skerritt (1992) proposes a 4-stage cycle of AR; planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Figure 3.2), although this is not necessarily a linear process, and the iterative nature of AR results in opportunities to adapt and develop actions over the course of the study. The adaptability of AR is one of its greatest strengths, however, from an ethical perspective there may be some concern that the participants are not fully aware of exactly what the research will entail. Participant consent is therefore obtained with the explicit statement that the parameters of the project are subject to change and participants have the right to withdraw at any time.

**Figure 3.2**

*The Cyclic Model of Action Research as proposed by Zuber-Skerritt (1992)*



The methodology of AR has been the subject of ethical review by Gelling and Munn-Giddings (2011), who identify seven stages as the basis for evaluating the ethics of a research project; value, scientific validity, fair participant selection, favourable risk-benefit ratio, independent review, informed consent, respect for enrolled participants. These points have been taken from a review on clinical research (Emanuel et al., 2000 in Gelling & Munn-Giddings, 2011), where it is concluded that these principles may be addressed, in AR, through collaboration and shared flexibility with participants.

AR is more commonly associated with a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data and focusing on the implementation of change rather than the interpretation of meaning. This would seem to align with the pragmatic approach of this thesis as well as Coe et al. (2017) who state that action researchers may use any methods relevant to their research questions. McChesney and Aldridge (2019) also discuss using mixed methods through an interpretivist viewpoint, which is still a vital consideration as I move forward. In

action research, an interpretivist philosophy suggests that the researcher is aware of and admits their presence and that their research affects the situation under investigation (Williams, 2006). A focus upon the subjective beliefs of research participants in relation to interventions taken means that an interpretivist approach is pertinent.

Revisiting the research questions posed in Chapter 1, there is a suggestion that elements of quantitative data collection could be employed in this thesis, particularly if assessing the influence of this online platform on practitioner engagement. As previously stated I don't intend to fully dismiss the use of quantified findings, which play an important role in triangulating responses. However, I now have a sense that the underlying focus of this research is the thoughts and feelings of participants and it is with this in mind that the data collection methods chosen are illuminative and predominantly interpretivist in nature.

### **3.14 Sampling and Data Analysis**

Sampling for this research was stratified and purposeful with particular consideration of the need to represent a credible and trustworthy account of the voices of practitioners. The strata used sampling were reflective of participants length of time in teaching and the level of provision being taught as it was felt that this would provide the breadth of feedback which represented the varied needs of practitioners. DeYoreo (2018, p. 1624) explains how *“Stratified sampling produces estimators that are more efficient than those from simple random sampling because of the homogeneity of the strata relative to the overall population.”*

I accept that there is an element of convenience in how sampling choices were made, as I sit as an insider-researcher within this study. However, I am confident that the purposeful approach taken to sampling has helped to avoid sampling error and under coverage, and I have been transparent in describing the demographic and other characteristics of the sample in

detail (Waterfield, 2018). As previously discussed in Chapter 2, there is no harm or shame in being an ‘insider’, and in many ways I believe this purposeful approach and “awareness” of the sample population has allowed me to represent a far more trustworthy account of practitioners lived experience.

I have been mindful of ensuring that the data in this study are analysed with meticulous thematic analysis, through the categorisation, and subsequent coding of ‘themes’ from open questions in pre and post-intervention surveys. These themes have been further triangulated with quantitative analysis of closed question responses and response rates to measure practitioner engagement with the online staff development intervention. In addition, member checking has played an important role in sharing the interpretation of responses with members to check authenticity and credibility of themes and conclusions.

As identified by Carl and Ravitch (2018, p. 1050) “*member checks are an important way to engage participants at various stages of data collection and analysis*”. The act of member checking, used both formally and informally in this research, helps to establish credibility through participant engagement and feedback, providing trustworthiness to this study overall. Informal member checking was achieved through casual interaction with practitioners who offered real-time feedback and validation for the actions being taken. The “genuine” conversations being had between myself and participants were really valuable in ascertaining the impact on college culture, which will be discussed in the findings in Chapter 5.

Formal member checking was achieved by asking for written participant feedback on research findings, and through seeking confirmation or correction on points being raised in surveys. Clarification and/or elaboration was sought where meaning was not otherwise clear, and participant feedback was actively sought throughout the many phases of data collection to ensure that the interventions, influenced by participant feedback, were aligned with their



previously expressed views and needs. As Carl and Ravitch (2018, p. 1050) discuss *“The process should involve sufficient time in the overall research design and timeline so that researchers can actively engage with and respond to participants’ critiques, interpretations, and additions. Ideally, member checks are employed at multiple points throughout a study so that they are proactively and intentionally structured into a study’s research design and not tacked on at the end of a study”*. In addition, this collaborative approach to data collection and analysis also helped foster a good trust relationship between participants (practitioners) and the researcher, ensuring that data analysis was representative of practitioners lived experiences.

Further practicalities of data analysis are discussed in more detail in the following chapter, including the use of primary and secondary data sets. However, It is important to note here that all data obtained and shared in this thesis has been done so with the prior consent of participants, or, in the case of secondary sources, is trend or headline data, which is in the public domain and readily available. I have not used any data for which I alone had privileged access.

### **3.15 Thematic Analysis**

The most appropriate approach to data analysis in this thesis is that of thematic analysis. Nowell et al. (2017) argue that thematic analysis is a:

*“qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions”*. (p. 2)

Thematic analysis requires the researcher to identify and report themes found within a data set, producing trustworthy and illuminative findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Offering a highly flexible approach, this approach to qualitative analysis, can be tailored to the needs of many studies, providing a rich and detailed account of data and offering a more accessible form

of systematic data analysis, particularly for those in the early stages of their research career (King, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

King (2004) and Braun and Clarke (2006) in Nowell et al. (2017, p. 2) argue that, “*thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights*”. Thematic analysis is particularly useful when working with a large data set, as it requires the researcher to follow a systematic data analysis and improves the clarity of any findings (King, 2004).

Nowell et al. (2017, p. 2) suggests that “*The lack of substantial literature on thematic analysis compared to that of grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology, for example—may cause novice researchers to feel unsure of how to conduct a rigorous thematic analysis*”. Although already discussed as a potential strength, there are also questions raised around the flexibility of this approach, in that too much flexibility may lead to inconsistency and a lack of clarity during the coding process and development of themes (Holloway & Todres, 2003). These fears may be allayed somewhat through adherence to the 6 phases of thematic analysis outlined in Nowell et al. (2017) as part of a controlled and careful inductive process.

**Table 3.3**

*Establishing Trustworthiness During Each Phase of Thematic Analysis (Nowell et al., 2017)*

<b>Phases of Thematic Analysis</b>	<b>Means of Establishing Trustworthiness</b>
Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data	Prolong engagement with data Triangulate different data collection modes Document theoretical and reflective thoughts Document thoughts about potential codes/themes Store raw data in well-organized archives Keep records of all data field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	Peer debriefing Researcher triangulation Reflexive journaling Use of a coding framework Audit trail of code generation Documentation of all team meeting and peer debriefings
Phase 3: Searching for themes	Researcher triangulation Diagramming to make sense of theme connections Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	Researcher triangulation Themes and subthemes vetted by team members Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	Researcher triangulation Peer debriefing Team consensus on themes Documentation of team meetings regarding themes Documentation of theme naming
Phase 6: Producing the report	Member checking Peer debriefing Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details Thick descriptions of context Description of the audit trail Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study

Nowell et al., (2017) propose a 6-phase method for conducting thematic analysis (see Table 3.3). They also discuss the means by which trustworthiness can be established. In the pursuit of trustworthiness, they identify a number of other factors including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and reflexivity. These are now explored and discussed further in this chapter in relation to their application to this research.

### *3.15.1 Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research*

The term trustworthy seems to be a consistent consideration in literature surrounding qualitative research (Denscombe, 2017: Nowell et al., 2017). Trustworthiness in positivist terminology would infer a degree of validity. There are different ways to achieve this in qualitative research, including member checking and triangulation, which have been briefly

discussed already in this chapter. Another consideration must be the consistency and cohesion of the actions taken, which can be encouraged by applying with transparency, an epistemological position underpinning any claims (Holloway & Todres, 2003).

The constructivist ontological position adopted in this thesis has encouraged an inductive, from the ground up approach to data analysis. However, it would be naive to suggest that educational researchers must solely adhere to only one particular philosophical position. There are of course going to be times when alternative viewpoints can and should be taken, particularly during data analysis, and in the case of this thesis, when a researcher is a relative newcomer to educational research. The consideration of alternative methods may play a part in reinforcing the decisions made by a researcher, or conversely, exposing different avenues of investigation. However, this should not in any way become a quest for “certainty” which would be inappropriate if retaining a constructivist-ontological and an interpretivist-epistemological standpoint. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss how it is impossible for qualitative researchers to prove in any absolute way that they “*have got it right*”. They go further by proposing a set of trustworthiness criteria, which offer practical choices for researchers concerned with the usefulness and acceptability of their research (Nowell et al., 2017).

### *3.15.2 Establishing Credibility*

In the context of this thesis, the notion of “credibility” is a more appropriate marker than the pursuit of validity. Indeed, the latter implies a level of certainty, which is not appropriate in a qualitative study of lived experience as is the case in this research. The term credibility is used to refer to a match between participants’ constructed realities and the researcher’s representation of them (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), offering a level of reassurance that qualitative data has been “*produced and checked in accord with good practice*” (Denscombe,

2017, p. 326). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a series of processes to establish credibility in qualitative research which include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, data collection triangulation, and researcher triangulation, which they argue should help to dispel any concerns over the accuracy or appropriateness of the researcher's interpretations.

Credibility in the context of this thesis has been demonstrated through the use of member checking and triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the role of member checking, in which participants are presented with the researchers' interpretations prior to publication, and how it can play a part in establishing credible and authentic findings. Member checking plays a significant role in the data analysis process of this thesis in both the individual semi-structured interviews and open question surveys, in which particular effort was made to clarify participants' views during and after data collection.

Triangulation in research is *"the use of more than one approach to researching a question"*, with the objective of increasing confidence in the findings through the confirmation of interpretations from two or more independent measures (Heale & Forbes, 2013, p. 98). This may be in the form of the use of different methodologies, sources of data or methods of analysis (Coe et al., 2017). Triangulation in quantitative research may infer a positivist approach in which data sets are compared. However, triangulation can also be utilised whilst in alignment with an interpretivist epistemology, when referring to the use of multiple methods of qualitative data collection and the convergence of information from different sources (Flick, 2004). This may include the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods which together, *"shed light on the same object from direct perspectives and in different ways, thereby giving a more comprehensive and valid picture"* Flick (2004, p. 172). This has been the preferred approach in this thesis, where it is felt that the constructed realities from qualitative feedback have helped to fill gaps in the contextually void quantitative data.

### 3.15.3 Transferability and Dependability of findings

Transferability supports the notion that findings may be generalised across wider comparable populations (Nowell et al. 2017, p. 3). Real life voices from within my organisation have told a story which would plausibly appear to resonate with others across the further education sector. This is only possible through the provision of “thick” descriptions, which is the responsibility of the researcher and has been achieved in this study through illuminative case studies and narratives from research participants.

It is plausible that the findings of this study may be more generalisable across the sector and even education in general, although this small-scale research study is also context dependent. There are very “successful” colleges (admittedly by Ofsted Standards) using graded observations, just as there are also many colleges who have chosen to move towards a less formal process of development, as illustrated in this thesis. However, the context and associated factors such as institutional, *“economic, political and cultural contexts”* (Hallinger, 2018, p.16), of each organisation play a key role in influencing the transferability of findings. Hallinger (2018, p. 16) further states that *“most reviews of research on educational leadership published over the past five decades have both treated context as a “given” and demonstrated a tendency to “average” findings drawn from diverse studies”*. Context is therefore a valuable consideration for the transferability and dependability of findings, and knowledge utilisation from studies such as this, must consider the potential for variation outcomes within any given context. The implementation of any guidance or recommendation by educational leaders must be *“sensitive to the specific features of the settings in which they work, the people with whom they are working and changes over time”* (Leithwood, 2017).

Dependability can be closely associated with the more empiricist viewpoint of reliability, but with a greater emphasis on whether multiple researchers may form the same conclusions from a data set, as opposed to focusing on the instrument of research as a dependent variable (Denscombe, 2017). As with the issue of credibility, it would be contradictory to seek certainty, instead the researcher may work to ensure that research *“reflects procedures and decisions which other researchers can observe and evaluate in terms of how far they constitute reputable procedures and reasonable decisions”* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 in Denscombe, 2017, p. 327). Dependability requires an explicit account of the methods, analysis and decisions made by the researcher, documented as an auditable trail so that a clear rationale may be determined by the reader. Nowell et al. (2017) discuss Koch’s (1994) argument that dependability is achieved when *“another researcher with the same data, perspective, and situation could arrive at the same or comparable, but not contradictory, conclusions”*.

#### 3.15.4 Confirmability and the role of Reflexivity

The last two factors associated with the trustworthiness of qualitative research in accordance with Nowell et al. (2017) are confirmability and reflexivity. Confirmability examines whether a researcher’s interpretations and findings are comprehensively obtained from the data being reported. Confirmability can only be realised where credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved (Nowell et al. 2017). Koch (1994) in Nowell et al. (2017) refers to the utilisation of *“markers”* relating to theoretical, methodological, and analytical decision making throughout study, in order for readers to fully comprehend how and why they have been made.

The final factor for consideration is reflexivity, which is a process through which changes in thought processes, methodological perspectives and changes of direction are navigated. In

this study I refer to these as “*key events*”, and personal reflections of the value of the insights obtained through this process have been documented. However, instead of a reflexive journal, promoted in studies such as Lincoln and Guba (1985), it has been my intention to provide a form of personal commentary during this thesis to provide an authentic reflexive account of my research journey, with rationale, and justification for the decisions being made in the course of this study.

### **3.16 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are particularly important for any research that deals with real people in real world situations (Bassegy, 1999). Coe et al. (2017) suggest that most ethical judgements evaluate actions, whether they have already taken place or are being contemplated. These judgments more than likely follow the moral perspective of what would or would not be right for someone to do in a specific situation. In research, ethics is concerned, firstly, with the “discovery” of truth and dissemination of knowledge, known as epistemic values, and secondly, how enquiries should be pursued, known as practical values (Coe et al. 2017). Hammersley and Traianou (2012) set out a series of ethical principles for research, including minimising harm, protecting privacy and respecting autonomy. I use these in this study as principles as a basis for ensuring that this thesis is conducted with full consideration of the importance of conducting ethical sound research.

#### *3.16.1 Observing ethical principles*

Ethical Clearance was sought and approved through the University of Sunderland prior to data collection taking place. Adhering to the “*Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*” (BERA, 2018) helped to safeguard participants, researchers and organisations.



Informed consent was sought prior to the investigation taking place, with all participants agreeing to be a part of the study. The purpose of the study and use of data collected was shared through a written statement and agreed through electronic submission. All participants have been offered the right to withdraw themselves and any personal data collected from the study if they so wish. No incentives have been offered and all duty of care has been taken to avoid any harm arising from participation in research.

According to BERA (2018), *“The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants data is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Researchers should recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy, and should accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity”*. Therefore, the use of student and staff names in surveys and data collection is not permitted in this thesis and any responses containing this information are omitted from the study. All survey data has been collected anonymously and kept in password-protected cloud storage. This is done in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018).

All content of interviews, where individual contribution has been provided, are published with consent and without any identifiable markers. Josselson (1996) in Bell (2002, p. 210) discuss the ethical importance of portraying the “truth” when transcribing interviews or focus groups content into narrative stating that *“when researchers take people’s stories and place them into a larger narrative, they are imposing meaning on participants” lived experience*”. It is therefore desirable for researchers to share narrative constructions with transparency or directly involve participants in the process to ensure truthful interpretation of their lives, which has been done through member checking as previously discussed.

Publication of research findings and practical implications are conducted with the permission and acknowledgement of all participants and collaborators, and are considerate of

the target audience, issues of confidentiality and any potential impact on participants. Safety of participants and researchers are of paramount concern and all parties have been made fully aware of their legal and ethical responsibilities. The utmost consideration is given regarding sponsors, clients and stakeholders, in particular the ETF, AoC and Sunderland University Centre of Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT), through upholding high levels of professionalism and integrity which also apply to the responsibility all practitioners have towards the wider community of educational researchers.

As a researcher I am aware of both conscious and unconscious bias when conducting this research, particularly when taking an insider role. The intervention activities are a result of over 200 hrs of personal work, meaning I have a vested interest in it working. To the best of my knowledge, I have acted with professionalism and consideration of the aforementioned ethical principles to ensure an authentic and ethically sound investigation has taken place with not merely the absence of bias or collusion.

### *3.16.2 Considering the human nature of research ethics*

As Husband (2020, p.7) states “... individuals are unique and will react differently to situations...”, a statement which applies to participants of research and the researcher themselves, and one which recognises the nuances within individual experience. When working with participants in this study I have been mindful of the “human” nature of my research and when considering ethics, it has been important to recognise ethical principles beyond an “adherence to the ritual of procedure” (Husband, 2020).

Palaiologou et al. (2016, p. 54) present the notion of “*Ethical Praxis vs Ethical Practice*”, recognising that educational research “...is concerned with relationships that are the products of human social and psychological experiences, the causality between actions and the people

*and the effect of the phenomena being studied*". Fundamental to *"Ethical Praxis"* is a consideration of how people conduct research and how different points of view are considered and represented. Palaiologou et al. (2016) go on to discuss that research ethics should be more than a bureaucratic process of ethics form filling, involving participants in all stages of the research process. During this thesis I have been conscious of my responsibility as the researcher to ensure that the "right action" is taken and to recognise participants as partners in the research process. In taking the view of ethics as not just a practice, but a praxis I have been able to remain contextually attuned, helping *"...to provide factual data at the same time as representing [participant] actions, emotions, dignity, privacy, autonomy and freedom to have opinions on all matters affecting them"*. (Palaiologou et al. 2016, p. 54).

An awareness of appropriate research design and methodological assumptions has led to a considered approach to research ethics. For example, In following an ethnographic research design, I have needed to be self-aware and reflexive in order to communicate my findings accurately and with conviction (Coe et al., 2017). This *"reflexive ethical responsibility"* (Husband, 2020), is important in demonstrating an awareness of the human nature of research ethics and to avoid a perfunctory ethics statement. Reflexivity has been an important trait for navigating a less straightforward research journey than I first anticipated in the early days of this thesis.

In qualitative research such as this, where the researcher is tasked with providing trustworthy representation of the experiences of others, reflexivity has supported the biographical representation of lived experience, which requires construction of a narrative *"that renders as clearly as possible what participants have said in the stories collected"*, Coe et al. (2017, p. 288), whilst recognising that the stories themselves are still likely to be only a partial

and selective commentary through *“reconstruction of events...rather than the events themselves”* (West, 2016, p. 35).

Another point for consideration regarding the human nature of ethics is the perceived balance of power between researchers and participants. Kaaristo (2022, p. 744) discusses the power dynamics within qualitative research and *“...the subsequent hierarchies and inequalities [which] are influenced by the researchers’ and research participants’ various social, cultural and physical characteristics and their combinations”*. As previously discussed I am predominantly positioned as an insider-researcher within this study and am likely to share cultural capital with the research participants. This “shared experience” has been critical in raising awareness of the potential impact of my actions on participants as well as supporting the contextual attunement of findings.

I must recognise that, at times, I have also identified as an outsider and the opportunity to inhabit a liminal space between insider and outsider (Kaaristo, 2022), has offered a dual perspective which must also be subject to ethical assessment, particularly when internal power dynamics changed significantly over the course of the study. With an internal promotion from an advanced practitioner role and a “peer”, to a senior leader and ““manager” at the half way stage of my research, a change of “status” is potentially a significant factor in how I am perceived by participants as an insider researcher. I have therefore remained cognisant of this shift in “political” boundaries and remain transparent in how this might have affected data collection

In employing an action research approach, which involves several interventions, I recognise that there will be some actions which may have caused discomfort to some of the participants in this study, however, I am reassured by Coe et al (2017, p. 60) who state *“Action research aims at a spiral of improvement, and it may be argued on this basis that all participants*

*will gain in the long run*". I am confident that I have observed ethical principles (minimising harm, protecting privacy, and respecting autonomy) on a practical level, but have also been mindful of the emotional and situational factors affecting participants of my research, particularly where it involves intervention through action research. I have been transparent with all who might be affected by the interventions being made and have taken purposeful action to mitigate any detrimental impact by retaining anonymity for research participants and my organisations (where possible). I have sought participant feedback, using formal and informal member checks throughout my research, in order to rationalise the interventions being made and to ensure accurate representation of participant voices. I have been committed to respecting the dignity and well-being of every participant, and have taken great care to ensure their voices were heard, their privacy protected, and their consent thoughtfully obtained throughout this study.

### **3.17 Summary**

In this chapter, I have explored the various ontological and epistemological perspectives, providing a critique of each and highlighting alternatives. I have aligned myself with a pragmatic epistemology through which knowledge is based upon the experience of both myself as the researcher and the research participants with each person's knowledge and experience being treated as unique. Ontologically, a pragmatic approach allows a researcher to consider both objective and subjective realities. Mixed methods data collection provides the opportunity for both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, using surveys and interviews.

## Chapter 4 - Data Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

The research methods presented and justified in Chapter 3 are put to work in this chapter to generate data which are analysed thematically and systematically using the six-step thematic analysis process advocated by Nowell et al. (2017). Data are inclusive of, but not limited to:

1. My experience as a practitioner, Teaching and Learning Coach and Head of Teaching, Learning and Quality at a large FE College in England.
2. The experiences of others involved in the interventions/initiatives employed in this thesis including; Teaching and Learning Coaches, Curriculum Managers and Teachers

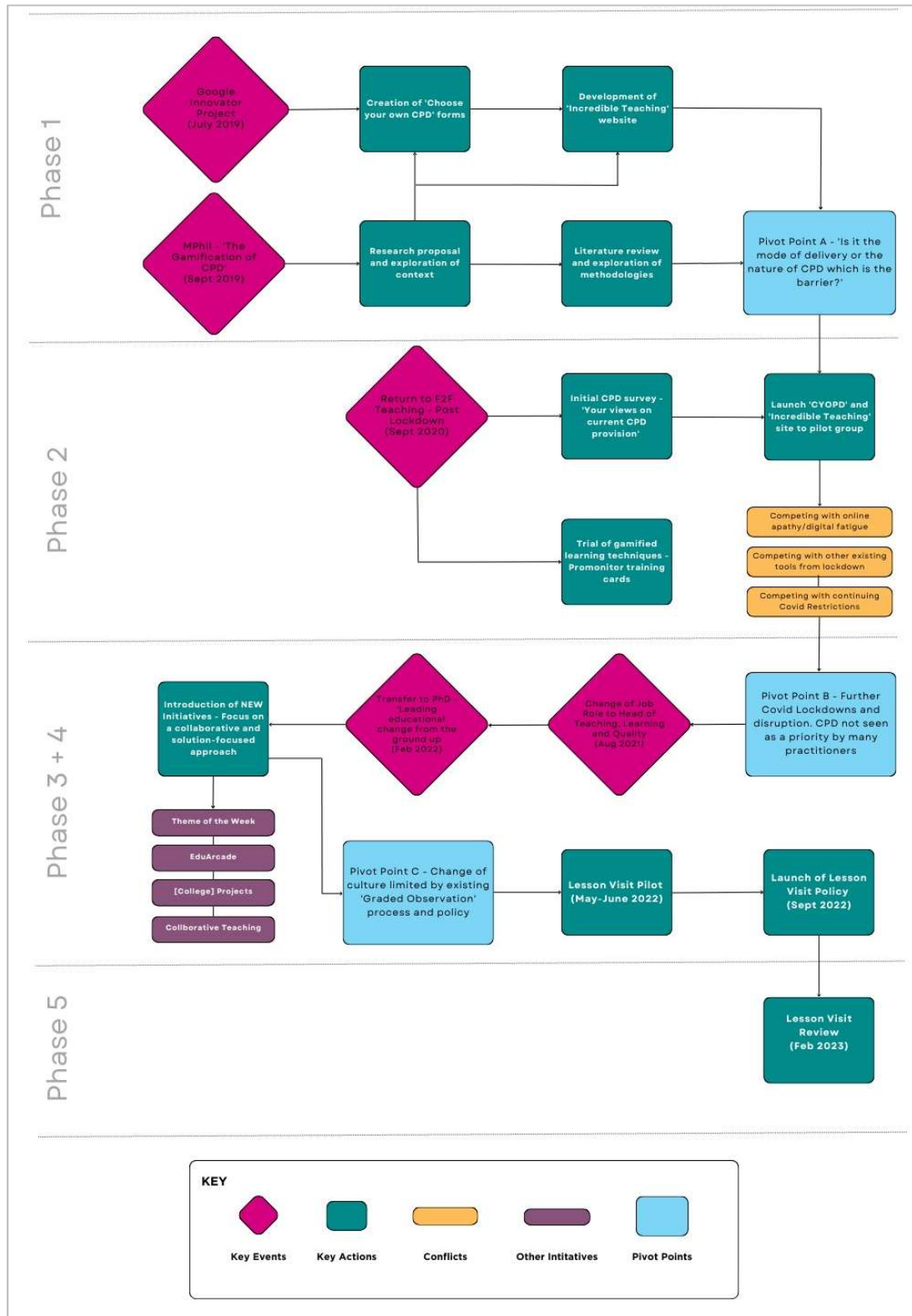
This logic framing study and the analysis of associated data are inductive, beginning with particular cases and moving tentatively towards what may plausibly be inferred to be more general. There are no preconceived hypotheses or theories in place. The intention is to observe the lived experiences of the research participants, and identify and categorise patterns in the data using systematic thematic analysis to bring sub themes and themes to light before making recommendations and drawing conclusions regarding what has been observed.

Due to the longitudinal nature of the research, multiple phases of data collection are employed in this study. At times leading to “key events” or “pivot points”. Triggered by both controllable and uncontrollable circumstances these are informed by feedback from participants of this study together with illuminative encounters of research conducted by others. A timeline of these phases and events are presented in Figure 4.1.

### 4.1.1. Timeline of activities

Figure 4.1

Timeline of activities during the data collection and data analysis of this thesis



## **4.2 Grounding the findings with Quantitative Data Analysis**

In the course of this research, I make a conscious effort to employ a pragmatic approach to data collection and data analysis. I ground the findings with quantitative data, using simple descriptive statistics obtained from closed questions in surveys and *Lesson Visit* logs and internal reports. I then turn to illuminating the lived experiences of practitioners and providing details of context, through qualitative exploration of open survey questions and associated interviews, where relevant.

## **4.3 Data Analysis**

This research has followed a pragmatic-constructivist epistemic perspective. Constructivism retains the idea that human knowledge is a human construct, and the examination of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it, is key to the credibility of this research. Pragmatism has supported an innovative and dynamic approach to addressing the research questions posed, which has in turn supported reflexivity and added to the dependability of findings.

In adopting a pragmatic, mixed-methods approach, quantitative responses to surveys etc., within the data analysis have been presented as percentages to provide contextual data, particularly in relation to the proportionality of responses. Qualitative data are presented verbatim and anonymous as either full or partial extracts of longer communications. Where necessary, comparisons and contrasts between quantitative and qualitative data have been made as expected in a pragmatic study. As previously discussed, all data obtained and shared has been done so with the prior consent of participants, or, in the case of secondary sources, is



trend or headline data, which is in the public domain and readily available. However, as Denscombe (2017, p.180) reminds us, it is important to note that,

*“...in practice, there is no simple demarcation line between ‘quantitative methods’ and ‘qualitative methods’. While, some methods might seem better suited to the collection of quantitative data, others to qualitative data, it is important to recognise that methods can lend themselves to the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, the quantitative/qualitative distinction actually relates to the data that I collected not the message of collection per se”.*

In this study, I have placed particular and significant emphasis on amplifying the voices of participants to ensure that their experiences and perspectives are at the forefront of the findings. To achieve this, I incorporated direct quotations from participants, allowing their words to speak for themselves and preserve the authenticity of their contributions. Thematic analysis was conducted in a way that allowed key themes to emerge organically from the participants' narratives, ensuring their insights shaped the direction of the analysis. Additionally, I employed a reflexive approach, acknowledging my dual role as a leader and as a researcher, remaining transparent about how these differing perspectives might influence the interpretation of their narrative. By involving participants in the process of member-checking, I also gave them the opportunity to validate and confirm the accuracy of my interpretations. Throughout the study, I presented a range of diverse perspectives, ensuring that participants' voices are not only heard but were fundamental in directing the analysis of data and conclusions drawn.

#### 4.3.1 Phase 1 - Pre-Intervention Survey (3 areas) and Interview

Data collection within this research has taken a phased approach. In Phase 1, an initial survey was used as exploratory work (Coe et al., 2017) to begin to understand the underlying issues relative to the research aims. Exploratory work conducted in this phase also included describing the research population, the collection of preliminary data and the identification of basic patterns of response amongst the participant group, as well as providing feedback on the thoughts and feelings of individual participants in relation to current levels of feeling towards approaches to teacher CPD within my organisation.

The survey was conducted using a Google Form, accessed through the sharing of a link in an email, which most participants are likely to use on a daily basis. A high response rate (67%), considered as publishable by the Canadian Medical Association Journal (Houston, 1996 in Coe et al., 2017), was achieved. This high response rate tells a story in itself, showing a clear interest from practitioners, and indicating that the topic of professional development was potentially an emotive one.

A mix of Likert-type responses and multiple-choice options were presented in questions designed to identify individual characteristics of participants and the types of professional development activities in which they had engaged. Each of these closed-questions was followed by an open-ended question to capture individual thoughts and feelings or to gain further clarification. The wording of questions was important to consider as Coe et al. (2017, p. 227) suggests that *“it is well known that people are prepared to give opinions about things about which they have no knowledge”*. Therefore, a mix of positively and negatively worded questions was also employed to avoid participants falling into automated responses. Open questions were used to promote more inductive reasoning and for generating more qualitative research

data and drawing some general conclusions from individual experiences. On completion of the survey, participants were asked to identify whether or not they wished to attend wider focus groups to discuss the findings of the survey in more detail. Phase one was an important process in understanding the “current state of play” as far as participant experiences to date.

As part of phase 1, a single semi-structured interview was conducted to ascertain if any further context might be provided for how participants felt about the existing CPD offer in their college, and what impact an online, gamified approach might have on improving this. Scott and Usher (2017) suggest that a true qualitative interview is unstructured, allowing the agenda to be set by the interviewee and primarily concerned with the participants’ views and opinions. However, in this study the interview was preceded by a survey, raising a number of key themes, which were valuable discussion points. It was therefore more appropriate to employ semi-structured interviews, designed to foster a “*flowing conversation*” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), in which participants were given the opportunity to share their experiences, insights, attitudes, feelings, and passions. Semi-structured interviews are still qualitative in nature and can be used, “*to consider experience, meanings and the ‘reality’ of participants’ experiences*” and how “[*these*]...*might be informed by discourses, assumptions or ideas which exist in wider society*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 3).

Questions in the interview were open-ended to begin with before becoming more conversational in nature. Discourse was led by what had been stated by the interviewee, which provided the opportunity for myself as a researcher to ascertain the meaning behind points raised both in the pre-intervention survey and during the interview.

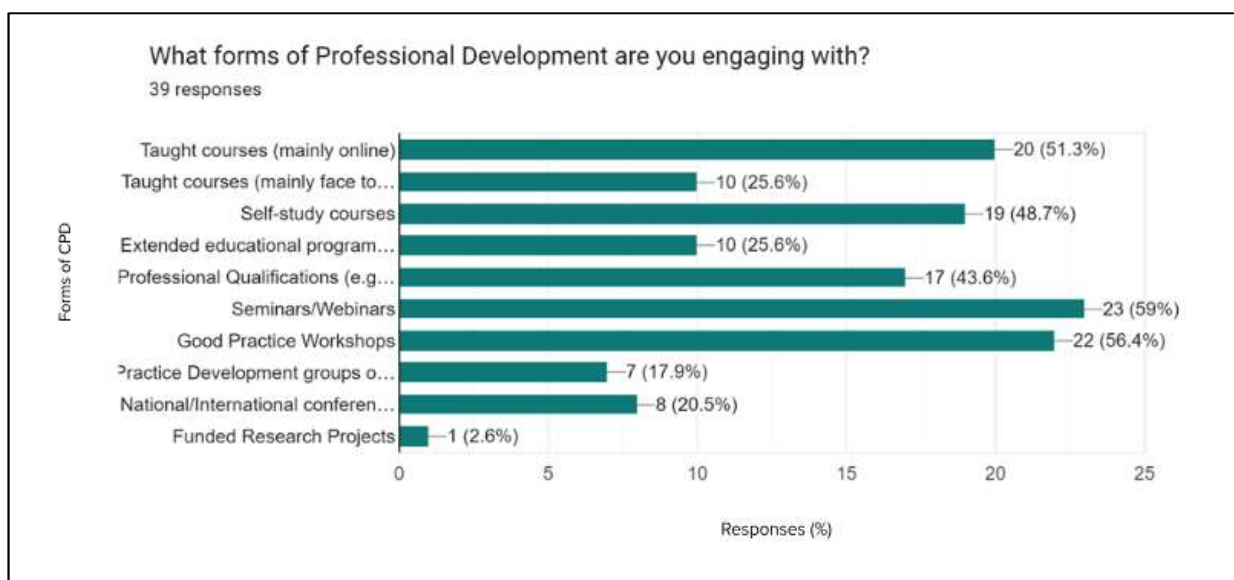
### 4.3.2 Data Analysis of Phase 1

The following represents the responses of 39 teachers, from 3 departments within the college (Business and Law, Sport and Public Services and Adult Education), who responded to the pre-intervention survey. Some questions were closed and designed to provide context. All other closed questions were preceded by an opportunity to expand on responses more openly.

In total 41% of participants had 15+ years teaching experience with 12.8% of participants having taught for 2 years or less. The amount of time spent on professional development in a normal year varied significantly but the majority felt that they had approximately 21-30 hours per year. There was some variety in the activities being undertaken as professional development (Figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2**

*Activities identified as main forms of professional development attended by survey participants*



Only 1 participant indicated that they had “no choice” over the CPD they engaged with. All other participants suggested that they retained some level of choice but again there was disparity between “Some choice”, “I have a choice”, “A lot of choice” and “All of the CPD I complete is my choice”.

When asked “What do you feel is the primary focus of professional development in your college?”, an overwhelming majority (69.2%) felt that it was to “Meet organisational Priorities” or “To develop teaching and learning” (66.7%). There was also a strong indication that professional development often had a focus on external influences such as Ofsted. Only 28.2% of participants felt that professional development was used to improve the health and mental wellbeing of staff.

When asked to rate the quality of internal CPD provision, 61.5% of staff rated favourably but there were not any ratings of “Excellent”. There were some obvious themes identified within the responses of those who rated favourably stating that in their experience CPD was targeted, provided choice and variety, was accessible and developmental.

<i>“Internal CPD is good, however targets staff as a whole”</i>	<i>“Whilst there is a wide range offered, much is rushed or completed during staff training days with little time to review and implement”</i>
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Participants rating less favourably suggested that, in their experience, CPD was too generalised, prescribed, irrelevant or unsuitable, and lacking impact:

<p><i>“Too many top down communications, no free time off timetable to explore good practice”.</i></p>	<p><i>“All courses are selected by the college and leave very little to outside options”.</i></p>
<p><i>“The activities that are relevant to teaching and learning often take a back seat to organisational agendas...and when choice is given it is sometimes not relevant to myself and my own needs and development”</i></p>	<p><i>“...simple elements such as recording [a] session to allow greater exploration and watching ‘on demand’ isn’t provided...[this] would be very valuable”.</i></p>

Additionally, one participant suggested that *“More benefit could be gained from being able to access the content at your own time or being given time to complete CPD in place of meetings that generally take up time and cost the organisation money”*, whilst another stated *“Sometimes I would rather be marking!”*.

When asked to rate the quality of external CPD 61.5% again rated it favourably, but in contrast to internal CPD, 12.8% rated the external offer as excellent. The key themes present in their reasoning were that external CPD was often of high quality, provided choice, was specific (to their needs) and there was variety on offer:

<p><i>"I have studied many accredited courses online to develop learning. (The) quality of resources is high"</i></p>	<p><i>"These are often course's that I have chosen to attend and therefore I have a vested interest in what is being delivered".</i></p>
<p><i>"The external CPD is directed specifically at the area of teaching I provide".</i></p>	

For those rating external CPD less favourably the following points suggested that it was due to varied quality in the delivery of training, the feeling that it was a "tick box" exercise or that in their experience it lacked specificity:

<p><i>"[The quality if external CPD is] very patchy. Some [is] good, some is terrible"</i></p>	<p><i>"The timing is normally out of sync with when you can utilise the training in your own practice".</i></p>
<p><i>"Some of the external CPD courses have been pointless, not relevant and a waste of time".</i></p>	<p><i>"I've not engaged in any external CPD for years !"</i></p>

When asked “How valuable is the majority of CPD you engage with to your personal development?”, responses were varied with 46.2% of participants suggesting that there was significant value, 20.5% suggesting insignificant value and 33.3% opting for neither significant or insignificant. Thematically it was suggested that those who felt there was significant value to their personal development, did so because they were able to enhance their skills/knowledge, maintain standards, or they had a choice in what they engaged with:

*“I feel it enhances my knowledge and skills which then benefits my learners”.*

*“I am doing a masters apprenticeship so very useful for my future career plans”*

Those citing an insignificant value did so because they felt that it was a box ticking exercise, they lacked choice and influence over what they engaged with, or that CPD lacked a personal focus:

*“I find lots of CPD sessions are reactive with lots of the sessions offered that are catered for resistant staff and seldom encourage progressive staff the experience to explore and be creative even risky”*

*“As a trainee teacher all development is good development, but sometimes the CPD provided doesn’t quite help advance past what I’ve learnt in my PGCE or doesn’t make content current enough”*



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*“The balance between teaching and learning related development and the time to get to grips with this needs to be greater compared to the time spent focusing on organisational policies and agendas which although important play little relevance in my own personal development as a teacher”.*

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When asked *“How valuable is the majority of CPD you engage with in your teaching practice?”* there was a similar spread of responses to the previous question relating to personal development. The majority of participants (41%) felt that it was neither highly valued nor lacked any value. Those citing a high level of value attributed this to adding value and directly impacting on student outcomes:

*“There is often an opportunity to add value to teaching practice following a CPD session”.*

*“My competence translates into better outcomes for students”.*

Those citing a lack of value, attributed this to a lack of agency, a lack of time for implementation (of strategies and resources), concern over external factors such as Ofsted or a risk averse culture within their department or wider college:

*“The CPD given by the college I would love to be incredibly valuable but I believe the themes chosen are not always that valuable to the teaching staff themselves”.*

*“Most [are] supportive but some recent CPD has been agenda driven and does not support creativity, lateral thought and is risk averse”.*

*“There have been more relevant CPD’s over the last couple of sessions, however I don’t think it caters for individuals needs a lot of the time. Just seems like they’re trying to meet OFSTED requirements and not what is needed for teaching practice”.*

Survey participants were asked to provide examples of the “best” professional development they had experienced in the last 5 years. Examples included key themes relating to professional qualifications, being skills focused and practical, relevant to the teacher, informative and specific, supporting their career goals and rewarding with an element of individual choice in what was engaged with. It is interesting here to make the distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic factors identified and this will be a point of discussion in the next chapter.

Conversely, when asked to provide examples of the “worst” professional development they had experienced in the last 5 years, examples included themes relating to the CPD offered being too generic, lacking relevance or not being current, covering content beyond the existing skill set of the teachers, or top-down, box ticking exercises, which were “pointless”. Often it appeared that participants felt that CPD was being “done to them”, with decisions having

already been made about “actions” prior to the training taking place. Indicating that a lack of involvement within the decision-making process was a potential issue.

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What is the worst professional development you have undertaken in the last 5 years? – *“Agenda reactionary driven CPD”*

What made it the worst? - *“Garnering an environment that encourages ideology and restricts the freedom of independent thought due to the fear of reprisal for not being allowed to speak freely without judgement”.*

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Participants were next asked about the mode of CPD delivery being offered. There was a clear preference for in-person (30.8%) versus online (10.3%), although 51.3 % of participants suggested that it was dependent on the content being delivered. In-person training was seen as being more direct, interactive and social, supporting soft skills development and offering the support that some staff needed. Online training was deemed to be accessible, able to overcome time constraints, and cheaper and more appropriate for the basic, mandatory tasks.

*“Time pressures/money mean I can join more online but I prefer the face to face where possible for the interaction with colleagues”.*

*“Prefer face to face. But if it’s hoop jumping for renewing E&D or H&S online as the process is quicker and takes less time up your day”.*

It also seemed pertinent to ask participants how they felt about online training since the COVID-19 lockdowns. There appeared to be both positive and negative feelings but in general it was felt that staff had benefits from being forced to work online during this period. Key themes suggested that staff found online learning easier and more accessible and they had become more competent in completing it over the lockdown period

Participants suggested that online training was a useful alternative to face to face delivery. Participants also cited the benefits of a reduction in travel and fees for facilitators. However, the following comment *“I’m pretty open minded, some virtual training is great but unfortunately training that is poor in person becomes horrendous when online”* indicates the importance of quality training whether online or in-person.

Finally, further comments relating to individual experience of CPD stated the importance of avoiding a *“one size fits all”* approach to training so that valuable time is not wasted. Although there was an acceptance that some training needs to be mandatory, the mode of training should be considered and in some cases it may be better completed online. In the main, staff wanted to avoid prescribed, top-down training in favour of individualised, self-led training, with a choice of training content and entry level, particularly if relating to skills development.

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<i>“Too much focus on one size fits all”.</i>	<i>“CPD challenges you to think differently and try new methods and ideas so your teaching is always evolving”.</i>
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*“Not an overly positive one from my 10 years’ experience - the shift from teaching and learning based CPD to more of a numbers and box ticking exercise is evident over the years, no doubt hampered by the cuts and financial difficulties the sector faces. Cost savings on CPD in the light of financial difficulties is criminal and only weakens the workforce and reduces morale”*

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#### *4.3.3 Case Study - Teacher Narrative - Feedback from Staff Interview on CPD*

Following the pre-intervention survey a semi-structured interview was conducted with one of the participants, a lecturer who worked across multiple departments within the college. This interview provided an opportunity to further explore the questions asked in the pre-intervention survey, illuminating some of the key challenges and considerations for the delivery of professional development within a particular Further Education College. On conclusion of the interview, it was determined that sufficient data to represent the lived experiences of practitioners within this study, was able to be collected through a stratified and purposeful approach to conducting the mixed methods surveys. No further interviews were conducted. On reflection, although it was deemed no longer necessary, the interview process was a valuable stage of iteration in understanding the data I was collecting and how I chose to collect it. The content of the interview was retained (Appendix D) and is presented as the following case study to illustrate the role it played.

#### 4.3.3.1 Quality of CPD

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*“When you give up the whole day for something that you’re not going to get anything out of it becomes quite frustrating, I’d probably say, maybe if I’m lucky, one day a year of staff development might be relevant to what I do”.*

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When asked about their experience regarding the quality of CPD provision the lecturer remarked that it was *“All the same, lots of people in a room sharing best practice ideas, which is fine but it’s not always relevant and can be filled with things I am not interested in or going to apply to my teaching practice”*. This response is in line with the wider views of survey participants who felt that CPD was fairly generic in its offering and varied in its relevance to individual practitioners.

#### 4.3.3.2 Focus of CPD

During the interview it was suggested that the focus of CPD was too heavily skewed in favour of data processing and systems related training of tasks, *“For example, staff development day in the majority I’d like to say it’s probably a 60/40 split in favour of processes, systems and data... that is 60% or more of the CPD you do in a year that’s not developing...teaching and learning practice”*. It was felt that CPD should have a much greater focus on sharing and learning from peers with the tailoring of content towards specific teams or departments, *“or even better, individual teachers”*.

There was a particular reference to “full days” of staff development and the difficulty this poses in being able to cater for all *“I just think there needs to be more of a focus on stuff that is relevant... personally speaking I don’t get enough out of a full day’s worth of*

*[professional] development as it's currently delivered". An example was then shared of when this had worked by offering staff a choice about which development session they attended.*

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*"I think people chose two sessions in a day to sign up to. The whole event was really positive...led by people who were passionate about what they were delivering. It was directly relevant to teaching, you could take away a toolbox of ideas and actually you knew right away that it was meaningful as the focus was on my teaching.*

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The element of choice in what to attend was clearly felt in the wider feedback too with some participants already feeling that this was an option for them.

#### 4.3.3.3 Meaningful CPD

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*"First and foremost, as a teacher, I think that the CPD absolutely should have a focus on teaching and learning".*

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In order for CPD to be meaningful, it was apparent, in the responses for the lecturer in this interview, that clear consideration must be taken to strike a balance between the development of teaching and learning pedagogy and practice and the more generic systems and data related content. *"I'm not suggesting we scrap the data and process-focused content as that sort of thing is important, but as I said earlier...the data-driven and process focused CPD definitely outweighs the stuff that is more relevant to teaching, so I would shift the focus around the other way".*

For CPD to be meaningful it was suggested that the content of any "training" would need to directly impact on the individual job role. *"I remember a session which was a bit like*

*speed dating where you had 5-10 minutes to teach or explain something to a colleague. In the whole session, which was about an hour, I think we covered about eight or nine different things and 2 or 3 of those were little starter activities which I applied to my own teaching, which made this a worthwhile session". There was a strong feeling that a "lack of impact" would render the training less meaningful. The element of choice was also referred to as a means by which the most impactful training might be identified per individual "I'm really looking at them to allow for more meaningful training to take place, in your own time, with your own decision-making".*

#### 4.3.3.4 Mode of CPD

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*"I think Staff will engage in most things they see as meaningful or valuable but I think at the moment we do not necessarily provide them with opportunities that they deem to be worth their time, particularly when this is to the detriment of teaching or preparation time"*

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When discussing the best mode of CPD delivery it was suggested that this is dependent upon the content as some sessions will *"benefit from being in a room with people sharing ideas"*. Whereas the more generic training, which may require less input and discussion may be more appropriate for online asynchronous delivery models. *"...for the stuff I find a bit monotonous and boring, we would probably benefit from online video tuition and activities"*. There was hesitation in advocating for online CPD as a direct replacement for in-person training but it was suggested that an online training repository might be of benefit *"...with some of the CPD delivered we kind of try to reinvent the wheel or redeliver it just in a slightly different way*



*maybe a year or two down the line. If this training is online... it's easily accessible five times a year, once a year, once every 2 years [when required]"*.

It was suggested that online training might play a role in supporting staff who otherwise would struggle to engage with CPD due to their availability, *"I think all the while people are very busy and the profession continues to increase workloads, then online [CPD]...would ensure that people would always find something relevant to access"*. However, it was also noted that without a set time for training or monitoring of access some staff would still *"try to get around it"*, suggesting that any offer of training must still be deemed as *meaningful* regardless of the mode of delivery.

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*"Those chats in the coffee room about what you did and how you might change it, what went right and what went wrong. Sharing with each other in this way is really important, so I think in terms of engagement, most members of staff will naturally engage in those sorts of conversations and maybe CPD needs to reflect this"*.

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The opportunity to discuss their progress, challenges and barriers to teaching and learning is what most teachers are looking for. If this could be reflected in the mode of CPD delivery, and further supported through individualised coaching or training then this would make for a meaningful exchange for most practitioners and avoid the "box-ticking" agenda of more generic and prescribed content.

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*"My biggest turn off in any staff development is when I feel I'm just doing it to tick a box and get something completed rather than a focus on something that will ultimately impact on what I do on a day-to-day basis"*.

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The feedback from this particular member of staff was reflective of the overall feelings elicited in the pre-intervention survey and subsequent interviews and when written as a case study is more illuminative of the apparent frustration felt by teachers who very much value professional development and professional learning opportunities, yet they do not necessarily feel that this is facilitated in a manner which offers much of a choice. It was at this point that the concept of agency was explored in greater depth, leading to Pivot Point A.

***Pivot point A - Is it the mode of delivery or the nature of CPD which is the barrier?***

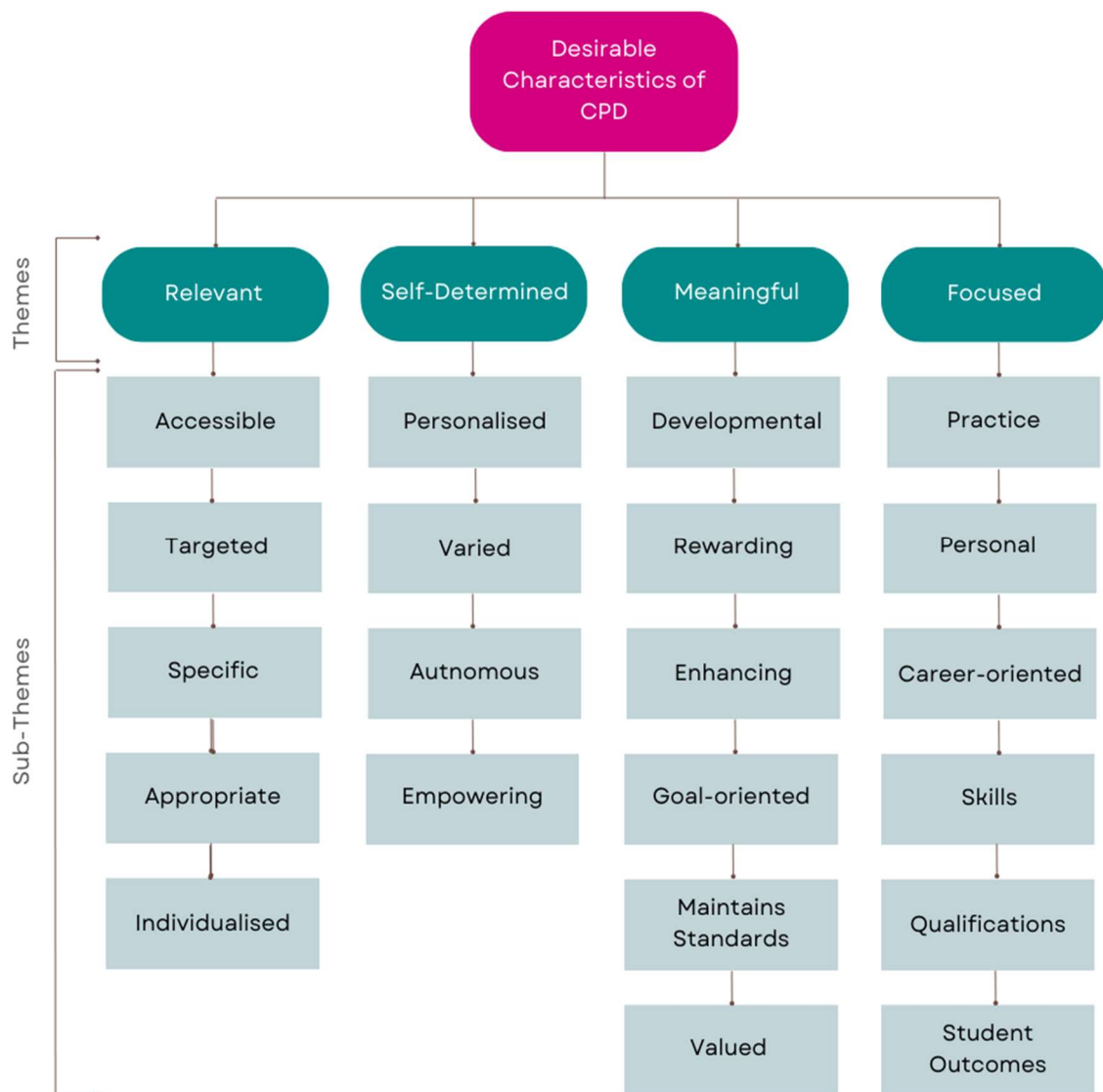
After Phase 1 the mode of delivery seemed to be less relevant, particularly since the COVID-19 lockdowns where staff had become much more frequent users of technology. What did become apparent was the narrative surrounding the approach to CPD being, more often than not, the traditional top-down, prescribed training, which offered staff very little “choice” in either the content or mode of delivery. This led to a pivot point in my research where I began to look more closely at the “nature” of CPD, which included greater investigation of the concept of teacher agency.

### 4.3.4 Emerging themes Pre-intervention

Using Nowell et al. (2017) for direction, thematic analysis was conducted to code and select themes based upon participant response to questions regarding their experience of professional development.

**Figure 4.3**

*Desirable characteristics of CPD according to practitioners (including sub-themes)*



#### 4.3.5 Desirable characteristics of CPD

The first findings of this thesis are the most desirable characteristics of CPD according to participants of the pre-intervention survey (Figure 4.3). Four characteristics, *relevant*, *focused*, *meaningful*, and *self-determined* were constructed through thematic analysis of qualitative data from the open survey questions and the practitioner interview previously discussed. The following offers further detail of how these emerging themes (and sub-themes), helped to indicate the desirable characteristics of professional development according to teachers in this study.

##### 4.3.5.1. CPD should be “Relevant”

The first desirable characteristic suggests that CPD should be *relevant*. Participants to the pre-intervention survey stated a preference for a model of CPD which was; *accessible*, i.e. it was available at a time and a format they would be able to engage with; *targeted*, i.e. it was directed at a particular area of practice or process development; *specific*, i.e. it was directly related to their job role or position within the organisation; *appropriate*, i.e. it was delivered at the right level for their existing skills, knowledge and competencies; and *individualised*, i.e. where possible, it met their individual needs.

This theme highlights that the relevance of professional development activities and associated training to the individual needs of the practitioner should be a key consideration when planning and delivering CPD.

#### 4.3.5.2 CPD should be “Self-determined”

The second desirable characteristic suggests that CPD should be *self-determined*. Participants to the pre-intervention survey stated a preference for a model of CPD which was; *personalised*, i.e. there was an opportunity for participants to choose what was most appropriate for them; *varied*, i.e. it provides more than one option to choose from or the content and approach taken differs throughout the session; *autonomous*, i.e. participants have the opportunity to make decisions about how and when they engage with the content; and *empowering*, i.e. participants leave the session feeling like they have some control over how they apply the skills or knowledge gained from training.

Self-determination is closely aligned to the concept of agency and would suggest that professional development activities and associated training should support conditions through which teacher agency might be enacted.

#### 4.3.5.3 CPD should be “Meaningful”

The third desirable characteristic suggests that CPD should be *meaningful* or useful. Participants to the pre-intervention survey stated a preference for a model of CPD which was; *developmental*, i.e. it built upon existing skills and knowledge or allowed for further training in the future; *rewarding*, i.e. participants felt a sense of achievement and/or progress by participating in the training on offer; *enhancing*, i.e. training made tangible improvements to individual knowledge or competency; *valued*, i.e. participant felt that engaging in the training was worthwhile; and *maintained standards*, i.e. the training supported the standardisation teaching and learning practice and administrative processes; *goal-orientated*, i.e. participants felt that activities were focus on the achievement of pre-determined goals.

The meaningfulness of professionals development activity and associated training aligns with feelings of usefulness and value, and although this might be perceived to be measured in some cases by the “impact” it has on student outcomes, the feedback used here to construct this theme might suggest that meaningfulness is also aligned with a practice-focused approach.

#### 4.3.5.4 CPD should be “Focused”

The fourth desirable characteristic suggests that CPD should be *focused*. Participants to the pre-intervention survey stated a preference for a model of CPD which was; *personal*, i.e., it was directly related to their individual needs and requests; *skills-focused*, i.e. it supported the development of skills; *practice-related*, i.e. it was directly related to the development of teaching practice; *career-oriented*, i.e. it support personal progression in relation to career goals and ambitions; *related to student outcomes*, i.e. training might have a direct impact on the learning and development of the students each teacher taught; offered a formal *qualification* i.e. the training was accredited and would provide evidence of knowledge or competency in a given subject or practice.

It is clear within this theme that practitioners want professional development activities and associated training to be practice-focused with a direct impact on their teaching and the learning of their students. Some practitioners would appear to desire more formal, tangible qualifications, possibly where this is a requirement in their teaching role, whereas others seek the development of their personal skills and knowledge.

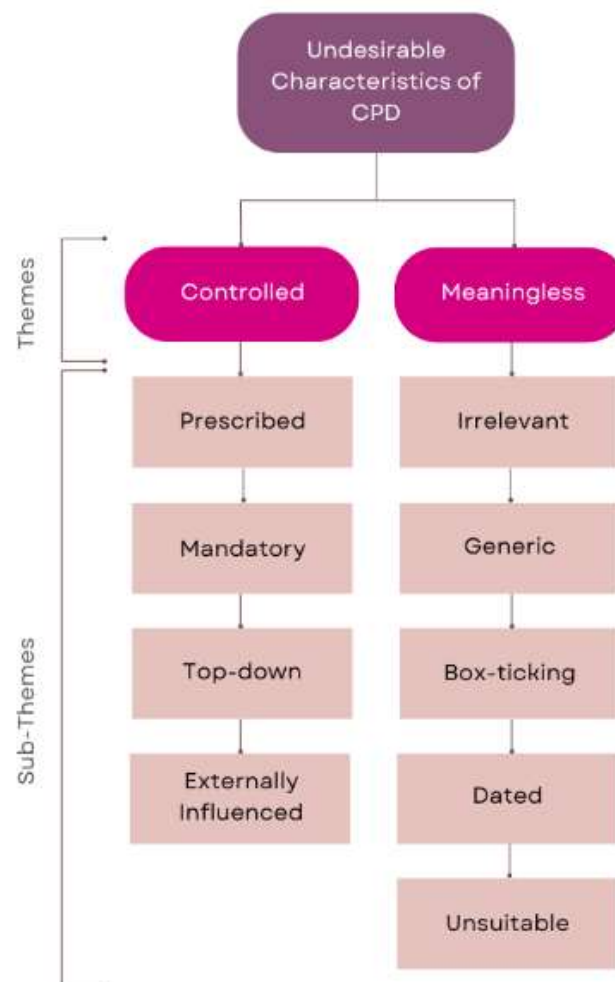
#### 4.3.6 Undesirable characteristics of CPD

The least desired characteristics of CPD according to participants of the pre-intervention survey are illustrated in Figure 4.4. These two characteristics were constructed through

thematic analysis of qualitative data from open survey questions and practitioner interviews. Figure 4.4 also illustrates how these characteristics were constructed from several sub-themes.

**Figure 4.4**

*Undesirable characteristics of CPD according to practitioners*



#### 4.3.6.1 CPD shouldn't be "Meaningless"

The first undesirable characteristic suggests that poor CPD is *meaningless* or useless. Participants to the pre-intervention survey stated that poor examples of CPD they had

experienced were; *dated*, i.e., the content being delivered was no longer relevant to the subject, specification or practical skills being taught to students; *unsuitable*, i.e. the level of content being delivered was way beyond the existing skill level of participants; *irrelevant*, i.e., the content of training did not directly relate to individual practitioner needs; *generic*, i.e. training was not tailored in any way to the needs of practitioners or the nuances of curriculum offer; and *box-ticking*, i.e. the only aim of training was to meet internal quality assurance processes or appease external bodies (e.g. Ofsted).

#### 4.3.6.2 CPD shouldn't be "Controlled"

The second undesirable characteristic suggests that poor CPD is *controlled*. Participants to the pre-intervention survey stated that poor examples of CPD they had experienced were; *prescribed*, i.e. participants were told what training they had to attend; *mandatory*, i.e. training had to be completed by all staff without exception; *externally influenced*, i.e. the agenda of training was directly related to the expectations or requirements of external bodies (e.g. Ofsted or Awarding Organisation); *top-down*, i.e. all decisions on the content and mode of delivery came from leaders and not the teachers themselves.

#### 4.3.6.3 Summary of themes Pre-intervention

The pre-intervention survey provided a good opportunity to explore, in the experiences of practitioners, what constituted good and bad CPD. These themes provide an important baseline from which to determine whether or not future changes to CPD content or delivery models (in phase 2) might satisfy the needs of practitioners, both practically in the development of skills, knowledge and competencies directly related to their teaching practice, or more holistically in valuing their individual needs and expectations.



In the interest of transparency, it is important to note that full data analysis of phase 1 (the pre-intervention survey), through which the themes and sub-themes were constructed, was not completed until after all 5 phases of data collection were completed, as to provide a credible means by which to determine the impact of any intervention.

#### *4.3.7 Phase 2 - Intervention*

Phase 2 focused on a model of intervention, which began as part of a Certified Google Innovator project, previously discussed in Chapter 1. This formal project approach ensured that I had both the support and resources needed to develop and manage a viable online CPD platform. Google Apps for Education and Google Sites were used to create a platform which utilised a gamified approach, where practitioners could access 3 sample courses, focusing on specific teaching and learning issues; managing behaviour, embedding English and maths skills, and effective assignment workshops. Participants were able to navigate the course, choosing which content to engage with, tracking their progress and earning digital badges as they advanced. Certificates of completion were automatically emailed to each participant and digital badges added to a leader board. Participants were also able to upload their own resources which could be added to the site on approval.

During phase 2 all staff within the 3 targeted departments were given access to the online platform for a 3-month period. During this time staff were encouraged to participate in activities, access tutorial videos and engage in the online forum. At no point was participation on this platform made compulsory as the aim of the intervention was to support and encourage agency. This which would have been contradicted by any suggestion that participants were “required” to engage.

#### 4.3.8 Review of Phase 2

Phase 2 was a complete failure with regards to staff engagement. Over the period of 3 months in which the website was live and staff were encouraged to access the content, only 9 staff started and/or completed activities. There was some disruption due to continued uncertainty around government enforced lockdowns and COVID-19 pandemic procedures, but even considering this, the need or willingness to engage was simply not there. My experiences of delivering other forms of CPD (both online and in-person) during this time would suggest the existence of “digital apathy” amongst many teachers, who had their fill of online training during the COVID-19 lockdowns. At that time online support and the need for training was both a necessity and the only option available. Post-pandemic, there appeared to be a significantly depreciated appetite for online content, when this was no longer the only option available. I considered a relaunch to determine the factors which led to the poor uptake, but instead, I decided to review the research questions and the feedback of the pre-intervention survey to determine whether an alternative course of intervention may be more appropriate. This led to the next Pivot Point.

***Pivot Point B - Further COVID Lockdowns and disruption. CPD not seen as a priority by many practitioners***

After phase 2, I reviewed the initial research questions and considered more intently the role of teacher agency in professional development, and more specifically how agency may be enacted. On reflection of the initial intervention of phase 2, although it intended to offer a choice, the online platform was still significantly limited by the breadth of content within the courses and the relevance of the content to the individual staff at that particular time of year.

#### 4.3.9 Phase 3 - Initiating a culture shift (becoming the Head of Teaching, Learning and Quality)

Phase 3 was greatly influenced by a change in job role within my organisation in August 2021, halfway through this thesis. Becoming the Head of Teaching, Learning and Quality (HoTLQ) afforded me greater opportunities to initiate the potential culture shift addressed in Chapter 1. After again reviewing the contents of the pre-intervention survey in Phase 1 as well as the perceived “failure” of the initial intervention in Phase 2, I centred my focus on RQ2 (*“In what ways can CPD satisfy both the individual needs of practitioners and the priorities of organisations?”*) and RQ3 (*“What do teachers’ stories of their experience of CPD tell us about how teacher agency is enacted?”*). This led to the decision to put a hold on the intervention employed in Phase 2 (gamified learning courses). Instead, I introduced some new initiatives to try and illustrate the power that agency and collaboration might have in addressing the challenges faced by teachers.

This seemed to address more broadly the sentiment from teacher feedback that they wanted some choice in what they engaged with and that a “one-size fits all” approach isn’t effective. These new initiatives offered a practice-focused perspective and helped to ascertain the level of potential buy-in from teachers and managers, regarding an alternative approach to professional development. These initiatives included:

*[College] Projects* - A college wide initiative, launched as a whole college staff development day, which encouraged staff to develop their own “projects” which focused on an aspect of teaching and learning in the classroom or something else which was part of their wider job role.

*Collaborative Teaching* - a peer collaboration initiative which facilitated conversations between colleagues. Staff could apply for a free coffee voucher and meet with a peer to discuss an aspect of their teaching and then arrange for peer observation, co-planning or a follow up meeting depending on individual preference and availability.

*EduArcade* - an interactive website for all teaching and support staff to provide advice, guidance, instructional videos and training, as well as opportunities to share “wow factors” from lesson observations and promote initiatives such as *[College] Projects*, *Collaborative Teaching* and *Theme of the Week*. Staff could also provide feedback and raise training requests with the Teaching, Learning and Quality team.

*Theme of the Week* - a weekly tip, trick or training opportunity shared on EduArcade and sent via email, incorporating the 4 key themes (and college priorities) of Innovative Pedagogy, EdTech, Preparing for Assessment and Lost and Missed learning, (the latter being linked to the COVID recovery plan for colleges).

#### *4.3.10 Data Analysis of Phase 3*

Data collection in Phase 3 was ad-hoc, and in some cases anecdotal, as it had not specifically been planned as a part of this research thesis at the time. However, due to the significant impact some of these initiatives had in exposing the need for a culture shift within the organisation, I feel it is pertinent to provide a brief summary of what was learnt from each of these projects.

*[College] Projects* - In total 160 projects were submitted by teachers and managers across 3 campuses. These projects provided various levels of impact on individual pedagogy/practice, wider curriculum or college priorities, and external stakeholders and partnerships. More widely, the concept of self-determined projects as a meaningful method of

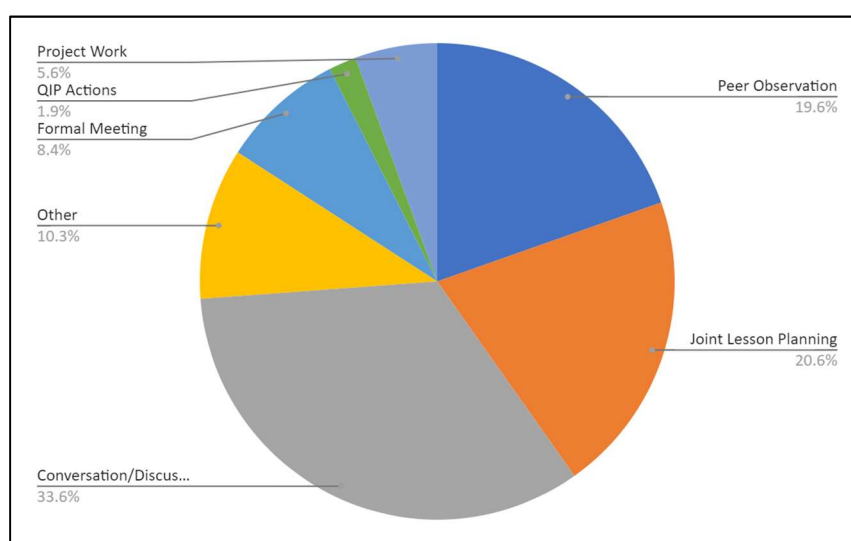
professional learning was accepted as a positive change of direction. The following comments from participants illustrate further how projects were received:

<p><i>"I think that the way that we have been given the opportunity to problem solve and be creative is really nice."</i></p>	<p><i>"It's a great idea - meaningful pedagogical development over a reasonable amount of time to actually have a measurable impact."</i></p>
<p><i>"[I] enjoyed the fact that this was very much centred around our own areas of improvement - rather than being told what to improve on."</i></p>	<p><i>"[I was] able to take ownership and focus on the aspects which were important to my teaching."</i></p>
<p><i>"I was sceptical about this being more work for the team, however we were all really excited about our ideas and it allowed us the opportunity to come together as a team and share a vision that will hopefully benefit all our courses."</i></p>	<p><i>"Innovative and forward thinking! [I] Would love to join up with someone [else] and work on this project!"</i></p>
<p><i>"Nice to work on something "real" rather than "maybe I'll use it if I have time!""</i></p>	<p><i>"I like the idea of personal CPD and the use of our own initiative to drive a project from an idea to completion."</i></p>

*Collaborative Teaching* - There was a significant increase in the number of “peer meetings” taking place with 136 entries (91 unique) compared to the previous peer observation policy where 12 “observations” were recorded in a calendar year. The focus of each peer meeting was varied (Figure 4.5).

**Figure 4.5**

*The focus of Collaborative Teaching interactions*



*EduArcade* - There was a mixed response to the use of this website-based resource, which offered asynchronous training and support for teachers and managers. Some staff used it regularly, others never accessed it (according to Google analytics). It was, however, a useful repository for teaching and learning materials, which could be accessed by anyone within the college.

*Theme of the Week* - although deemed appropriate for the time (end of COVID disruption) this initiative was stopped after 6 months as staff requested more in person training

from the Teaching and Learning team. There was little evidence of impact beyond the sharing of resources.

Overall, the first 2 initiatives which encouraged collaboration and empowered staff to take their own action in addressing challenges, had greater buy-in and longevity compared to the “piecemeal” content offered through the EduArcade and Theme of the Week emails.

The success of *[College] Projects* in particular presents us with a significant finding regarding the appetite amongst practitioners to engage with CPD which offers “*meaningful pedagogical development*” where teachers can “*work on something real*” and “*focus on the aspects which [are] important to [their] teaching*”. The desire for agency is clearly supported within the comments provided and supports the notion that professional development should be “*centred around [teachers’] own areas of improvement rather than being told what to improve on*”.

The *Collaborative Teaching* initiative shows that a willingness to engage collaboratively with peers should also be considered a key finding. The increase in engagement provides support that peer feedback is valued by practitioners, as well as further highlighting the desire to take a practice-focused approach to professional development.

The lack of engagement with the online training materials provided through the *EduArcade* and *Theme of the week* initiatives, further emphasises the issue of *digital apathy* amongst several teachers, and aligns with the discussion in the Phase 2 analysis. It also contributes to the narrative around CPD being “*focused, relevant, meaningful and self-determined*” (Figure 4.3), in that, although both of these initiatives would seem to offer the participants a choice, either the content or mode of delivery was in the main considered to lack focus, relevance or meaningfulness and therefore many participants took the self-determined decision not to engage with the material.

***Pivot Point C - Change of culture limited by existing “Graded Observation” process and policy***

Pivot Point C was triggered by the perceived success of *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching* as well as some scepticism of the impact that these new initiatives could have across college, in part, because of the existing culture of a top-down approach to professional development and quality improvement, most typified by the graded lesson observation policy, which treated teachers in a diametrically opposed way to the agentic and collaborative approach taken in the *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching* initiatives.

Early in my appointment as HoTLQ concerns about graded, unannounced lesson observations and the impact they were having on both the development of teaching and learning pedagogy and the wellbeing of teachers, were raised by individual staff and teaching unions. These concerns along with the feedback from staff during Phase 3 presented a significant finding, in that the culture of a college is integral to creating conditions through which agency and collaboration might be achieved. This led me to reconsider research questions 2 and 3, leading to the pilot of an alternative observation process in the summer term 2022, which was the start of Phase 4.



#### 4.3.11 Phase 4 - Changing Policy (*The final piece of the puzzle?*)

Under the existing observation policy, teachers would be subject to two unannounced lesson “drop-ins” per year, lasting a minimum of 30 minutes, where “performance” would be measured against a prescribed list of criteria by their line manager. Following observation, a “professional discussion” should have been held between the teacher and observer to discuss identified strengths and areas for development, with both having completed a reflection form, which graded performance across key teaching and learning themes, including; management of learning, meeting individual needs, embedding of English and maths skills etc.

After the professional discussion had taken place both observer and lecturer would be required to agree on a suitable performance pathway, which were, “*Good Practice*”, “*Progressing*” and “*Development*”.

The development pathway should have been selected when a specific area(s) of teaching and learning had been identified as needing development. In this instance, an individual improvement plan (IIP) was produced to clarify each area for development. The development plan was designed to be a collaborative process and should, therefore, have been agreed to by the observer and lecturer before a Teaching and Learning Coach was allocated for a period of 6 weeks. Teaching and Learning Coach meetings were also allocated on request, for lecturers on the Good Practice or Progressing pathways, to discuss SMART targets, share good practice or any other teaching and learning matters. After reviewing the existing observation process, it was clear that there were several issues arising. Reasons for change to the existing lesson observation policy, included:

1. Observations currently work on the principle of teachers proving that they are good enough rather than challenging them to ask for support to get better (Based on the premise that most “top performers” will seek help to get better!)
2. Observations currently occur very much as a one-off event which is “done” and then filed away rather than “continuous” professional development aligned to PDR and personal action.
3. Currently too much time is spent on “weaker” teachers who may or may not improve but very little impact on those who are good or better (97% of teachers were Good Practice or Progressing according to lesson observation data)
4. Teachers unwilling to take risks when subject to grading, meaning innovation can be stunted and some teaching and learning pedagogy remains “stale” as a result
5. Evidence of performativity rather than a genuine account of teaching practice and a willingness to develop
6. Anxiety and tension around unannounced observations
7. Underlying mistrust in observers and the observation process
8. Too much “stick” not enough “carrot”, staff feel treated with suspicion
9. Ofsted focus has changed to a more triangulated approach to making judgements but we still have an observation policy rooted in the old Ofsted inspection framework

In addition to the points raised above, lesson observation data indicated further points for consideration (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1**

*Lesson Observation Data 2021-22*

	Observations Completed (%)	Good Practice Pathway (%)	Progressing Pathway (%)	Development Pathway (%)	Staff Observed twice as per policy (%)
Term 1	62.5	71	26	3	39.5
Term 2	47				
Term 3	27				

In total, 395 observations took place in the year 2021-22. Only 39.5% of staff were observed twice as per the observation policy. 71% of staff received the best possible outcome, the Good Practice pathway, and only 12 staff (3%) had formal development targets set post observation, with teaching and learning coach support provided.

My concerns with this data are twofold. Firstly, the policy, as it existed, was not always being followed in practice and the outcome of these observations was heavily skewed towards Good Practice, which was not entirely reflected in either learner outcomes or learner voice feedback. In fact, learner voice, which was used to support a *Best Teacher Awards*, did not reflect a 71% good practice outcome and in some cases the supposed “weaker” teachers, according to formal observation outcomes, were being nominated as the “Best Teacher” by their students! Overall, I became convinced that the existing observation policy needed to change to focus more on the professional development of teachers, to ensure that more than 3% of staff were actively recorded as developing their teaching practice.

In the summer term of 2022 we began a pilot of a new lesson observation policy, which we called *Lesson Visits*. The aim of the new *Lesson Visit* policy was to inspire teachers to invest in

the development of their own pedagogy, so that all learners achieve aspirational outcomes. To achieve this the following objectives were the main foci:

1. Provide an empowerment model of observation where both teacher and observer share responsibility and accountability for the development of teaching practice
2. Develop self-motivated and reflective staff who are willing to seek support to improve, regardless of their performance level
3. Inspire a culture of innovative teaching and learning practice by removing the fear of criticism or reprimand
4. Employ practice-focused thinking by matching problems with solutions to encourage observation rather than it be dreaded!

With reference to RQ2 (*“In what ways can CPD satisfy both the individual needs of practitioners and the priorities of organisations?”*) my intention when developing the *Lesson Visit* process was to consider the needs of practitioners whilst at the same time satisfying priorities of the college (Table 4.2). The impact of proposed changes on staff, students and the wider college are also discussed (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.2**

*Lesson Visit Process (Pilot)*

**Implementation**

***Process***

- Each lecturer is invited to suggest what sort of lesson observation they would like to have from their line manager (or Teaching and Learning Coach) \*
- The lecturer may identify a specific training need, problem or concern they would like to address or may want feedback on new pedagogy or assessment practice
- The observation takes place under the pre-agreed terms and is followed by a professional conversation
- The lecturer identifies the challenges of their lesson honestly - the observer listens, and provides support/ideas in a collaborative coaching approach
- SMART targets are set which may utilise support from the line manager, teaching and learning coaches or colleagues (previously identified as strong in those areas e.g. WOW factors)
- Observations will occur termly with resulting actions reviewed as part of the PDR process to ensure timely monitoring of progress.

***Paperwork***

- Paperwork is limited to detailing the time, mode and purpose of each observation
- Positive feedback is recorded and any area for development posed as questions to support the post-observation professional discussion.
- A personal action plan is produced on Blue Sky to compliment the PDR process

***Reporting***

- Quality office to monitor number of observations, mode, purpose, TLC involvement etc.
- Impact recorded through lecturer and observer feedback and learner voice (where appropriate)
- Triangulation with outcomes, attendance etc.

**Table 4.3**

*Impact of lesson observation changes on staff, students and the wider college*

<b>Impact</b>
<p><b>Staff</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Encourage innovation and build personal confidence</li><li>2. Open and honest culture of developmental practice</li><li>3. Empowerment/Accountability Model - staff have a say!</li><li>4. All staff focus on their own personal development with sense of responsibility and accountability</li><li>5. Collaborative reflection rather than objective criticism</li><li>6. Reduce anxiety and fear around observations providing a safe space for PD</li></ol>
<p><b>Students</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Benefit from more innovative practice</li><li>2. Be inspired to study and explore their subject between lessons</li><li>3. Be curious and engaged throughout every lesson</li><li>4. Feel better supported as lecturers react quicker to individual needs of student groups</li><li>5. A greater willingness for staff to listen to student feedback</li></ol>
<p><b>Wider College</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Tied in with PDR provides a clear and aligned action plan for each member of staff</li><li>2. Change of culture so that staff feel in control of decision making around their own development</li><li>3. More motivated and reflective workforce capable of taking responsibility for their own professional learning - <i>[College] Projects</i> accounts for this</li><li>4. Managers working directly with their teams taking sufficient action to ensure good-quality teaching, learning &amp; assessment.</li><li>5. Greater utilisation of Teaching and Learning Coaches across all staff</li></ol>

Teaching staff who had not had a second formal observation were invited to choose the *Lesson Visit* pilot as an alternative. The take up was mixed but the following feedback was obtained from both teachers and managers during the pilot period of 6 weeks.

#### 4.3.12 Data Analysis of Phase 4

Feedback from participants directly involved in the *Lesson Visit* was largely positive and made particular reference to a feeling of “*empowerment*” and “*choice*” for teachers in an environment which was “*supportive*” and “*constructive*”.

<p><i>“I think it’ll be good to empower professionals and push pedagogy forwards for all.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Staff have received the new focus of the observations very positively and it is a great shift away from the process being about a judgement”.</i></p>
<p><i>“I liked choosing the focus that I know needs working on, as I really felt the Lesson Visit was about development rather than box ticking.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I am glad I took part in the process - I have felt that it is supportive and developmental rather than [that] I am an underperforming teacher...”</i></p>

Other feedback indicated that teachers valued the opportunity to engage in conversation with the observer, particularly where a focus for feedback had been chosen by the teacher in advance.

<p><i>"I found it very beneficial being able to raise an observation focus with [the observer] beforehand, and then to show him how I am currently acting on that in my teaching"</i></p>	<p><i>"Both of us went into the process knowing we were going to have an observation followed by... a positive conversation based on my goals".</i></p>
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*"It was a great feeling validated in my approach...I did not make this a "different" or show lesson...I genuinely wanted feedback on my everyday practice".*

Finally, feedback also indicated that the process had a more immediate impact on professional development relating to teaching practice and pedagogy. This suggests that where a focus for observation is self-determined teachers are likely to be more honest in what they are showing the observer and more receptive of the feedback they receive

*"I felt encouraged to do the lesson again but better."*

<p><i>"I felt this process was much more democratic...and helpful than the unannounced drop in approach. It facilitated genuine thought &amp; dialogue about everyday teaching approaches."</i></p>	<p><i>"It was good to get further constructive feedback on practice beyond my specified target, and this will shape my practice immediately."</i></p>
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There were no distinctively negative points raised by participants of the pilot, however comments were made regarding the need for training and support for observers as well as how best to encourage teachers to engage with a new policy.

<p><i>"...it is important to have a good [observer] who can coach rather than finger-point my faults".</i></p>	<p><i>"My concern is getting staff to set three targets when they...may not have the desire to improve their own practice. "</i></p>
<p><i>"Maybe less goals to be achieved - trying to develop and manage all that goes with teaching outside of teaching can be hard".</i></p>	<p><i>"I found myself writing less [feedback] as I was focusing solely on the desired outcome [Lesson Visit focus]".</i></p>

The final stage of the pilot involved presenting these findings to leaders and managers within the college, who had not previously been asked for their input. This was deliberate to avoid any "watering down" or compromise and to ensure that there was significant shift away from graded observations towards a policy which focused on professional development.

A formal training session was provided to all potential observers (referred to as *reviewers* in the policy), including senior leaders, curriculum managers and TLCs. During this session the feedback from staff involved in the pilot were shared along with the draft policy, which included two significant additions, learning walks and deep dives. Learning walks provided managers with a process through which they could observe everyday teaching if they

wanted to know more about an area of provision. Deep dives provided the opportunity for a more formal review of provision to take place on request, where pre-existing concerns around learner outcomes or learner experience were present. The inclusion of these two mechanisms link directly with research question 2 and satisfying the needs of practitioners and the organisation.

Managers' responses, despite the significant majority not being involved in the *Lesson Visit* pilot, offered a very different perspective towards the proposed policy changes. Their concerns largely focused upon the process and their workload, rather than the value of changing the approach to one focussed on the professional development of the teacher as opposed to a "quality assurance" process. There was clearly greater "concern" with managers than there was with teachers, albeit a limited sample size took part in the pilot. These concerns would appear to relate to manager's apprehensions regarding a "loss" of power and control. The question here would be, did they really have power to begin with or did they just think they had it and were worried about letting it go? Either way, this response proposes a significant finding with regards to a manager's perceived role in the development of their staff.

#### *4.3.13 Phase 5 - Implementing the change*

The final phase for analysis looks at the introduction of a new lesson observation policy and the impact, if any, which was had in facilitating systematic empowerment of teacher agency for the improvement of educational practice.

In September 2022, a new lesson observation policy was launched, called *Lesson Visits*. The aims and objectives from the *Lesson Visit* pilot were retained but some revisions to both the process and policy were made in response to the feedback obtained from teachers and

managers. A full copy of the *Lesson Visit* process and associated guidance notes can be seen in Chapter 5 (Table 6.1 and Table 6.2).

#### 4.3.14 Data Analysis of Phase 5

A formal review of the *Lesson Visit* process was conducted after the first term (September-December), which included both quantitative data analysis and qualitative review of individual feedback and focus groups. The headline data presented in phase 5 analysis makes deliberate use of quantitative data, in the form of percentages, to illustrate the practical differences between the old graded observation policy and new lesson visit policy. Qualitative feedback from teachers and lesson reviewers is then explored to provide greater context regarding the lived experiences of those involved in the study.

##### 4.3.14.1 Headline Data

In total 388 teaching staff were part of the *Lesson Visit* process. Of these, we would expect 372 to have had a *Lesson Visit* by the end of term 1. The other 16 staff were on maternity or sick leave, were PGCE students or on sabbatical. 306 (82%) of *Lesson Visits* took place during term 1 of 2022-23. This was an increase of 32% compared to term 1 under the previous observation policy. Statistically, this would suggest a significant improvement in practical implementation of the *Lesson Visit* process.

Part-time and full-time staff were able to select a line manager or member of the TLQ team to conduct the *Lesson Visit*. 132 *Lesson Visits* (43%) were completed by line managers and 174 (57%) by members of the Teaching, Learning and Quality (TLQ) team. Contrary to some of the concerns raised previously by managers, there was only a small margin of difference

between staff opting for a line manager versus TLQ observation, the reason for this may become clearer when looking at the focus of *Lesson Visits* shortly.

Some of the visits were scheduled by lesson reviewers rather than being requested, but autonomy of focus and whether or not the date of visit was appropriate were still in the control of the lecturer. Of the 306 lessons visited, 136 (45%) were deemed to have *wow factors*, which was an option for all lesson reviewers if they wanted to highlight a particularly strong or impressive element within teaching practice. Under the previous observation policy only 24% of lessons observed in the entire academic year 2021-22 had *wow factors*. This significant increase in lessons deemed as having outstanding features may indicate that the absence of prescribed, objective outcomes within the observation framework lends observers to be more subjective about what is outstanding rather than being confined to a list of factors.

#### 4.3.14.2 *The Focus of Lesson Visits*

All teaching staff were asked to provide a specific focus for the *Lesson Visit*, shared with the reviewer before the visit takes place (see Appendix F – Figure 1). *Lesson Visit* focus was consistent across all programme areas relative to sample size and teaching, pedagogy or practice is the most recorded *Lesson Visit* focus at 50%. 18% of staff wanted to address a problem or concern and 20% focused on something outside of the 5 main categories. It is clear from these data that teachers value the practice-focused approach, whether this be in developing a desirable element of pedagogy or addressing a problem or concern. The focus categories were originally chosen based upon college priorities. Despite being a college priority for development, only 4% of lesson visits focused on skills development (English, maths, employability, sustainability). This would suggest that the priorities of the college (e.g. Ofsted

Inspection) do not necessarily align with the priorities of the teachers (e.g. Teaching pedagogy) and that different factors are likely to contribute to what is seen as a priority for each party.

#### 4.3.14.3 *Teaching and Learning Themes*

The main strengths observed in *Lesson Visits* were teaching pedagogy and resources (48%), Management of Learning (45%), Assessment of Learning (45%) and Engagement and Motivation (42%) (see Appendix F – Figure 2). The most common areas of good practice were around Development of English skills (53%), Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (52%) and Safeguarding and Welfare (50%). Development of Maths skills, management of learning and safeguarding and welfare are the most *points for discussion*. However, this does not mean they are development points but may have required more clarity on how they are implemented and embedded. Development of Maths Skills (13%) and Development of Digital skills (12%) were the most *unseen* themes, despite being identified as college priorities and forming part of targeted CPD.

Overall, Traditional teaching, learning and assessment themes are key strengths for many staff suggesting that the basics are being addressed but the additional more discrete skills are either ineffectively embedded or not signposted clearly enough. This data also aligns with that seen in the *Lesson Visit* foci and might again suggest that the college priorities and the priorities of teachers are disparate.

#### 4.3.14.4 *Feedback from teachers and reviewers on the Lesson Visit process*

All teaching staff and reviewers were asked to give feedback on the *Lesson Visit* policy, process and their personal experience of this in Term 1. 67 responses were received (response rate of 18%) in a 4-week window. The questions available for feedback were dependent on the

role taken in the *Lesson Visit* process i.e. The role of teacher(71.6%), reviewer (11.9%), teacher and reviewer (14.9%), or those who had not conducted a *Lesson Visit* (1.5%). Participants had the option to include their name or remain anonymous.

#### 4.3.14.4.1 Feedback from Teachers (59 responses)

**Figure 4.6**

*How do you feel about the Lesson Visit policy (in 1 word)? - (Teachers)*



Q1. What was positive about the Lesson Visit part of the process, as a teacher?

*“I genuinely think this new approach to lesson observation is the best I have experienced in over 20 years of teaching”.*

Feedback from teachers suggest that they valued the opportunities afforded by the new *Lesson Visit* process to reflect and receive feedback on teaching practice. There was reassurance from lesson reviewers that they, the teachers, were *“doing the right things”*.

There was positivity regarding constructive feedback, through a positive approach or positive conversation and the opportunity to discuss their *Lesson Visit* focus and wider teaching practice. Teachers responded that the *Lesson Visit* process was a “*relaxed but focused*” approach to observation. The majority of teachers felt that the *Lesson Visit* was conducted with a clear focus on developing professional practice.

*Q2. Where could the Lesson Visit be improved, as a teacher?*

In response to this question a number of comments, themed as “concerns” were raised. These included comments about the policy/process being followed properly by the lesson reviewers, with one teacher having 3 visits where the reviewer failed to turn up.

Some teachers stated that more time to discuss the focus of their lesson before the *Lesson Visit*, would have been beneficial, with some stating that this would support them with setting a focus in the first place. Some teachers wanted more student involvement in providing feedback during (and after) the *Lesson Visit*, however there were also teachers who stated that they felt uncomfortable when this had happened without their knowledge. One member of staff was upset with students being contacted for feedback after the session.

There were several comments relating to the *Lesson Visit* paperwork being too lengthy for and this was highlighted as a potential barrier to engagement. This was echoed by another teacher suggesting that the “*contents of the paperwork could be revised*”. Some teachers clearly retained concerns over judgements of teaching competency being made, with one in particular cautious of “*...not being judged based upon one Lesson Visit*”. One teacher also stated, “*It was fine- although [to be honest] Lesson Visit is just another name for an observation visit. Be upfront in what you are wanting to achieve*”, which indicates a need for further clarity around the aims and purpose of the policy.

*Q3. What was positive about the professional discussion part of the process, as a teacher?*

*“The older model was a narrow vision of the present; it had no opportunity to showcase the preparation and thought that goes into each lesson as it was so random”.*

Teachers valued the opportunity to discuss practical teaching and learning strategies with the lesson reviewer. Some also valued the feedback they received about things that they were not aware of, which helped to support ongoing development of their teaching practice.

There appeared to be an agreed focus upon constructive practice-focused feedback, in the professional discussions and with respect and understanding evident with consideration of context. Teachers felt that they were encouraged to stretch themselves and learners and they valued the praise and recognition for the work being done.

Unlike the previous observation policy, *Lesson Visits* were not judging just a snapshot of teaching and the 2-way collaborative discussion was identified as a valuable opportunity to reflect on teaching practice, whilst discussing the wider picture. Some teachers felt that this led to line managers leaving with a better understanding of the intent and implementation within their provision and that both parties were able to explore and learn about a problem from a different perspective.

*Q4. Where could the professional discussion part of the process be improved, as a teacher?*

The responses from teachers were varied. Some asked for the consideration of other sources of information i.e. student voice, in the professional discussion. There was a suggestion that in some cases there was too much time between the initial *Lesson Visit* and the



professional discussion and that there needed to be more time allocated in the college timetables for these meetings to take place.

There were further issues highlighted around the sharing of *Lesson Visit* notes, which should have been accessible by the teacher from the outset, if the documentation guidance had been followed correctly. Additionally, there was a request for all managers to be trained using a coaching style so that they might better facilitate the discussion. There was no reference to this being a need for the TLQ team who use coaching regularly as part of their role at the college.

There were several comments specifically themed as “concerns” including one teacher who did not have the professional discussion at all post observation. It was also reported that some reviewers were deciding goals before meeting rather than collaboratively. There were also further examples of teachers receiving feedback through the sharing of paperwork but without any formal meeting taking place. Another teacher felt that feedback focused too much on areas for development rather than celebrating strengths.

One teacher stated that the *Lesson Visit* “*Felt a bit contrived - i.e. the observation was taking place to tick a box rather than address a genuine need*” - feeling that it had been forced upon them rather than them having a choice. This was not in line with the *Lesson Visit* guidance and seems to have been as a result of the line manager trying to get through all their observations, rather than valuing the process and the intended benefits for both teacher and manager.

*Q5. What was positive about the documentation and goal setting process, as a teacher?*

*“It was nice to discuss these and work through each to set a theme, timeframe and who would support me. I think the section I liked the most of this process is that you are able to*

*identify someone to support you to do this, and that is critical, it supported me to feel that my goal can be something that I could achieve with support and allowed the goal to be “bigger and better” than if I was just doing it solo with the resources I have”*

Comments relating to the *Lesson Visit* documentation and goal setting process suggested that in the main it offered clarity and direction, and it was easy to keep track of areas to improve. It was suggested that teachers planning for future lessons could focus on development goals and that new ideas on how to improve lessons could be implemented. One teacher referred to the process being a shared task but with personal accountability and ownership of goals. Teachers’ comments suggested that the goal setting and “forcing” the teacher to think about short, medium- and long-term goals, was a “useful” way to consider CPD. It was also deemed important to have the option to align to goals set as part of PDR and trigger support from TLQ team where necessary.

*Q6. What improvements could be made to the documentation and goal setting process, as a teacher?*

*“I simply haven’t had time to wade through the paperwork. No goals were identified during the feedback so not sure what I am supposed to do. Just make something up. My goal at the moment is not to drown under my current workload”.*

Comments here mainly referred to the length and complexity of the document and the need for clarity on some of the terms being used, in particular “point for discussion” in the teaching and learning themes. More support and guidance was also requested on the setting of goals and an option to obtain student voice, when requested would be welcomed.

There were several comments specifically themed as “concerns”. Firstly, there were 2 teachers who had not received a copy of the *Lesson Visit* form, which should have been created by or shared with them to add the lesson focus in the first instant.

In more than one case no goals were set, with one teacher stating *“I don’t like having to set long term goals as I am nearing retirement age!”*, and another comment suggested the teacher had no say in their goals *“The reviewer completed it”*. One teacher suggested that they wanted their *Lesson Visit* grading as *“this is what Ofsted do”*.

There were several comments specifically referencing the term “points for discussion”, which was used to identify topics for the professional discussion relating to teaching and learning themes. On one occasion, *“The observer had set ideas about what is good practice. [This process] needs flexibility as vocational [teaching] has very different subjects and students”*. Another teacher felt that the term “Points for discussion”, *“...has negative connotations, but I knew the observer well and so wasn’t bothered as we can discuss in a professional manner”*. This suggests that the presence of any existing relationship, either positive or negative, may influence the professional discussion, if clear guidelines and training is not provided.

One final comment referred to the points for discussion being supportive but, *“...some of the points were beyond my remit - e.g., the lack of ALSA in a behaviourally challenged L1 class. Overall, it was fair, and I could agree / disagree with statements, looking at it from my side”*.

#### 4.3.14.4.2 Feedback from Reviewers (18 responses)

**Figure 4.7**

*How do you feel about the Lesson Visit policy (in one word)? (Reviewers)*



*Q1. What was positive about the Lesson Visit part of the process, as a reviewer?*

*“The fact they could “invite” me was brilliant too as I worked hard with the team to instil an ethos of growth/development and a safe, no judgement approach. This enabled more of the team to be more open with who/what they invited me to see.”*

Many reviewers felt this process facilitated constructive discussion about teaching pedagogy. Having the teacher choose a focus helped the reviewer but also led to “conscious developments towards improving the area for development in the lesson itself”. Being invited into a lesson was perceived as a strength of the process by the majority of reviewers. Reviewers also felt that they were able to better understand the pressures faced by their teams, with a focus on “sharing” their practice rather than performing. It was felt by some that this provided a better perspective on what needed to be developed, as teachers were willing to talk openly about their teaching and the emerging issues.

It is clear from the feedback from reviewers that the *Lesson Visit* process has had an impact on teacher/manager relationships, which is represented in the following statement: *“Overall better for Manager-staff relationships as more professional and collaborative”*, and further supported by another reviewer who shared *“I was welcomed into lessons - in one case I stayed nearly an hour”*. Under this new process, observations were welcomed more eagerly by some staff and one reviewer reflected that *Lesson Visits* facilitated reflective practice rather than applying a *“measuring stick”* approach.

*Q2. Where could the Lesson Visit part of the process be improved, as a reviewer?*

*“Not all visits were scheduled by staff. It was often difficult to find a focus and a specific 45 minutes in a lesson that was 3-4 weeks away, especially with shorter courses where enrolments, registrations and exam registrations take priority at the start of term. there was a blend between staff who asked to be seen and staff who agreed to my suggested times”.*

Some of the reviewers felt that more time was needed to complete the visits, suggesting that there was a lot to do in term 1. They also requested more clarity on the term *“points for discussion”* in the teaching and learning themes, which correlated with similar comments from teachers. There were also several comments which indicated a feeling that the documentation was too long for some. It was felt that teachers and managers needed time to adapt to a complete change in how things are done, with several reviewers making comments relating to staff reluctance to ask for a visit. It was suggested that a more formal scheduling process may support this and that the process of creating and sharing documents may need to be looked at - possibly sharing through Google Classroom. As with the teacher feedback, some reviewers

also felt that *Lesson Visit* goals needed to be closer linked to PDR, but in this case of reviewers made specific reference to this being “*for monitoring*”.

There were still cases where reviewers felt that “*a few members of staff feel the need to perform and feel anxious*”. The reason for this may well be indicated in a further comment from one reviewer who stated, “*Outside of learning walks, when teachers are still given a week’s notice, when do we get to see the day to day teaching?*”, which implies that the only way to evaluate teaching is by surprise drop in!

*Q3. What was positive about the professional discussion part of the process, as a reviewer?*

*“[It was a good] opportunity to build rapport, give praise and celebrate the work of the teachers and offer advice, support directly relevant to them”.*

The professional discussion allowed for the reviewer to “*know the teacher’s thoughts*” on the lesson content, student experience and wider context of the course. It was reported that teachers appeared more comfortable with sharing their concerns/areas for development. Some reviewers felt better able to understand the challenges faced by their staff as well as the lesson content. Feedback again suggested positive relationships had been built between teachers/managers, and “*The majority seem to have got [something] out of the process*”. Overall comments suggested a positive experience for both parties which involved open and honest discussion and learning and pedagogy focused conversation. However, it was suggested that a minority of staff still expected feedback rather than a collaborative discussion after the *Lesson Visit* which would indicate a flaw in communication.

*Q4. Where could the professional discussion part of the process be improved, as a reviewer?*

*“I do not feel staff are still yet empowered or confident in setting their own goals and it would be nice to see less work from the reviewer in this process with staff more proactive in the setting of goals, from my experiences so far”.*

There were several comments relating to the time available to “fit in” meetings post visit, which led to too much time between the visit and the discussion taking place. To support this, it was suggested that teachers could reflect on the session before the discussion takes place - making notes on the documentation. Some managers reported that others were not holding the discussions and just sharing the *Lesson Visit* paperwork with teachers instead. When setting goals, it was made apparent that both teachers and reviewers need a better understanding of what internal CPD is on offer to support teachers’ development of practice and pedagogy. It was also suggested by one reviewer that the paperwork for 2nd *Lesson Visit* (for full-time staff) should be combined with first to ensure the next reviewer (not likely to be the same person) is informed of the content of the previous visit

*Q5. What was positive about the documentation and goal setting process, as a reviewer?*

The teacher goal setting was favoured by some over the previous observation policy in which “targets” were set by the observer (line manager). Some reviewers’ comments suggested that it felt like staff were more accountable for their own development and that the setting of goals ensured that the *Lesson Visit* had a purpose, with goals being set for all regardless of how “good” the lesson was. It was suggested that teachers were able to play a central role in their own development plan and some reviewers tried to link development goals with PDR goals but this wasn’t the case across the entire group.

Q6. What improvements could be made to the documentation and goal setting process, as a reviewer?

One area for concern was the suggestion that not all teachers were ready to be totally autonomous and that this significant change would require teachers to be more confident in setting their own development goals. This correlates with feedback from teachers who reported concerns with the process of goal setting. Clarity was needed on whether it was only the lesson focus being observed or wider “performance” and it was clear that goals were not always being set and one reviewer stated that *“It was difficult to set goals for staff whose ultimate goal is to retire soon”*. There were issues with staff setting goals within the meeting and it was reported that some teachers also found it difficult to determine a focus for the *Lesson Visit*. There were also some concerns over the monitoring/reporting of goals and not all reviewers felt they had eyes on the outcome of *Lesson Visits*

#### 4.3.14.4.3 General Feedback on Lesson Visit Policy and Process

**Figure 4.8**

*Overall view of Lesson Visit policy compared to previous graded pathways*

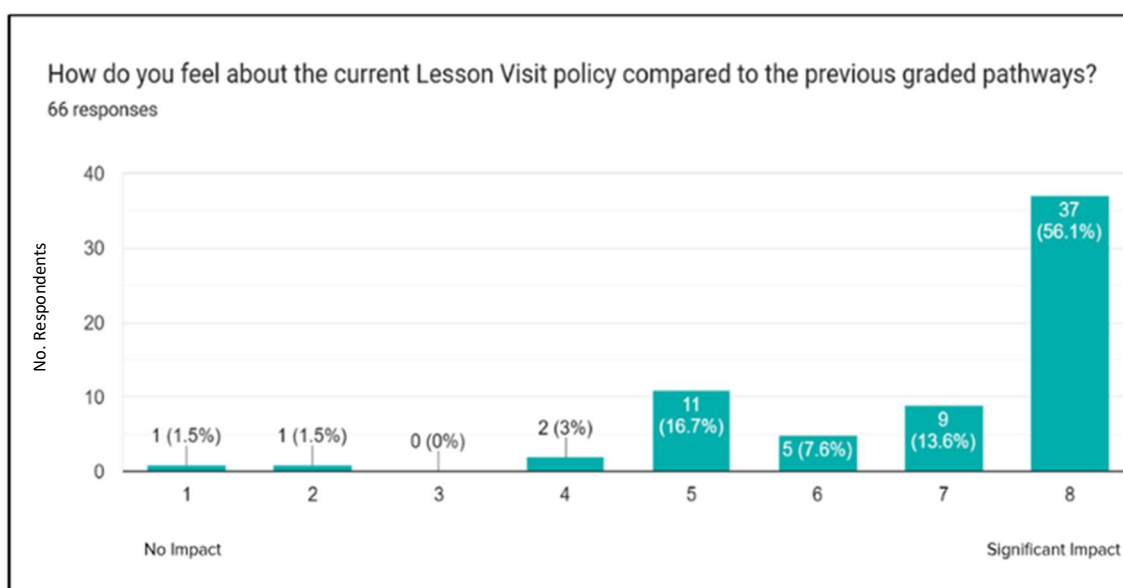




Figure 4.8 indicates the overall strength of feeling of *Lesson Visits* compared to the previous graded pathway. More general *Lesson Visit* feedback, inclusive of teacher and reviewer responses suggests that the new *Lesson Visit* policy has had a positive impact upon: Development of teaching, learning and assessment in the classroom; Relationships with managers and coaches; Opportunities for professional development; Levels of morale (see Appendix F – Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7 and Figure 8).

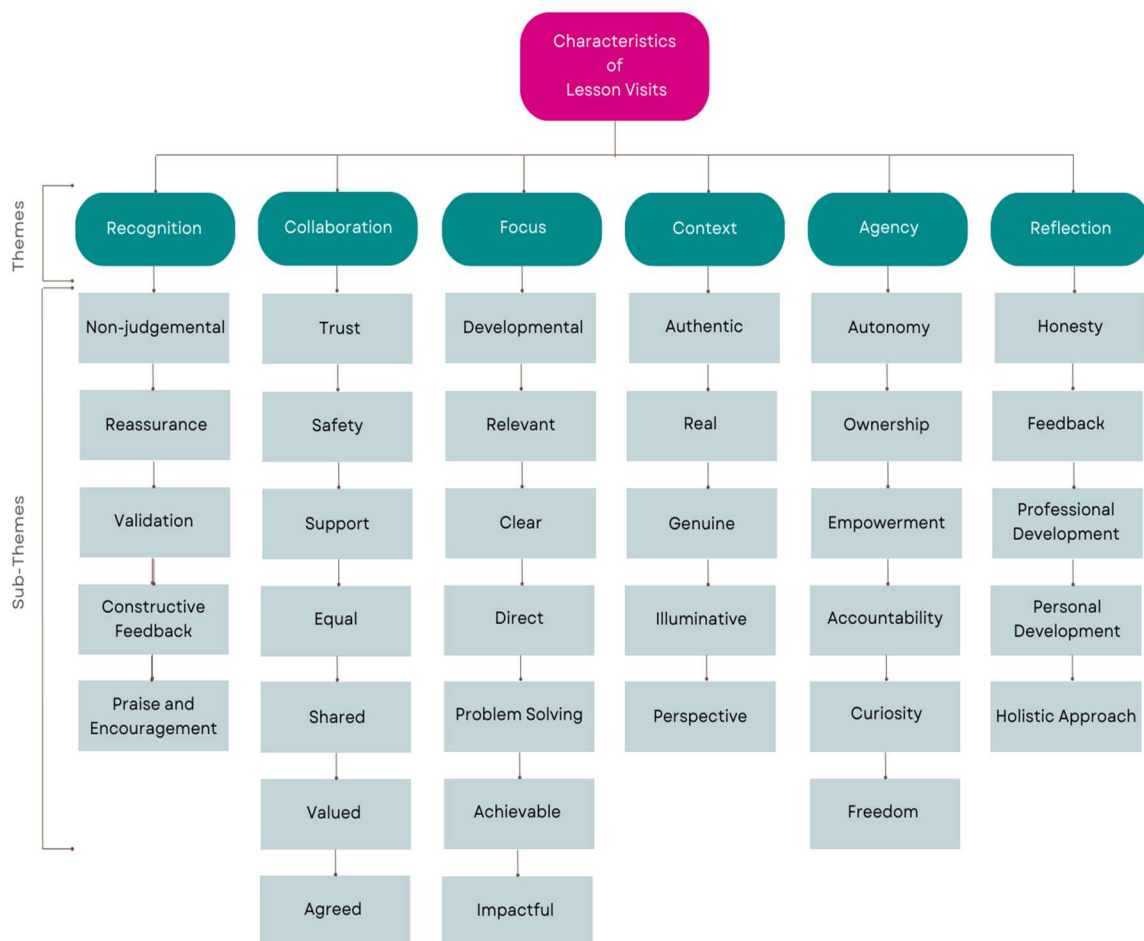
In addition, teachers greatly valued the autonomy of *Lesson Visits*, feeling “*more empowered*” to address and develop their own teaching and learning. 80.3% of participants’ preferred *Lesson Visits* to graded pathways with 56.1% choosing the highest score possible in favour of *Lesson Visits*.

### 4.3.15 Emerging Themes Post -intervention

Again, using Nowell et al. (2017) for direction, thematic analysis was conducted to code and select themes based upon participant response to questions regarding their experience of professional development. After constructing sub-themes from raw data (Appendix G), main themes were then constructed to illustrate the “positive” impact of *Lesson Visits* as a model of professional development as well as potential “areas for development”. These are presented as “*characteristics of lesson visits*” in Figure 4.9 and “*barriers and challenges*” in Figure 4.10.

**Figure 4.9**

*Characteristics of Lesson Visits according to practitioners (including sub-themes)*



#### 4.3.15.1 Positive Impact of Lesson Visits

According to the participants of the post-intervention survey, there are six *positive* themes associated with the *Lesson Visit* process. These include; *collaboration, recognition, focus, context, agency* and *holistic*. The following illustrates with transparency how these “positive” themes have been constructed from several sub themes, based upon participants’ feedback from the introduction of *Lesson Visits* as a mode of professional development.

##### 4.3.15.1.1 Recognition

Participants to the post-intervention survey indicated *recognition* as being a positive theme of *Lesson Visits*. Sub themes suggested that *Lesson Visits* were viewed as; offering *reassurance, validation, praise* and *encouragement*, and *constructive feedback* as well as being *non-judgemental*.

The theme of *recognition* is an indication that teachers welcome the opportunity to be *seen* by their line managers and/or peers and that the *Lesson Visit* process provides the opportunity for this to happen. Through *Lesson Visits* teachers are able to receive reassurance or validation that they are “doing the right thing”. Constructive feedback allows for the recognition of teachers’ efforts as well as identification of strengths and areas for development. A non-judgmental approach supports praise and encouragement, which is directly linked to the improvement in relationships and morale (see Appendix F).

##### 4.3.15.1.2 Collaboration

Participants in the post-intervention survey indicated *collaboration* as being a positive theme of *Lesson Visits*. Sub themes suggested that *Lesson Visits* were based upon; *trust, support* and *safety* as well as the process being *equal, shared, agreed* and *valued*.

The theme of *collaboration* suggests that the opportunity to engage in professional development as a *shared endeavour* is a welcome characteristic of *Lesson Visits*. Teachers felt supported and valued in this process and were able to share their thoughts and feelings regarding their own lived experiences as a teacher, in a safe and trustworthy environment. Teachers reported being treated as equals by lesson reviewers with areas for development and associated development goals agreed between both parties. This theme again links to the improvement in relationships seen in Appendix F.

#### 4.3.15.1.3 Focus

Participants in the post-intervention survey indicated *focus* as being a positive theme of *Lesson Visits*. Sub themes suggested that *Lesson Visits* were viewed as being; *direct, clear, relevant, achievable, developmental, impactful, achievable* and based on *problem-solving*.

The theme of *focus* relates to teachers and managers who reported that *Lesson Visits* provided a clear and direct focus for professional development. Teachers being able to identify a focus of observation ensured that the purpose of the visit was clear and relevant. The focus could be developmental and/or practice-focused where a problem had been identified, either by the teacher as a *Lesson Visit* focus or by the reviewer during the visit. The goal setting procedure was then likely to be more achievable and impactful because of a focused approach.

The theme of *focus* also links to one of the four desirable characteristics of CPD, *focused*, identified in the pre-intervention survey analysis (Figure 4.3).

#### 4.3.15.1.4 Context

Participants to the post-intervention survey indicated *context* as being a positive theme of *Lesson Visits*. Sub themes suggested that *Lesson Visits* were viewed as being; *real, genuine, authentic* and *illuminative* as well as offering *perspective*.

The theme of *context* is a strong indication of the importance of understanding the *real* situation faced by practitioners, in their own world. Teachers and managers reported that *Lesson Visits* allowed for observation of *real* and *authentic* teaching practice. This was illuminative as far as offering a genuine account of what was occurring in a classroom and supported discussions which considered the perspective of both the insider (teacher) and outsider (observer).

The theme of *focus* also links to one of the four desirable characteristics of CPD, *relevant*, identified in the pre-intervention survey analysis (Figure 4.3).

#### 4.3.15.1.5 Agency

Participants to the post-intervention survey indicated *agency* as being a positive theme of *Lesson Visits*. Sub themes suggested that *Lesson Visits* were viewed as supporting; *curiosity, accountability, autonomy* and *ownership* as well as offering a sense of *freedom* and *empowerment*.

The theme of *agency* is reflective of the feelings of teachers during the *Lesson Visit* process who reported a sense of *freedom* in how they were able to approach lesson observation. The closely linked sub-themes of *autonomy* and *ownership* illustrate a sense of control amongst teachers which links to one of the four desirable characteristics of CPD, *self-determined*, identified in the pre-intervention survey analysis (Figure 4.3).

Further sub-themes of *empowerment* and *accountability* are also notable with the feeling that teachers felt motivated to address issues they may not otherwise have done so under a more formal graded process, and that they were willing and able to be accountable for their own development. Finally, *Lesson Visits* appeared to support curiosity amongst teachers who might wish to explore new pedagogy or specific resources to develop their practice or address a problem, which was more achievable in a *judgement-free* environment.

#### 4.3.15.1.6 Reflective

Participants to the post-intervention survey indicated *reflection* as being a positive theme of *Lesson Visits*. Sub themes suggested that *Lesson Visits* were viewed as supporting; *personal development*, *professional development*, opportunities for *feedback* and a *holistic approach* to assessing teaching practice, built upon a foundation of *honesty*.

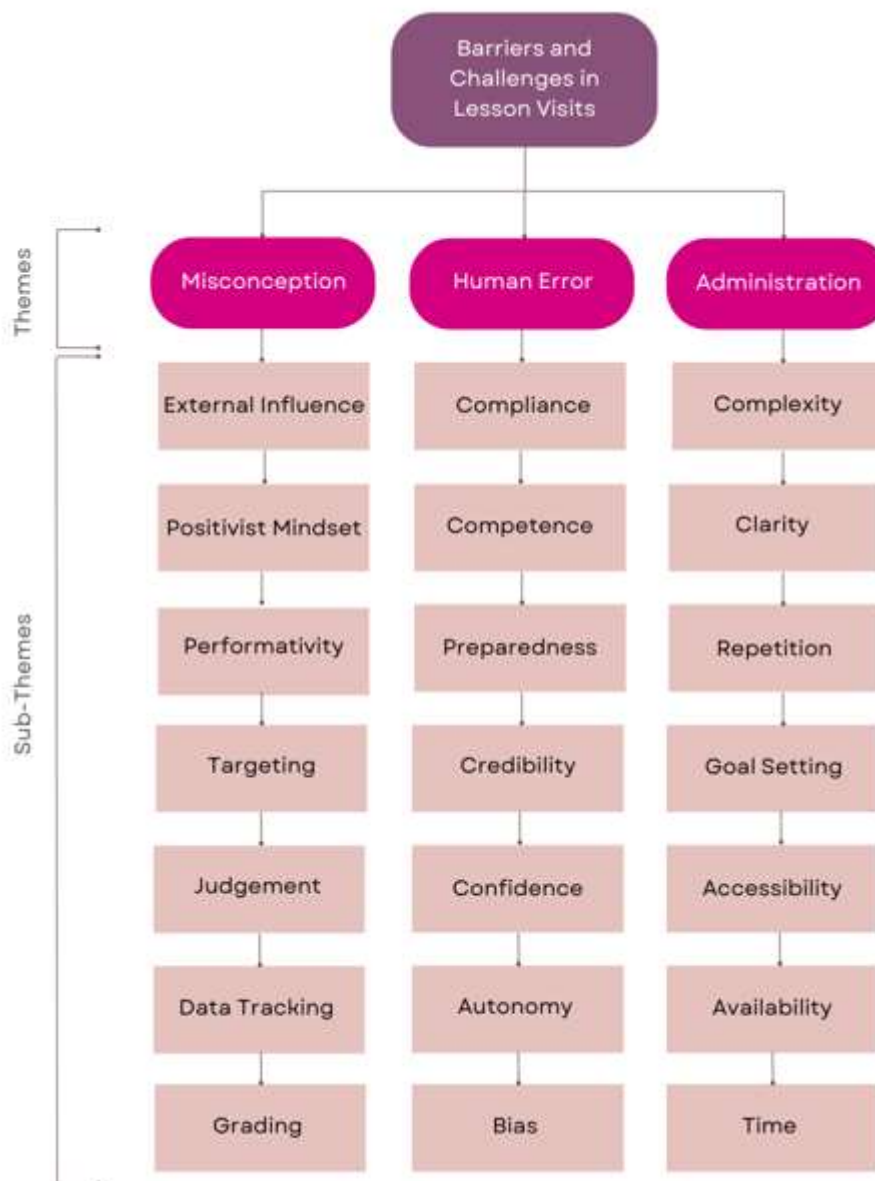
The theme *holistic* implies that no singular episode or action was used to make a judgement on teaching practice. In addition, *Lesson Visits* offered a multifaceted approach to support both personal and professional development. Honest feedback from both parties on what had been seen in the lesson as well as the opportunity to discuss other related factors provided opportunities for reflection amongst both teachers and reviewers.

#### 4.3.15.2 Barriers and challenges for Lesson Visits

In addition to presenting the positive impact of lesson visits in themes, I also present some of the barriers and challenges picked up in thematic analysis of participant responses, these include, *misconception*, *human error* and *administration* (see Figure 4.10).

**Figure 4.10**

*Barriers and challenges in lesson visits according to practitioners*



#### 4.3.15.2.1 Misconception

Participants in the post-intervention survey indicated *misconception* as being a barrier or challenge for *Lesson Visits*. Sub themes suggested that there were concerns around participants' views on a continued desire for grading and the influence of external bodies (e.g. Ofsted).

Some teachers still felt targeted and some managers clearly wanted to retain the ability to target “weak” teachers. There is potential for a preoccupation with data tracking and a view by some that aligns with a very much positivist, objective focused approach to lesson observation which retains judgement. Finally, the continued presence of performativity in both teachers and managers is evident.

#### *4.3.15.2.2 Human Error*

Participants in the post-intervention survey indicated *human error* as being a barrier or challenge for *Lesson Visits*. Sub themes suggested that there were concerns around bias in the observation process, issues with the competence and credibility of observers as well as the potential for bias, the preparedness and confidence of teachers to adopt a system reliant on autonomy and the compliance of both teachers and managers in adopting the model exactly as intended.

#### *4.3.15.2.3 Administration*

Participants in the post-intervention survey indicated *administration* as being a barrier or challenge for *Lesson Visits*. Sub themes suggested that there were concerns around the clarity of processes, particularly the goal setting process and perceived complexity. The accessibility of documentation to those that need it was also raised as a barrier as was the availability of lesson reviewers and the time required to both complete and follow up on *Lesson Visits* is also a potential barrier. Finally, it was felt that there was some repetition in goal setting between *Lesson Visits* and the college personal development review (PDR) process.



#### 4.3.15.3 Summary of themes Post-intervention

The post-intervention survey provided insight into how practitioners felt about a lesson observation policy which was employed as a model of professional development rather than a model of quality assurance. The vast majority of participants favoured the new policy over the old one and cited a number of additional benefits including improved teacher and manager relationships and morale, increased opportunities for greater impact on teaching and learning practice, and individual professional development. Teachers (and some managers) also valued the autonomy afforded to the teacher in identifying a focus for observation as part of the new policy.

This positive feedback was mirrored in the thematic analysis of qualitative data with the construction of six main themes, facilitated through the *Lesson Visit* policy; *relevance, collaboration, focus, context, agency* and *holistic*. There were some parallels with the findings from the pre-intervention survey themes which identified characteristics of good CPD according to teachers. Focus and relevance were continuing themes across both sets of data.

In the next chapter I will discuss these themes and findings further with reference to supporting literature, revisiting elements of Chapter 2 in the processes, before outlining the key findings.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion of Themes and Findings

*“We now live in an age in which discussions about education are dominated by measurement and comparisons of educational outcomes and that these measurements as such seem to direct much of educational policy and, through this, also much of educational practice. The danger here is that we end up valuing what is measured, rather than that we engage in measurement of what we value”.* (Biesta 2009, p. 10)

### 5.1 Introduction

In the interests of coherence, it is important to introduce this chapter by reconnecting with the methodology set out in Chapter 3 and in particular the ontological and epistemological standpoints proposed there. The constructivist ontological position adopted in this thesis has encouraged an inductive, from the ground-up, logical approach to data analysis. The broadly ethnographic approach adopted in this study supports the exploration of the lived experiences of participants in this research. It also presents an account of my own journey as an educational researcher. The previous chapter offers many insights and rich sources of information relating to continuous professional development of teachers in a large FE college in England.

As previously discussed, the pragmatist-interpretive epistemology adopted in this thesis has supported the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. I continue to ground the findings of this study in the analysis of quantitative data, before using qualitative data sets to illuminate and discuss the individual lived experiences of the teachers who participated in this investigation. Chapter 4 provides an account of my analysis of a wealth of data through five different phases of research intervention and data collection. These include individual

perceptions of the quality of staff development; engagement with online CPD delivery methods; feedback on teaching and learning interventions which are practice-focused; and finally, the implementation and review of an alternative lesson observation policy.

From this information, themes have been distilled, interpreted and constructed to illustrate more clearly the thoughts and feelings of the research participants reported in this thesis. From these themes several findings have come to light. This chapter provides an opportunity to discuss these findings and how they might be used to contribute to further research and/or practice development.

### *5.1.1 Revisiting the Research Questions*

Chapter 1 explains that the aim of this research is to explore the lived experiences of teachers as they encounter professional development in an FE setting. The following primary research questions are set out in Chapter 1 and repeated here for ease of reference:

1. To what extent is teacher motivation influenced by the gamification of professional development?
2. In what ways can CPD satisfy both the individual needs of teachers and the priorities of organisations?
3. What do teachers' stories of their experience of CPD tell us about how teacher agency is enacted?

In this chapter, I indicate where the findings from Chapter 4 address the research questions posed in this study, whilst also making links to associated literature from Chapter 2.

### 5.1.2 Re-defining the sample group

For transparency, there was some discrepancy between the participants in the pre-intervention stage of this research compared with the post intervention survey of *Lesson Visit* impact. Initially it was my intention to refine the number of participants to a select group of departments within the college to ensure a spread of teachers with different lengths of service and experiences within the classroom. However, once this thesis started to move more into whole organisation policy revision, which impacted upon the entire college, it became more important to request involvement and feedback from a wider pool of participants including all teachers and managers subject to the *Lesson Visit* policy. Consequently, these groups were invited to provide feedback. This means that the respondents in the pre-intervention phase and the post-intervention phase may vary (participant anonymity when responding to surveys means this could not be checked).

## **5.2 RQ1: To what extent is teacher motivation influenced by the gamification of professional development?**

### 5.2.1 *There are clearly desirable characteristics of CPD for teachers*

*“Emotions are qualifications of a drama and they change as the drama develops”*

(Dewey, 2005, p. 3).

The thoughts and feelings of teachers have been of great value in translating and reporting the findings of this research with authenticity and credibility. Preliminary findings in Phase 1 indicate that according to teachers there are four desirable characteristics of CPD,

which should be; *relevant, self-determined, meaningful* and *focused* (Figure 4.3). This is not surprising, considering the previously identified preference of teachers for CPD which is practice-focused, context-sensitive and context-dependent. It is also unsurprising that these four desirable characteristics are well connected to literature introduced and discussed in Chapter 2.

Desimone (2009) and Opfer and Pedder (2011) consider the importance of a clear focus for CPD, whilst Collin and Smith (2021) infer the importance of CPD being meaningful in its design and implementation, with particular consideration of relevance through an understanding of context. Biesta et al. (2015) and Priestley et al. (2015) foreground the importance of self-determination in the form of *agency* categorised as offering both teachers and learners a voice, and often a choice in how they teach and how they learn. The influence of these characteristics upon the quality of CPD (defined by the value placed upon it by teachers) is discussed later in this chapter.

### 5.2.2 *One-size fits no-one*

*“...research can only inform practice because it can never replace other knowledge which teachers bring to bear on practical problems...even the best research evidence is not available as fixed, universal relationships between methods and outcomes, but as local, context-sensitive patterns which have to be interpreted by teachers within their particular working environments.”* (Edwards, 2000, p. 301)

The initial phase of data collection (pre-intervention survey), showed a wide variety of CPD delivery models and content. Participants had plenty of opportunities to attend training and the majority (61.5%) rated the quality of training favourably, with clear characteristics

defining “quality” provision. For training to be of value to teachers it needed to be *focused, relevant, meaningful* and *self-determined* (Figure 4.3). CPD that lacks “meaning” and is “controlled” was the least desirable (Figure 4.4) This is an interesting finding considering that these are two characteristics, which can be seen to be standard practice for “traditional” CPD delivery models reliant upon experts “transferring” knowledge (Fielding et al., 2005).

The majority of participants (69.2%) suggest a tendency for CPD to be “done” to meet organisational objectives and/or “done” to develop teaching and learning (66.7%). This is not a surprise if we look at the work of the ETF (2018) who report similar trends, suggesting that a key driver of training for colleges was to maximise efficiency, performance and professionalism of the workforces. On the other hand, teachers are more likely to want to focus on training which develops their teaching practice and pedagogical skills.

This preoccupation with meeting organisational objectives is also apparent in the work of Biesta (2015), Coffield (2017) and Ball (2018) among others, who all make similar comments indicating that the attentions of college staff and more specifically college leaders, are often diverted away from students and more focused upon the appeasing inspectors. The urgency to meet the demands of external parties such as awarding organisations or Ofsted, is palpable across the field of this research.

The lack of attention given to the improvement of individual practice is again clear where participants remark that CPD is rarely ever “*excellent*” in its content or delivery. It is clear therefore that something is not quite right in relation to CPD meeting the individual needs of teachers in practice. In the review of the literature in Chapter 2 we see similar results in the works of Smylie (1989), Opfer and Pedder (2011), and Carpenter (2016), who all report that the quality of CPD in education is mixed. Some report CPD being too “*generalised*” or “*prescribed*” and that there is a feeling that it lacks relevance and meaning to teachers on an individual level.

The phrase “*box-ticking*” is frequently used to describe this form of CPD. Unfortunately, this appears to be the all too common default position. This thesis provides evidence that the box-ticking approach is not unique or restricted to CPD either, as it clearly spills over into the graded lesson observation process employed by the college. This is discussed in more detail later.

With reference to RQ1, the mode of delivery would appear to not be entirely relevant to the meaningfulness of CPD. In fact, my original belief that gamified learning might be the panacea to improving staff engagement, was shown to be something of a red herring. There remains both teacher and student reticence to teaching and learning online and despite the forced adoption of online methods during COVID lockdowns, it is far from being a preferred way of learning. Smith and Taxler (2022, p. 4) cite that an “...*unwillingness to participate seems to be the case...even without a teacher presence*”. This is an issue repeatedly reflected in the feedback received from participants of this thesis who have consistently stated a preference to retain face -to -face learning opportunities, with only a few retaining any sort of allegiance to online learning.

Despite the obvious flaws in online learning versus face to face teaching, there has been a positive legacy in that, in general; teachers and students feel more comfortable working with technology. However, here is still some disparity between those “going for broke” and using every “gimmick” available and those who are more cautious about how they integrate technology into their practice to ensure that it truly enhances teaching and doesn’t simply mask the ineffective pedagogy (Smith & Taxler, 2022). From the literature reviewed (Deterding, 2011; Kapp, 2012; Kityakova, 2014; Buckley & Doyle, 2016; Newman, 2017), there was reason for me to believe gamification might play a part in improving teacher engagement, whether it be the integration of educational technology, albeit enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, or addressing other aspects of educational practice, opening up new spaces and the feeling that

the future can be different from the past. The work of Bernstein (1996) suggests that approaches to CPD which employ boundary-crossing conditions of experience where teachers can see that the future does not have to be the same as the past, lends support to the argument that such a model might operate to support the development of teacher agency, changing the relays of institutional power and control.

Unfortunately, immediate post-COVID attitudes suggest that training and development was not a priority as teachers were fixated, in accordance to government instruction, on “catch up and recovery”. This, coupled with the presence of digital apathy having been forced to work solely online during the pandemic, fuelled a lack of engagement with “optional” CPD in general. A similar outcome was seen in the *EduArcade* and *Theme of the Week* interventions. These failed to deliver a discernible or sustainable impact, and most likely did not meet the desirable characteristics of CPD (Figure 4.3). Not all interventions befell the same fate however, *[College] Projects* demonstrated in microcosm the virtues and potential of a model of CPD which encouraged the development of agency and collaboration and contributed to what might be considered as meaningful CPD. The *Collaborative Teaching* initiative further supported a desire for teachers to learn cooperatively with, and from, one another in a shared mutual endeavour (Fielding et al. 2005). A greater level of engagement and satisfaction reported by teachers in these two examples, lead me to believe that it is, in fact, the nature of the model of CPD, underpinned by a particular and pragmatic approach to educational change and the improvement of educational practice, as well as the associated focus and content, which is most valued by teachers rather than any one mode of delivery.

*Lesson Visits*, the epilogue of my attempts to create a model of CPD which might satisfy both the individual needs of teachers and the priorities of organisations, was shown, both objectively, in the quantitative analysis of impact, and qualitatively in the voices of participants



and their stories of experience, to have come a lot closer to creating the conditions in which teachers' individual needs might be met. In addition, promoting a practice-focused approach, with constructive feedback and reinforcement from a "chosen" reviewer was pivotal in empowering teachers to request an observation, which was *focused, self-determined* and *relevant* (with consideration for context and individual needs). In meeting these three conditions the fourth condition, *meaningful*, also appeared to be achieved. This new approach to CPD was very well received by the majority of participants with one teacher stating, "*I genuinely think this new approach to lesson observation is the best I have experienced in over 20 years of teaching*".

In the main, it is clear that CPD should promote conditions in which teacher agency and the improvement of educational practice can be enacted, where teachers are empowered to identify their own training needs, with or without support, and exercise an element of choice in how they address any areas for development. The alignment of these professional learning aims with existing expertise and "*contextual nuances*" (Buckley & Husband, 2020), can then support bespoke training for individual practitioners, and a more meaningful experience of CPD.

This offer sits in stark contrast to the traditional, top-down, prescriptive approach that many schools and colleges are still taking and many leaders, managers and even teachers would appear to favour. This is more than likely because of a conditioned beliefs and assumptions, rather than any *measurable* outcomes. The work of Carr (2005, p. 40) lends support to the influence of these conditioned beliefs, stating:

*"...the whole raison d'être for practical philosophy is based on a clear recognition that notions like "theory", "application" and method" have no place in practical reasoning and*

*thus play no meaningful role in a form of philosophy specifically intended to contribute to its development”.*

Data from this study suggest that many of the current educational issues faced by educators are founded within the early twentieth century trend for institutionalisation, in which education became a mechanical process of technical reasoning through which rational truths were to be taught and learnt. This is still very much evident in the antiquated and pretentiously prescient epistemological position adopted by Ofsted through which it enforces externally imposed goals as part of an objective driven, inspection process (Ball, 2003; Coffield, 2017). Data from this study demonstrate the adverse impact of this more locally in my own organisation, through the existence of a graded lesson observation policy, which mirrored, be it intentionally or unintentionally, the Ofsted way.

It is understandable that teachers who are citing concerns with workload may be conditioned to reach for the first available off the shelf solution to their problem. After all these models and methods purport to offer the scientifically verified knowledge, which provide a guaranteed “blueprint” for “success”. However, this preference for technical-rational approaches to CPD, in changing and improving educational practice, often do little to address the root cause of the problems and issues being faced by teachers in the contexts of their work. What education leaders and CPD managers want and what teachers need appear firmly juxtaposed. Data from this study indicate that it takes steadfast commitment and courage on the part of educational leaders to take the risks required to change the way in which CPD is done. In the modern era, education has become “...*insulated from philosophy*” and place where “...*technologisation, institutionalisation and bureaucratisation - those core embodiments of the ideology of scientism - effectively ensure that education is now construed as a species of poiesis*”

*guided by techne, and hence as an instrumental activity directed towards the achievement of externally imposed outcomes and goals.” (Carr 2005, p. 45)*

This “blind” commitment to a seemingly limited approach limits the expression of practice or *praxis*, within education. In order to engage with a practice “...*qualities such as honesty and humility...patience and courage...and justice and generosity*” are essential in realising the “*goods*” intrinsic to it (Dunne, 2021, p. 153). These qualities are inherent to the need to explore practice independent of a defined outcome, and must oppose any pursuit of immediate gratification or external recognition. They must work to overcome the perceived individual limitations or shortcomings of an individual and promote a partnership with others who might support the development of a practice overriding any rivalry between individuals:

*“If one person really comes to excel, this does not need to be at the cost of other people’s chances to develop their talents. Every achievement of excellence enriches all who participate in or care about a practice; it can be an occasion for admiration or even celebration as well as sometimes, of course, for attempts at emulation.” (Dunne, 2021, p. 153)*

I have learnt from the feedback of participants, in both the pre and post-intervention surveys, that the “good” of professional development may vary depending on the individual needs of a teacher. For some, the effort which goes into developing a practice is seen as a reward in itself, further cementing an understanding of what it takes to become a teacher. For others, the achievement of competencies is most enabling and offers a sense of resourcefulness and mastery of teaching craft (Sennett, 2008; Thoilliez, 2019).

### *5.2.3 Looking beyond the “technique” of gamification*

The extent to which gamification influences teacher motivation within this study remains unclear. There is some evidence, anecdotally, to suggest that teachers “enjoyed” gamified learning but the lack of interest in accessing and completing online training during phase 2 might suggest otherwise. It would seem likely that during this study in particular the mode of CPD delivery, which gamification was looking to influence, was not the underlying issue and instead it was the culture of CPD and how it was perceived by practitioners, which was the deciding factor in how motivated they were to engage.

Based upon data generated in this thesis I am, therefore, unable to confirm whether or not the gamification of professional development influences teacher motivation. However, taking RQ1 as a starting point for investigation played a crucial role in encouraging me as a researcher to look beyond a “tool” focused approach to addressing my problem. This was an extremely important “pivot point” in this thesis, and an important and necessary step in this research process, which encouraged me to look more deeply and critically into models of educational change and improvement; the nature of educational practice; and how educational practice actually improves in FE contexts, including the apparent issues in and the shortcomings of technical-rational perspectives regarding approaches to managing and improving the quality of education.

## **5.3 Research Question 2 (RQ2): In what ways can CPD satisfy both the individual needs of teachers and the priorities of organisations?**

### *5.3.1 It takes time to affect change!*

There are examples in the data reported and analysed in Chapter 4 which indicate that some observers still crave control, which is most likely attributed to the internal pressure on managers to be “accountable” for the quality of teaching in their departments. Whether it is the adherence to quality improvement plans or the ever-increasing presence of key performance indicators, (a symptom of the businesses, which colleges have now become), managers clearly feel under pressure to “perform”. The following quote from one manager, *“I have seen far fewer lessons than I usually would by this point of the academic year, and have missed this opportunity to discuss lessons and learning with teachers.”*, suggests an inherent need to manage and control the practice of others, even if it is with the best of intent.

There are also some who still want to “root out” the “weaker” teachers in the manner to which they have become conditioned. However, I believe, as is evident in the majority of responses from managers in this study, that the empowerment of teachers to act as they see fit in addressing classroom issues, as demonstrated through *Lesson Visits* and other related interventions, is both an appealing and powerful prospect for teachers and managers, and overall presents a change which has the potential to significantly improve relationships of mutual respect, trust and support between teachers and managers.

Former Ofsted Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw is quoted by Coffield (2017) as stating:

“... if anyone says to you that staff morale is at an all-time low, you know you’re doing something right”. (p. XVI)

This is indeed a shocking statement and one which is difficult for anyone with roots in education to accept, let alone digest. However, it is one which epitomises the feeling that many educators have towards the approach embodied by the inspectorate body for education in England. The findings of this thesis suggest the opposite, as significant improvement in teacher morale was seen after the introduction of *Lesson Visits*. However, it is also important to remain mindful of the many factors which continue to impact upon day to day teaching, leaving teacher morale vulnerable to change. College leaders have the opportunity to impact teacher morale by supporting their staff in being able to do their job well, however, in order to provide an environment which supports effective teaching, and a culture that allows for honest and open discourse around educational issues and the development of teaching practice, leaders need to be willing to take a risk themselves in doing so. This is clearly difficult for some whilst the ever-present Ofsted “gavel” hangs over them.

Within the *Lesson Visits* initiative, support was needed in the setting of developmental goals and the monitoring progress towards achieving these. Complete agency for some, as we have already discussed in Chapter 2, proved problematic, as agency is dependent on individual levels of teacher confidence and competence, requiring certain conditions to be in place for it to be enacted. This is particularly relevant where teachers are new or inexperienced, something which will likely remain a concern for colleges with the fall in teacher recruitment and the scramble to fill T-Level classrooms with industry professionals, many of whom are entering directly into the classroom and bypassing the traditional teacher training routes. Although industry experience itself is incredibly valuable in helping further education providers to meet

their local skills needs, it is not all it takes to be a teacher, and colleges will need to adapt their own processes to accommodate this. I suggest that this is a potential limitation of the *Lesson Visit* model and a consideration for further development.

#### 5.3.1.1 *What are the conditions for change?*

*“A practice is a coherent and invariably quite complex set of activities and tasks that has evolved cooperatively and cumulatively over time. It is alive in the community who are its insiders (i.e., its genuine practitioners) ...and it stays alive only so long as they sustain a commitment to creatively develop and extend it – sometimes by shifts which at the time may seem dramatic and even subversive. Central to any such practice are standards of excellence, themselves subject to development and redefinition, which demand responsiveness from those who are, or are trying to become, practitioners.” (Dunne, 2021, pp. 152-153)*

To understand the conditions for change we must understand what it is we are changing, teaching practice. Thinking, philosophy, teaching and research are all experiences, all examples of a practice. Carr, (1995, p. 63) draws attention to how, *“Practice is not the stepchild of theory but proceeds theory, as the theory itself is a form of practice”*. Practice and theory are therefore, seemingly, mutually constitutive of one another. In other words, someone has to have done something before they can theorise about it. However, the 19th-century push towards scientism separated out experience, practice, theory, and research into their own individual silos.

Carr (1995) discusses how practice is inherently grounded in reality. He argues that if we construct a world based on experience and interpretation then we are inductive from the bottom up. Linked to the notion *phronesis* (practical reasoning) and aligned with a constructivist ontological position, this definition of practice illustrates what I consider to be the true strengths of the interventions employed in this thesis, notably *Lesson Visits*, *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching*, in which these conditions for change have been supported.

As discussed in Chapter 3, In contrast, Plato's empiricism suggests that truth is found and known by stripping the body away from human experience in order to arrive at certainty through objectivity and that in certainty we can find the perfect form. This process is highly deductive in nature (Coe et al., 2017) and indicative of the top-down, technical-rational approach to educational change and improvement, which positions CPD as a (quasi-mechanical) instrument in engaging teachers in professional learning (Chen, 2022), and this is all too often the norm in educational settings. The pragmatic-interpretive epistemic approach, employed in this thesis, offers a balance between the real world and human experience. Taking a non-binary, ground-up approach is the start of this process, this epistemic position acknowledges that there are other conditions to be met if we are to pay full attention to the real-world experiences of educators.

This thesis advocates the adoption of a much more coherent model of educational change and improvement. During its evolution, a much greater focus on practice has come into view and to the fore. Through adopting new interventions, the conditions for change reported in this thesis have become increasingly pragmatic, with teachers able to explore and try new things, reflecting, listening and changing their practice through a democratic distribution of power. This pragmatic and democratic approach, aligned with Dunne's (1997) definition of



*praxis*, contradicts the technical-rational, “penalty shootout” model. Data from this study reveal that this has elicited a behaviour change in teachers who are not scared to raise their concerns as they engage in collaborative solution-focused, horizontal discourse. There is no longer a top-down chain of command and control operating in the college in which this study is set. Having subverted the existing top-down order of things, relationships of respect and understanding between teachers and managers have improved, rebuilding trust and promoting collaboration in professional learning (Chen, 2022).

Replacing the feeling of fear with the feeling of trust was dependent on the establishment and maintenance of positive social relations between teachers and observers. These relationships were strained under the old observation model which sprung observation upon teachers at any given moment and then expected them to “perform” according to a prescribed list of objective statements. *Lesson Visits*, offered an alternative approach. They removed the fear (in many cases) associated with observation and supported a more positive experience in which trust was a key element. As Sennett (2012) suggests, the development of trust requires a leap of faith in other people, at the heart of which is a belief that nobody wants to do a bad job in education. Sennett (2012, p. 170) describes this ethos as “...to want, and to do, good work”, when referring to the relationships between inspectors and educators. However, this is also akin to the trust relationships evidenced in *Lesson Visits* between teachers and reviewers.

It must also be recognised that this positive change of direction has not been an overnight success and is not immediately transferable into other contexts. Any change in practice is likely to be slow and at first not everyone may be on board. However, I have learned in the course of conducting this research that this does not have to be a discouraging sign. As discussed in Chapter 2, Fielding et al. (2005) note that knowledge is often treated as a

commodity to be passed on. However, teaching is a dynamic, complex complicated process and must be afforded time to develop as a practice. As Bernstein (2006) argues, certain pedagogical rights must be met and supported through a pedagogic device and discourse in which certain cultural forms, values, practices, and shared understandings can be made transparent and where, in the interests of democracy, previous boundaries, structures and practices can be challenged.

Carr, (1995, p. 2) urges researchers and theorists in the discipline of education to recognise that, “...teachers are not mindless functionaries performing in accordance with the theories of others”. However, this cannot necessarily be said for educational policy makers who appear to rely upon a far more technical-rational approach to educational change and improvement (Carr, 1995).

In the spirit of practical reasoning we must assume that there is no blueprint for change. Traditional models of CPD are often prescribed and at times expensive, but the question is...to what end? Even the most basic of reflections on practices which have been learnt, for example riding a bike, playing a guitar, or driving a car, reveals that the acquisition and development of these practices involved much more than just being told (or even shown) what to do. The process is messy, iterative, incremental, slow. And yet we still expect to deliver CPD “events” and solve our problems overnight by simply telling teachers what to do. Coe et al. (2014) propose six components of great teaching:

1. *(Pedagogical) content knowledge (Strong evidence of impact on student outcomes)*
2. *Quality of Instruction (Strong evidence of impact on student outcomes)*
3. *Classroom climate (Moderate evidence of impact on student outcomes)*
4. *Classroom management (Moderate evidence of impact on student outcomes)*
5. *Teacher beliefs (Some evidence of impact on student outcomes)*

6. *Professional behaviours (Some evidence of impact on student outcomes)* (pp. 2-3)

All 6 of these components are inherently associated with the individual teacher and although they may be influenced externally by leaders and managers too, their quality is dependent on the teacher. This example as well as data from this thesis illustrate the importance of putting teachers at the heart of quality improvement, and by supporting conditions such as the development of teacher agency we can make it easier to bring people along with us.

Education in England has a long-standing history of self-evaluation and peer review and currently most colleges follow the standard practice of producing a self-assessment report (SAR), which is submitted along with a QIP to Ofsted on an annual basis. MacBeath (2008, p. 39) in Coffield (2017, p. 31) comments on the evolution of self-evaluation to self-inspection (Table 5.1), and suggests that, “...the more government provides the frameworks, indicators and tools, the less inventive and spontaneous the process at school and classroom level”.

**Table 5.1**

*Characteristics of self-inspection and self-evaluation (Adapted from MacBeath, 2008, p. 40)*

<b>Self-inspection</b>	<b>Self-evaluation</b>
Top-down	Bottom-up/grass roots
A one-off event	Is continuous and embedded in teachers' work
Provides a snapshot at a given time	Is a moving and evolving picture
Is time-consuming	Is time saving

Is more about accountability than improvement	Is more about improvement than accountability
Applies a rigid framework	Is flexible and spontaneous
Uses a set of predetermined criteria	Uses, adapts and creates relevant criteria
Creates resistance	Engages and involves people
Can detract from learning and teaching	Improves learning and teaching
Encourages playing safe	Takes risks

MacBeath (2008) makes a number of interesting points regarding the characteristics of self-evaluation. These appear to align with the interventions employed and reported in this thesis, however, according to Coffield (2017, p. 31) the tendency for educational leaders to fixate upon exam results, *“as if that is all there is to education”*, indicates that the value of CPD is still very much under-rated and too often dependent upon organisational agendas, and the quest for Ofsted validation through self-inspection.

Referring specifically to a school-led peer-review of 300+ schools, Coffield (2017) goes on to identify the lack of interest that the review process has in classroom teachers. Instead, the professional development of senior-leaders is perceived as the primary objective in managing educational change and improvement, despite the benefits of self-evaluation over self-inspection posited by MacBeath (2008). The suggestion here that leadership is the most important indicator of educational improvement is not entirely wrong. However, data from this study suggest that it is the manner by which leaders lead that is paramount. Leaders who are able to accept a degree of vulnerability and encourage teachers to be more inventive and spontaneous, collaborative and cooperative in developing their teaching practice, may provide

conditions of liminality in which change and improvement not only come into view but also become capable of being realised in order to effectively challenge the status quo. Ensuring that the future does not have to be the same as the past (Bernstein, 1996).

Spontaneity does not need to be to the detriment of accountability, as Coffield (2017, p. 32) observes when discussing the arguments of Drucker (1994) “...education has become much too important and much too expensive not to be held accountable”. Monitoring the quality of education and reporting on general themes is a potential positive aspect of inspections, as could be argued is the opportunity to provide feedback and “challenge unquestioned assumptions, poor practices and incompetent teachers in order to stimulate improvement” (Coffield, 2017, p. 32). However, if the act of inspection is detrimental to teaching and learning practice, and on a daily basis as teachers and leaders are discouraged or distracted from taking risks with new curricula and teaching pedagogy, then the impact of inspection is likely to be limited at best. At worst, inspection, whether it through external means or internal self-inspection (e.g. graded observation, learning walks, deep-dives), creates a culture of fear and performativity, which stunts the growth, innovation, change and improvement needed to overcome some of the most enduring educational issues facing practitioners across the sector.

Coffield (2017) promotes a new model of inspection where education moves away from exclusively summative assessment of measurable educational outcomes (e.g. exam results and graded observations) towards a blend of formative and summative assessment in order for schools and colleges to prosper from the positive benefits of inspection. Within this thesis, Coffield’s model has been demonstrated, in microcosm, to be one which has had a positive influence and impact upon the improvement of educational practice. In addressing the negative connotations associated with the terms “inspection” or “observation”, such as blame and

control, this model of educational change and improvement, through practice-focused CPD has helped to create a culture of honesty and collaboration where the focus is firmly on quality improvement as a *shared endeavour*.

Coffield (2017) also discusses how Ofsted inspections might offer greater levels of support to match the challenge they put upon schools and colleges, notably through greater involvement before, during and after inspection and in particular playing a part in agreeing and monitoring developmental goals and supporting implementation appropriately. It is still important to consider the condition of “challenge” in *Lesson Visits*, and as discussed earlier the importance of accountability in education. As leaders, managers and teachers, we must not shy away from making judgements about teaching practice as they can be used to challenge the status quo. In *Lesson Visits* we were clear that judgements were still being made, it would have been disingenuous to suggest otherwise. However, it was the spirit of these judgements, the conditions under which the judgements were made and what happened next, that mattered most.

Swaffield and MacBeath (2005, p. 240) suggest that support is, “*a subjective phenomenon dependent on a range of factors, not least the nature, provenance and purpose of the critical friend...Whether invited, proposed or imposed, critical friends come with a remit, a focus, or in some cases only a set of under elaborated assumptions about what they are there to do and where the boundaries of their intervention lie*”. During *Lesson Visits* it was deemed imperative that the teachers themselves should have some say in the nature of support received, rather than mandating a prescribed set of actions, in order to retain and protect the condition of *agency*.

Another condition to be considered is *context*. Ball (2012) and Coffield (2017) both discuss the importance of context with Coffield noting that although context is considered by

Ofsted in an inspection it is often as a “*backdrop* rather than an *active force*”. Ball et al. (2012, p. 24) illustrates four dynamic aspects of context including; “*location, professional cultures, physical/material, external*”. It is proposed that these factors have a considerable impact on the quality of classroom practice, even though they may not be in the control of the teacher or even the wider organisation. This discussion of context is as relevant at classroom level as it is when assessing overall organisational quality and plays a key role in helping to promote the importance of context when making judgements about teaching practice. This was a key aspect in the *Lesson Visit* process, which promoted a more “*holistic*” and “*dynamic*” assessment of “*real*” teaching (Coffield, 2017).

With judgements being made and shared with the intent of supporting educators to be more reflective and accepting of constructive feedback, lesson reviewers (observers) during *Lesson Visits* took on the role of a “*critical friend*” (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2005). As a “*critical friend*”, judgements are expected to be interpretive in nature and made with the consideration of the context in which practice is interpreted. Eisner (2002, p. 123) states, “*Interpretation is a process of sensemaking and often requires a deep understanding of the context*”, where judgements are made on the quality of practice they should be based upon the “*...merits of what has been seen, not a statement about matter of preference*”. This statement is aligned to the ethos of *Lesson Visits*, as evidenced in data from this study. However, this approach and ethos appear to be in stark contrast to existing models of graded observation in some further education colleges (not to mention the current Ofsted EIF).

Data from this study reveal that *Lesson Visits* provided the opportunity for context informed discourse and self-directed improvement strategies based on the direct observation of practice, not the preceding theory. Data from this study also suggest that *Lesson Visits* had the positive outcome of encouraging teachers to be less guarded and more willing to reveal

their concerns and areas of weakness in a safe and supportive environment. In addition, data from this study lend support to the finding that, the role of the “*critical friend*”, (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2005), is one where they are encouraged and able to make judgments without the fear of offending, as the process of quality improvement becomes a democratic and *shared endeavour* and is not confined to a finite set of principles.

Confining the “*craft*” of teaching into a finite set of principles and practices can stunt innovation and free-thinking (Thoilliez, 2019). The freedom to explore new and innovative ways of teaching and learning, whilst engaging in constructive critique and reflecting upon “*tried and tested*” techniques, is a valuable process for developing as a teacher. Building self-confident and reflective teachers should therefore be at the forefront of professional development. Anyone who has spent time in an FE classroom, or any other classroom for that matter, knows that teaching is more than a lesson plan. More than a simple blueprint of what an outstanding lesson should look like. Techniques that should work, sometimes do not when tested within the environment of the classroom. It is ultimately context which shapes the effectiveness of any singular technique in practice. Some models of CPD in further education are heavily technique and objective focused, portraying the idea not only that “*best practice*”, “*excellent practice*” or even “*perfect practice*” exist, but also that they can be simply applied by any teacher in any context. These “*recipes*”, “*blueprints*” and “*just add water*” approaches offer overly simplistic solutions to complex and enduring educational problems, often offered in the form of “*top tips*” for being an outstanding teacher. The purveyors of such “*solutions*” encourage teachers to latch onto a technique which may or may not then work in practice, once the classroom dynamics and individual students’ personalities are applied. In essence, these events become nothing more than “*empty rituals*” through which the teacher will try and regularly fail to make a positive impact upon the learning of their students



The quest for perfection and the workload, constant monitoring and paperwork which inevitably follows, can be a heavy burden which contributes to teachers leaving the profession. Data from this study suggest that *Lesson Visits*, *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching* initiatives, provided a more realistic assessment of teaching practice and areas for development, in order to develop the skills and qualities needed to thrive rather than just survive in the classroom.

### 5.3.2 *College priorities and individual teacher priorities are unlikely to be the same*

Sawchuk et al. (2006, p. 123) state, “*Our working conditions are our students’ learning conditions*”, a statement which should not be forgotten when exploring the finding that College priorities and individual teacher priorities are unlikely to be the same. I believe that the reasons for this disparity are systemic and symptomatic of the existing model of educational change embodied by the Ofsted EIF, which ignores fundamental educational values in favour of market imperatives. As a consequence, there appears to be a tendency for CPD to be delivered based upon what colleges want to give teachers rather than what teachers need or value most, “*Those chats in the coffee room about what you did and how you might change it, what went right and what went wrong*”. Conversely, college priorities often dictate a focus on summative assessment of measurable educational outcomes (Coffield, 2017).

This “*symbiotic response*” (Orr, 2020), to government policy changes means that many colleges seem conditioned to run CPD in the form of “events” rather than focusing on longer term sustainable programmes. For CPD managers this puts them in a difficult position where they are doomed to predictable failure, backed into a corner and expected to “pull rabbits out of hats” to solve complicated and enduring educational issues at a moment’s notice. Under an Ofsted EIF, which promotes a positivist approach to educational evaluation, change and

improvement and a quest for implicit truth, the quality of teaching and learning is assessed through top-down, outside-in inspection, in stressful circumstances in which teachers can feel alienated. The reality of what teachers are experiencing in the classroom can seem very distant from the judgments being made and the consequential action being taken by college leaders. Under these conditions the feeling of “*pedagogical solitude*” prevails (Shulman, 2000).

I don't think it is entirely fair to claim that all college priorities are based upon the appeasement of Ofsted inspectors. Colleges are big business in the current educational landscape and they must remain sustainable entities. However, if the priorities of the college and teachers are not both primarily focused on teaching and learning then the truth of the classroom remains hidden and the *stories* of what is really happening go unheard and unaddressed, replaced by the imperatives and terrors of what Ball (2003) describes as “*performativity*”. Within colleges, even outside of inspection windows, a preoccupation with appeasing Ofsted means that education leaders, managers and teachers do not and cannot talk about what is actually happening in practice. The systems in place do little to support an honest and open climate of discussion and practitioners across the sector simply play the game to pass the test, perpetuating the “*unequal and undemocratic relationship*” (Orr, 2020), between colleges and Ofsted.

As Dunne (2005) reminds us above, the only people who can change a practice are those engaged in the practice itself. I have experienced this myself as a teacher and in microcosm, I have also demonstrated in the conduct of this research how an alternative model of educational change and improvement can be applied within a college through *Lesson Visits*, which “*benefit from an enhanced understanding and appreciation of the desires and priorities of the teaching staff.*”(Husband 2015, p. 132).

However, despite change internally, we still have to contend with bias that exists in Ofsted's positivist technical-rational approach to educational change and improvement. The rise of a tendency for risk aversion is not surprising considering Ofsted's role as judge, jury and in some cases executioner, in relation to the current withdrawal of funding for colleges which "require improvement", as well as the very public labelling and shaming of those colleges awarded gradings of being "inadequate" (Carr, 1995 p. 3).

The findings of this thesis suggest interventions such as *Lesson Visits*, *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching*, may provide an alternative approach to educational change and improvement which satisfies both the individual needs of teachers and the priorities of organisations. *[College] Projects* for example provided numerous examples of impact on individual pedagogy/practice on the classroom, wider curriculum or college priorities, within the local community and in external partnerships. More widely, the concept of self-determined projects as a meaningful method of professional learning was accepted as a positive change of direction. *Lesson Visits* showed a more mixed response to the RQ2, with the *focus* of *Lesson Visits* (see Appendix F – Figure 1) suggesting that the college priorities and the priorities of teachers remain disparate.

### 5.3.3 Considering the impact of Ofsted

"The whole frame of modern culture...has tended to be one of control, mastery and domination." (Dunne, 2021, p. 155)

So far in this chapter I have discussed, on several occasions, the impact that Ofsted has on the decision making of college leaders and their approach to professional learning and development. It is clear that the seemingly relentless mission for colleges to be recognised as

outstanding further education providers is a contentious point of discourse, particularly as the word outstanding implies perfection, a feat so rarely, if ever, achieved by any human being or for very long. The French philosopher Voltaire declared that “*the perfect is the enemy of the good*”, suggesting that an unbridled search for perfection prevents the implementation of *good* improvements. As a college leader, I was concerned that a fixation on “outstanding”, the Ofsted gold standard, was preventing the implementation of educational improvements that were genuinely good, and might have a significant impact on both the student experience and staff wellbeing. Notions of, or claims to be outstanding can also alienate those who do not feel that they are able to be outstanding, because of the context and circumstances in which they are working.

Biesta (2015, pp. 2-3) argues that long-standing measures of *strong* education, are dependent upon the successful achievement of pre-defined learning outcomes and that this measure of strength portrays a “*fundamental misunderstanding of what education is about*”. Objective-laden assessment of practice, which deals in absolutes, causes troubling educational issues as it discounts the variability of contexts, and teachers can switch off or even be diminished by negative experiences. Believing in a singular truth, such as the existence of a “blueprint” for teaching and learning, can stunt the evolution of teaching practice in real workplaces and actual contexts, inhibiting professional judgement and discouraging teachers from going “off-piste” (Dunne, 1997). This kind of risk averse-culture works to limit the innovation and free thinking required to find the solutions to the problems we face in education. Instead, it encourages “*performativity*”, which, ironically, acts to disguise the reality of what is apparently required to be labelled as outstanding, by diverting teachers’ attention away from students to focus on appeasing inspectors (Coffield, 2017).

Ball (2003, p. 216) notes that “*performativity*” within education creates, “*a culture and*

*a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change, based on rewards and sanctions”.*

College leaders are often willingly, or even unknowingly, fixated upon the pursuit of being “outstanding” and this ultimately affects the decisions we make, particularly around the assessment of teaching practice with *“pragmatically constructed systems to report achievement of the numerical targets”* (Orr, 2020, p. 19), which preserve an aversion to risk. However, a risk-tolerant culture in which failure is supported rather than punished can provide greater opportunities for educators to innovate and try out new things, learning along the way regardless of the outcome (Biesta, 2015).

Biesta (2015) argues that education involves more than just *“qualification”* and that *“subjectification”* or the development of independent thinking/autonomy is an important consideration. It is evident that objective assessment of practice, such as that seen in Ofsted inspection and graded lesson observations, appear *“...increasingly difficult to justify in terms of empirical and robust evidence of educational improvement.”* (Gregson & Spedding, 2020, p. 188), and can lead to some teachers feeling trapped and locked in a cycle of “empty rituals”. As discussed above, it takes courage and commitment from educational leaders and policymakers to see that it doesn’t have to be this way and most importantly to do something about it.

Maintaining the status quo is only likely continue to limit the open-mindedness of teachers and college leaders, inevitably resulting in the predictable failure of the default top-down, expert-led, technical-rational approach, which both proposes and assumes that solutions for any problem can be easily found and prescribed like medication for a sick patient. As long as a good job is not seen to be good enough, despite real and positive changes being made, the education sector will continue to push its staff to breaking point for what many would consider an expensive fool’s errand.

### 5.3.4 *Nothing will work if the culture is wrong*

As discussed in Chapter 2 it cannot be assumed that by simply creating the space for collaboration and discourse between colleagues that professional learning will take place (Carpenter, 2016). Culture is key to managing change and providing the conditions through which professional learning might be effective. College leaders have the responsibility for making the right decisions in how they wish to lead and they must finely balance these decisions if they wish to meet the needs of teachers and the priorities of the organisation. As Biesta (2009, p. 2) notes, “*The rise of the measurement culture in education has had a profound impact on educational practice*”. The findings of this thesis lend support to the argument that it doesn’t have to be this way!

During this thesis there have been several illuminative events, which were marked as *pivot points* in Chapter 4. *Pivot Point A* has already been discussed in RQ1 with regards to the nature of CPD versus the mode of delivery. *Pivot Point B* has also been discussed in RQ1 with regards to the consequences of COVID-19 disruption, but it is *Pivot Point C* which I consider to be the most didactic moment in this thesis. *Pivot Point C* noted that a change of culture at the college was severely limited by the existing graded observation policy, which took a diametrically opposite approach when compared to the collaborative and agentic nature of *[College] Projects and Collaborative Teaching*.

At the time of *Pivot Point C*, it was my firm view that a graded observation policy, with a focus on “rooting out” weaker teachers rather than identifying and developing teachers into conscious reflectors, was a flawed approach and no longer in keeping with current theories and associated research. Experience had taught me the objectivity of graded lesson observations encouraged performativity (Ball, 2003), and created a culture of fear which masked the reality

of what was really happening in the classroom. In addition, the preoccupation of observers with finite, pre-specified learning outcomes simply created an “audit culture” in which very few teachers (3%) were actively supported to develop their teaching practice. To make matters worse, this 3% only received support because they were “graded” as requiring it, inadequate by Ofsted’s standards. As Biesta (2009) observes, this indicates a fundamental misunderstanding of what education is about. Rather than proving they were good enough, I wanted a process by which teachers might retain the drive to get to “know” their practice better than they already knew it and in the process unlocking their tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1967) and feeling challenged to say “*I want to get better at...!*”.

As Carpenter (2016) suggests by eliminating spatial and temporal restraints on collaboration, educators have greater opportunities to engage with informal professional communities, taking greater charge over their own professional learning. The *Lesson Visits*, *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching* interventions all supported conditions for the development of agency in how teachers engaged in their own CPD. Carpenters’ examples of “*participatory cultures*” and “*affinity spaces*,” are highly relevant, as these interventions connected teachers, who shared similar interests, in order to share and learn from each other. All three interventions promoted a risk-tolerant culture (Biesta, 2015), in which failure was supported rather than punished, providing the opportunity for teachers to innovate and try new things in “*liminal spaces*”, where it was not easy or clear to know what to do for the best:

*“The COVID-19 pandemic is a prime example of this concept [liminal space]. We remain suspended between what our lives were like before the respiratory virus crisscrossed the globe—and what life will look like afterward. Many people have said that if they just knew when it would be over, it would be much easier to get through.”* (Blanchfield, 2021, para

2)

When reviewing the impact of changes made to my organisations professional development and observation policy, the concept of liminal space and *“being at the precipice of something new”* (Blanchfield, 2021, para 1), seems pertinent. Data from this study indicate that the intention to move away from data-driven, prescriptive CPD opened up liminal space for professional learning. Key to the shift towards this more democratic and pragmatic pathway was the absence of the feeling that professional development is “done” to or manipulated in any way:

*“liminality in education...challenges normalising and disciplining educational practices by creating radical openness towards the unknown.”* (Nišavić & Maja, 2019, p. 33)

The theologian and author Fr Richard Rohr, quoted in Smith and Taxler (2022, p. 1) states, *“if we don’t encounter liminal space in our lives, we start idealising normalcy.”* Genuine transformation can only occur through being drawn into the sacred and creative space of liminality. Being in a liminal space can be incredibly uncomfortable for most people, but under the right conditions the virtues of horizontal discourse (Bernstein, 1996, 2000) can be explored. Liminality supports transformation and accepts that even if it may not have been the most obvious route to take, it is, nevertheless, the route one is on now (Franks & Meteyard, 2007). Indeed, at the time of writing this thesis, educators across the globe find themselves in liminal space as we transition from pre to post-pandemic learning environments with the major challenge of online teaching and learning and the embedding of established pedagogic values into new and unfamiliar spaces before us.



### 5.3.5 Addressing the concerns of graded observation

Graded lesson observations and the associated literature was not something which was explored in great detail during Chapter 2. At the time this thesis was focused on RQ1 and the gamification of learning in development of teaching practice. However, in light of the wholesale changes to lesson observations (Phase 5 of Chapter 4) I now want to take the opportunity to discuss with the support of literature, why this was such an important intervention.

Inwood (2020) discusses some of the flaws associated with a graded observation policy, evidencing that *“if a lesson is given a top grade – or “outstanding” in Ofsted terms – by one observer, the probability that a second observer would give an entirely different judgement is between 51 and 78 per cent.”* (Inwood, 2020, para 6). The *Lesson Visit* policy, implemented as an alternative to graded observations, showed an increase in the number of observations taking place, however, using this data to quantify success is also flawed. According to EEF (2017), there is no discernible impact on students’ performance from regular, structured lesson observations, where teachers watched and provided feedback to colleagues. This is further supported by Randall (2023) who reviewed two major research studies in the United States that showed *“no sustained improvement”* as a result of enhanced teacher evaluation processes. These findings suggest that it would be more effective to combine lesson observation with other strategies for enhancing teaching, including CPD courses or peer feedback, rather than simply increasing the quantity of observed lessons, which was the approach taken when devising the *Lesson Visit* policy.

Inwood, (2020) promotes the notion of education moving away from passive observation to support a more active role for teachers themselves in judging their performance. However, it is noted that this requires a culture shift which advocates for a far more

collaborative approach rather than the current “watch and critique” method. Relational trust, “*lubricates the necessary social exchanges*” (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 123), which play an integral role in supporting the conditions under which this open and collaborative approach might work, lowering the perception of vulnerability, minimising the feeling of risk and supporting a more confident approach to trying new pedagogical approaches. In short, relational trust helps to provide a safe space in which teachers can ask for and receive help.

We have previously discussed the clear influence Ofsted has in the decision making of college leaders. Bromley (2014) provides an interesting discussion around the lack of change to graded observation policies in schools and colleges, despite a shift away from grading by Ofsted. Bromley (2014, para 3) cites Ofsted themselves as having stated that it would be, “*nonsensical to suggest that an inspector could give a definitive validation of a teacher’s professional capacity [just as] we would not expect a surgeon to be judged on a single 25-minute observation of their work*”. Feedback from both teachers and managers after the introduction of the *Lesson Visit* policy suggest that there are still some misconceptions over a decade on about the Ofsted inspection process and the observation of teaching practice. Notably, one teacher suggested that they wanted their *Lesson Visit* graded because “*this is what Ofsted do*”.

In most cases, graded, high-stakes lesson observations prevent observers from seeing teachers in their natural classroom settings. Bromley, (2014), cites the Hawthorne Effect (French, 1953), suggesting that when someone is watching a lesson, especially an inspector or senior leader with a clipboard, the dynamics of the classroom change even if the teacher has the courage to conduct a “normal” lesson and resists giving in to the inevitable pressure of being observed.

O’Leary (2013, pp. 93-94), states that, “*by itself observation may only provide a partial view of teaching and learning, thus highlighting the importance of gathering information from*

*other sources in order to be able to form a well-rounded judgement*". Data from this study suggests that observations should be just one of several data sources used to evaluate teaching and learning. The same data indicate that there should be a clear focus on helping teachers identify areas of practice they need to improve in a way that supports curiosity and raises awareness rather than ruling through fear and compliance. When considering the role that observations might play and the format they take It is again important to understand the complexity of practice and actions. Practice, being constructed through social, historical and political influences, can only be understood through interpretation and critique and not solely by observing actions, *"...we cannot adequately understand the meaning and significance of practice without referring to the intentions of the teacher"* (Carr, 1995 p. 6). Unless this is understood the meaning of "practice" and any associated judgement of practice is unlikely to be clear.

Carr (1995) discusses how social construction refers to the impact of how practice is interpreted by the agent and others. Historical construction, considers the history of the situation, existing relationships, past experiences, and general expectations. Political construction focuses upon the impact of micro politics within a classroom including whether the nature of communication is domination and subjugation or open and democratic discourse. Data from this study lend support to the view that these are all factors for consideration by both the teacher, in terms of their understanding of their role in the practice and also the observer in consideration of context when making judgements. However, these factors are unlikely to be prevalent in a tradition model of observation which as discussed above, *"privileges theory over practice [and] predicates practice on theory, obscuring the ways in which theory is itself predicated on practice"* (Carr, 1995, p. 9). This technical-rational approach to educational change and improvement, still very much dictates the process of Ofsted inspection,

where the existing power relationship acts to dominate the acceptance of theory over practice. As a result, any Ofsted inspector could be classified “deskilled” as a source of theory (Carr, 1995).

A technical-rational grading process creates a disconnect between teacher and observer, perpetuating the position of “us and them”, with teachers being “done to”. The implication that teachers will benefit from objective criticism devalues the experience of the teacher, even going as far as to suggest that teachers, are “*poorly informed about practice, even though they live it*” (Carr, 1995, p. 10), and know it from the inside (Dunne, 2005). On the other hand, the “theorists”, well removed from the coal face of the classroom, are seen as being well informed about educational practice even though they are removed from it by divisions of labour between teachers and researchers. This is a notion I simply cannot agree with and something which has driven my work throughout this thesis. I am not saying that teachers know best, there are clear and obvious examples of when this is not the case, but through an awareness of the value that a lived experience has in informing practice and in turn theory, we all have the potential to learn more.

Dunne (1997) also criticises the detached nature of observing and verifying objectives as fact due to a lack of familiarity with a teacher’s situation or background and therefore any judgement against said objectives, he argues is void of context. Neglecting the “*art*” (Sarason, 1999) of teaching practice and the experiential dimension of learning ensures that teaching is no longer seen as embedded in particular contexts or indeed affected by cultural, linguistic, religious, or political heritage (Dunne, 1997). Instead, teaching practice is evaluated through immutable objectives, with the intention of isolating the precise terms by which “good” practice can be quantified, profiling teaching objectives into separate ends and means, and instructing teachers to specify their goals as discrete, observable behaviours.

As an instrumental process, the objectives model eliminates a hermeneutical dimension from teaching. This model does not reflect a vision for teaching but merely a model for technical-rational action which is systematically applied even though it would appear difficult for rationality to be achieved in a model which is rife with its own bias and limitations. If objectives are to provide empirical evidence of intended outcomes, Dunne (1997) argues that there must be some certainty that the objectives were desirable in the first instance, formed through judgement and informed by good sense which in themselves are not empirical in nature.

Under a graded observation policy, failure to achieve the objective might be the result of the objective itself being too complex, a fault of the teacher's lack of competence, or the students simply just having a bad day. Consideration of context and a more holistic view of competency, which draws upon a multitude of information sources is therefore important, and as suggested by O'Leary (2013), to avoid making judgement simply based on a desire to achieve empirical truth rather than being content with contextualising the outcome through discourse. Any number of factors may contribute to outcomes intended or otherwise making it no simple task for the observer to make a "*complex set of judgments*" based on much more than the "*outcome*" of the lesson when measured against the achievement of objectives.

In this thesis, data suggest that *Lesson Visits* provided an alternative to graded observation and took a guided approach to promote professional learning and conditions for agency. Using the example of the *Great British Menu* competition, in which feedback is offered to the contestants from an *expert* in the early rounds to support the development and evolution of their final dishes, there is an acceptance that not everything needs to be "known" and that through being open to the evolution of an idea through engaging in "genuine dialogue" practice can be developed. Data also suggest that through the use of a coaching model which employed

Socratic questioning in post-visit professional discussions, teachers were afforded the opportunity for genuine dialogue and thoughtful reflection on elements of their teaching practice (with a focus they had chosen) leading to constructive feedback and more honest discourse between teacher and reviewer. In this model of discussion, expertise and experience are valued by both parties but neither party is deemed to be “better” than the other.

Data also lends support to the argument that, the shift to a quality improvement process rather than quality assurance process was instrumental in changing the mindset of teachers. It was vital though to ensure a clarity of understanding around the differences between the two. The distinction can be illustrated as a pursuit for pragmatism, akin to Aristotle’s respect for the importance and value of experience as a starting point for learning and his perspective on different forms of knowledge as opposed to Plato’s pursuit of perfection. I have come to understand that in education, dealing in absolutes causes some serious issues, it discounts variability, and teachers can switch off and be diminished by negative experiences of being observed/inspected. Data from this study support the view that observations of educational practice should not necessarily be made solely on the basis of the achievement (or otherwise) of measurable outcomes. It is instead a view of student experience which is the fundamental measurement of “good” practice. Indeed, the concept of “good practice” has many faces. Data from this study suggest that pursuing an often crudely measured version of one “truth” stunts the evolution of different forms of knowledge and the improvement of practice (phronesis/praxis), hinders professional judgement and discourages teachers from any deviation beyond pre-set parameters, even when it might be desirable or even necessary (Dunne, 1997).

Data from the *Lesson Visit* intervention in this study demonstrate subtle measures of impact across the entire college (See Appendix F). There were people coming forward after 30

years in the profession to take on new roles in order to be part of the journey and there appears to be a greater understanding that teacher development is not best supported by graded observation but by collaboration, honesty and professional freedom to *practice*. The findings of this thesis show that *Lesson Visits* offer an alternative to graded observation, supporting “*real engagement with, and in, a practice [to ensure] a person’s powers are released, directed and enlarged*” (Dunne, 2021, p. 153). Participants repeatedly responded that, “...*Lesson Visits reduce stress of not knowing*”. teachers feel their views are “...*valued and supported*” and they “...*could bring anything to the table...to try to improve*”. Teachers are able to “*focus on areas of impact at the chalk face*” through a process which is “... *more teaching and learning focussed and done in a way that should not put staff under fear, pressure or apprehension*”.

However, despite the perceived benefits of the *experience*, data from this study also show that there are some managers who fear a loss of control (power). Considering that the success of an observation is, “...*reliant on the commitment of the observers*”, it is promising that the majority of reviewers (observers) reported that they were receptive to a more collaborative and agentic approach to CPD and lesson observation, this would infer a likelihood for pre-existing tendencies towards the “old ways” to be eroded, but these changes will only be sustainable if the college culture continues to permit it.

## 5.4 Research Question 3: What do teachers' stories of their experience of CPD tell us about how teacher agency is enacted?

### 5.4.1 CPD should be practice-focused

*"[Educators] carry around extraordinary insights about their practice—about discipline, parental involvement, staff development, child development, leadership, and curriculum. I call these insights "craft knowledge". Acquired over the years in the school of hard knocks, these insights offer every bit as much value to improving schools as do elegant research studies and national reports." (Barth, 2006, p. 8)*

As previously discussed, the findings of this thesis suggest that colleges still appear to be adhering to traditional technical-rational models of CPD, which are limited in meeting individual needs and are rarely practice-focused. Participants of this study, in the main, wanted to avoid prescribed, top-down training in favour of individualised, self-led training with a choice of training content and entry level, particularly if relating to skills development. This type of approach prioritises practice-focused development, embedded within context and with a particular focus on knowledge, skills that are always and essentially practice focused.

Where this approach was taken with *Lesson Visits*, *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching*, it was suggested that there was a more direct impact on teaching and learning in the classroom and the value of this form of CPD according to teachers and managers was greater, with teachers in particular feeling that they were able to make quicker and more impactful changes to their classroom practice as a result of more honest and open feedback and by having identified a focus themselves pre-observation.



Shulman (2000) suggests a generalised approach, be it CPD delivery or lesson observation, is due to a fundamental misunderstanding of what teaching practice is:

*“...notice the message it conveys--that teaching is generic, technical, and a matter of performance; that...It’s something general you lay on top of what you really do as a scholar in a discipline”*. (p. 25)

Shulman (2000) raises an important point here in opposition to the use of objective criticisms and top-down technical-rational thinking when addressing quality improvement in education. Here we might also consider the importance of understanding the nature of educational practice and the construction of different forms of knowledge.

Dearden et al. (1972) identify that the overriding purpose of education is the development of reason through initiation into *“intrinsically worthwhile activities”* Autonomy therefore becomes the primary educational aim as a result (Blake et al., 1998 in Carr, 2005, p. 3). The *Lesson Visit* policy change in this thesis provided teachers with the opportunity to identify a focus of observation (and consequently development), which very much supported CPD to be *“intrinsically worthwhile”*. This view point is further supported by Deterding (2012), Buckley and Doyle (2016), Angelovska (2019), who discuss the role that intrinsic motivation can have on defining the value and meaning of activities.

It is understandable in the *“age of measurement”* (Biesta, 2009), that college leaders stick to what they know. Looking deeper into educational philosophy we can relate to the work of Gadamer and Habermas in hermeneutics and critical theory, which identifies a crisis in modernity to, *“bring the social world under control”* (Carr, 2005, p. 6). We have already discussed in Chapter 2 how this has led to an Ofsted EIF obsessed with the search for empirical truth and technical-rational reasoning. Data from this study also lend support to the view that

this approach holds so much influence over the decisions being made within colleges and has been seen to have a detrimental impact on the development of teaching and learning, due to the lack of encouragement for risk-taking and the prevalence of measures and pressures for the demonstration of teachers' performativity (Ball, 2003; Orr, 2020).

The findings of this thesis suggest that an alternative to the status quo exists, where we take a more holistic, practice-focused view of educational improvement, aligned to the, "...*the idea that educational processes can be controlled by teachers and ought to be controlled by them*" (Biesta 2009, p5). This approach acts to subvert highly regarded and widely but misguidedly defended expectations, which underpin many of the traditional technical-rational perspectives of quality improvement within education.

As previously discussed, the nature of education as a practice came from revising the Aristotelian philosophical tradition (Macintyre 1981 in Carr, 2005, p. 5). For Aristotle, the "end" of a practice is something ethically worthwhile and good (Carr, 2005). Data from this study reveal that practice-focused, collaborative and cooperative CPD initiated, directed and conducted by teacher-researchers, supports the development of practical knowledge or practical reasoning, which Aristotle refers to as *phronesis*. The acquisition of *phronesis* (practical knowledge) is the task of the individual, who must come to understand what it is that needs to be done to pursue some "good" from the practice itself, absent of any narrow self-interests or personal desires (Carr, 2005). The lack of an "agenda" in favour of "curiosity" is an important factor for the "good" which comes from a *Lesson Visit*. This good is very much related to the emergence of new knowledge through an awareness of things that might otherwise have been hidden in a graded observation which encourages risk-aversion and performativity. Data from this study suggests that the *Lesson Visit* model of professional learning can support the transition of a teacher from a novice to advanced teacher. However, this is dependent on the

ability of the individual to apply sound practical reasoning and judgement about what constitutes “good”.

*Phronesis*, in contrast to *techne*, is not a technique and not a skill that can be learnt independently of practice. “*Phronesis is a moral and intellectual virtue rooted in a natural human capacity ‘to do the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right way’.*” (MacIntyre, 1981 in Carr, 2005, p. 39). Highlighting the importance of the lived experience of teachers, *phronesis* can only be developed through practice itself. Even the most advanced teacher will, from time to time, have the need to explore, “*practically usable solutions to intractable problems*”, that require more than just an understanding of practice (Carr, 2005, p. 39). This theory is epitomised by the approach taken in *Lesson Visits*, through which teachers develop their knowledge of teaching practice and pedagogy directly within the classroom environment, rather than committing to the stable and static position of theory (*theoria*), so readily promoted through the expert-led approach to CPD delivery. Under these conditions the activity of practice (*praxis*) extends beyond the limitations of existing practical knowledge and questions the philosophical understanding of practice, directly through the lived experience of the teacher (Carr, 2005). Data from this study also lend support to the argument that this process of enlightenment, evident within the *Lesson Visit* policy affects both the teacher and the lesson reviewer in order to continually evolve an understanding of what is good and how it the internal goods of educational practice might be realised. (Dunne, 2005)

#### 5.4.2 CPD should support an experience

“...life goes on in an environment; not merely in it but because of it, through interaction with it”. (Dewey, 1934, p. 19)

Data from this study reveal that, instead of classifying my initial attempts to gamify CPD as a failure, the intention to employ the most appropriate pedagogical design in order to support teacher engagement (RQ1), resulted in an enhanced understanding of the role of “an” experience in learning.

As Wong (2007, p. 203) states, *“The degree that any activity is aesthetic and educative...is related to the degree that active doing and receptive undergoing are joined in perception...we do something, we undergo its consequences, we do something in response, we undergo again. And so on. The experience becomes educative as we grasp the relationship between doing and undergoing”*. In essence, an awareness of what is happening and why, is essential in learning.

The transformative nature of an experience utilises thoughts, feelings, and action for enhancement. An *“aesthetic experience”* and *“transactional phenomenon”* occur where both the person and the world are mutually transformed (Wong, 2007). The emotion of learning and feeling of *“inspiration”* supports a powerful notion of *“increased vitality”* through which a person might recognise their own ability to perceive and act and, *“dwell within and venture beyond the realm of rationality and control”* (Wong, 2007, p. 203).

Dewey (2005, p. 285) describes aesthetic experience as *“experience in its integrity...For it is experience freed from the forces that impede and confuse its development as experience”*. Aesthetic experience involves *“inception, development, and fulfilment”* and is closely related to Maslow’s concept of *peak experience*, (Maslow 1968), which plays an important role in self-actualization, located at the top of Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). A *“Peak Experience”* is; *“fulfilling”, “significant”* and *“spiritual”* according to Privette (2001).

Both Dewey and Maslow infer that there are unique qualities to *an* experience which are attained as the experience proceeds in a temporal manner. This cumulative process allows

phases of an experience to build upon one another to enhance the experience beyond a simple mechanical process. In addition, Leddy and Puolakka (2023) identify the following qualities, in reference to Dewey's work, as being integral to aesthetic experience.; *"intensive", "resistance", "rhythm", "momentum", "direction"* and finally *"fulfilment"*. What aesthetic experience does not involve is, *"submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure."* (Dewey, 2005, p. 42). Here, it is inferred that an experience must retain an element of agency to be truly *"unique"*.

In relation to the findings of this thesis, the suggestion that, *"A rigid predetermination of an end-product...leads to the turning out of a mechanical or academic product"* (Dewey, 2005, p. 144), suggests that the decision to offer a more flexible approach to CPD (and lesson observation), might in some way support teachers to achieve *"heightened vitality"*. Through a model which promotes agency and empowerment, teachers are able to share their thoughts and feelings, engage more freely with reality and accept, or even welcome the opportunity for enlightenment on factors which may otherwise have remained hidden to them and those able to help. Greene (2005, p. 80) refers to this process as providing *"...the remarkable possibility of awakening, of overcoming the "anaesthetic" said to be the opposite of the "aesthetic," of attaining the wide-awakeness that resists apathy and withdrawal"*. Greene further implies that educators must be *"awake, critical, open to the world"*, in order to understand their situation and to thrive rather than simply survive. Key to the development of *"wide-awakeness"* is the possibility for imagination.

According to Greene (1988) in Blier and Stanton (2018, p. 8) imagination gives us *"the capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise...to see beyond and break free from the limitations of the present context."* This type of experience creates conditions for liminal and dialogical encounters, which generate a new insight and greater understanding, within context.

The new “*vantage points*” gained support the conception of new ways of moving forward. *Lesson Visits* in particular have supported the development and strengthening of a “*wide-awakeness*” amongst practitioners and observers alike and through open and honest discourse and the absence of a predetermined stressful and “performative” agenda, both parties might “imagine” an alternative to the current situation, should it be needed.

The “*wide-awakeness*” of practitioners, regarding their teaching practice, be it self-explored or supported by a colleague/manager, supports a development of confidence in “knowing” the good and bad within teaching practice. This opportunity for “*Enhancement*” (Bernstein’s first pedagogic right) works to support quality improvement on a base of “*stability that is not stagnation but is rhythmic and developing*” (Dewey, 2005, p. 18). Indeed, when you do something you enjoy or love with the people you like and trust, in a place where you want to be, it is more meaningful as a result. It is therefore important going forward, to consider the conditions under which CPD is provided in order to provide conditions for “*an*” experience.

My own personal experience during this thesis should also be of note here. If I consider the practitioner research programme I was a part of during the infancy of my work, I can reflect upon the role that “*an*” experience played in changing my “*wide-awakeness*” and understanding of the world, particularly in relation to the perceived problems I had in my role as a CPD manager and the root causes. At the outset my view was relatively fixed and superficial, maybe due to my natural empiricist outlook employed in my undergraduate studies, or maybe due to some naivety on my part, of what I was able to affect with my current level of knowledge and influence. Reflecting now upon this transformative process, as I tried, and failed, to get to grips with the root of my problem, I am able to appreciate the temporal nature of my experience as I cumulatively develop and learn from my actions and the associated outcomes of a systematic investigation of educational practice (Gregson, 2020).

With this heightened level of “*wide-awakeness*”, I have attempted to replicate, in my own organisation, the conditions under which I had experienced a shift in perspective. In the early phases, my intervention (the gamification of CPD) seemingly failed because not all conditions desirable to the participants were achieved (Figure 4.3). However, in learning from this and addressing some of the concerns through the introduction of *Lesson Visits* and the preceding CPD interventions of *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching*, I witnessed higher levels of engagement in professional development, whilst teachers reported their experiences to be more meaningful, by virtue of an improved perspective upon teacher-manager relationships, development of TLA, increase morale and an overall preference for ungraded, autonomous observations.

I cannot account for the level of fulfilment the outcomes of this thesis have given participants, although the findings of this chapter provide some degree of testament. However, I can attest to my own experience in which I have become close to achieving “*heightened vitality*”. I now understand more intently the words of Eisner (2002, p. 236) when he states “*Growth is rewarded not in an instance but in a process*”, as I have experienced first-hand the “*wide-awakeness*” posited by Greene (1978), and in the process overcome the “*paralysis*” and “*apathy*” associated with the feeling that nothing can or will change. I still retain a degree of conflict in perspectives, as I continue to wrestle with my propensity for perfectionism but as highlighted earlier when considering the impact of Ofsted, I am more aware than ever, as a result of this experience, that the pursuit of perfection can often be at the expense of what is “*good*” for learners, educators and education.

### 5.4.3 Educational improvement should be a “shared endeavour”

When considering the formative process of initial teacher training the question of “*What are you going to put into practice next week?*” is common. The acceptance that practice must evolve through experience is imperative, as a new teacher navigates the unfamiliar territory of the classroom. At this stage, through valuable dialogue and conversation with those who have experienced every eventuality, trainee teachers are able to grow and develop. This example can be characterised as a “mutual engagement” or *shared endeavour*, which proposes an “*equal sharing of power, leadership, ownership, and responsibility*” (Potter, 2001, p. 8). In which both parties play a role in pragmatic and democratic (and horizontal) discourse (Bernstein 1996, 2000). Data from this study suggest that, traits such as modesty, humility, and open-mindedness are nurtured under these conditions and may in turn lead to a power transfer between the teacher and the expert. This power transfer can even lead to more power for both parties as they work collaboratively, within a safe and supportive environment, to better understand and develop their practice.

The recognition that teaching and learning are not any one person’s responsibility and practice only improves through collaboration is important in helping educators to “...*take ownership of educational leadership for sustainable change and quality improvement.*” (Newman et al, 2024, p. 17). The opportunity for contextualisation is also an essential condition for a *shared endeavour*, as is the acceptance that as educators we are “all” equally responsible for educational improvement. *Lesson Visits*, for example, would not work without every person playing their part and as an “insider”, proposing a model of CPD (i.e. *Lesson Visits*), which does not need to conform to a pre-set notion or theory. I have experienced this first hand.



#### 5.4.3.1 How do Lesson Visits promote CPD which treat educational improvement as a “shared endeavour”?

In Chapter 4 (Figure. 4.9) I proposed six themes which make up the characteristics of *Lesson Visits*. These core characteristics are essential in encouraging higher levels of engagement in CPD and supporting the position of educational improvement as a *shared endeavour*. I now provide a more detailed explanation of why this is the case with reference to the supporting literature.

##### 5.4.3.1.1 Recognition

*“The very act of participating in the discourse, of attempting discursively to come to an agreement about the truth of a problematic statement or the correctness of a problematic norm, carries with it the presupposition that genuine agreement is possible”.* (McCarthy, 1975 in Carr, 1995, p. 17)

The first characteristic of *Lesson Visits* is *recognition*, which is rooted within the understanding that 21st-century teaching is a dynamic, ever-evolving ball of complexity and it is very easy for teachers to feel detached from anything other than getting their job done, falling into a position of “*pedagogical solitude*” where innovation and curiosity are dampened by the mechanical grind of the day to day. Shulman (2000 p. 24) states “*We experience isolation not in the [library] stacks but in the classroom. We close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude*”. Although referring to teaching amongst higher education “scholars”, Shulman’s reflections on the propensity for loneliness amongst teachers in the classroom are also salient to the findings of this thesis.

Shulman, (2000, p. 24) further suggests “...if we wish to see greater recognition and reward attached to teaching, we must change the status of teaching from private to community property”. The view that teaching (and learning) is regarded a community responsibility is evident in the collaborative and pragmatic approach taken within *Lesson Visits* and the preceding interventions of *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching*. Under these conditions, we were able to build upon what teachers were already doing, giving CPD much greater credence by respecting and valuing the teachers’ role in practice development. This outcome is supported by Fielding et al. (2005) who argue that through sharing their own examples of “good” practice, teachers may become increasingly motivated as they engage with new practices and begin to realise their potential. In the long-term, professional growth is supported by teachers collaboratively engaging with relevant educational change (where the improvement of student learning occurs) in ways which challenge them to improve their teaching practice without reducing the quality of what they currently do.

Through treating teachers as agents of change, rather than tools or mindless foot soldiers to be used as a means to an end, we can accomplish a far greater degree of “good” for education. As Dunne (2021, p. 158) proclaims “...teachers, as the teachers who are most centrally engaged in education... should be a paramount consideration in all educational decision-making”. However, in recognition of Shulman’s discussion of pedagogical solitude, “This good is not well provided for when teachers are permanently isolated in their own classrooms as ‘deliverers’ of a prescribed curriculum”.

#### 5.4.3.1.2 Collaboration

The second characteristic of *Lesson Visits* is *collaboration*, which promotes the usefulness of communities of practice, which might be formed under the right conditions within

a college. As a community, teachers and managers are presented with the opportunity to obtain a wider range of perspectives from a trusted group of peers in order to change and develop their own practice and in turn influence the evolution of policies and processes within their organisation. In this instance, the addressing of enduring educational issues, emerging problems, or even the desire to just “get better”, then becomes a *shared endeavour* owned by more than one member of the community.

It must also be recognised that these “communities” cannot be forced to form, and there is no formula or algorithm for their existence. They are born naturally from “...*groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do*”, who might imagine an alternative way of doing things (Wenger, 2011, p. 1). An essential element of a community approach is the role of pragmatic discourse, however, not being able to meet an agreement can be a concern, and may even bring into question the value of discourse in the first place. For a truly *shared endeavour* we must “...*ensure discussion which is free from all constraints and domination*” (McCarthy 1975 in Carr, 1995, p. 17).

Bernstein, (1999, p. 159) states that “*Everyday, ‘common sense’ knowledge is expressed in horizontal discourse, which is local, segmental, context dependent, tacit, multi-layered, often contradictory across contexts but not within contexts*”. This form of conversation would not likely be replicated in a formal teacher and manager meeting, with the focus of discourse fixed upon outcomes through sequential, hierarchical processes, in which case there is limited opportunity for “*local classroom negotiation*” (Bourne, 2003 p. 500). Teachers under these conditions are at risk of not being heard and are instead directed towards very specific, immediate goals which are the result of “*tacit recontextualisation*” (Bernstein, 1999). This was not the case with *Lesson Visits* which promoted a much more open *coaching* conversation, and

challenged both parties to explore the inconsistencies and conflicts in how they perceived a practice (Cox, 2015).

Through the use of Socratic questioning teachers could be encouraged to challenge assumptions and clarify observations made by both parties during the visit. This transition into more horizontal discourse helped to ensure that educational conversations are not “*dis-embedded, but strongly embedded in a particular social and institutional context*” (Bourne, 2003, p. 509). This more “*explicit recontextualisation*” was beneficial for both teachers and observers who were presented with the opportunity to be heard, sharing their own analysis of the world (classroom) and their position within it and giving a level of meaning which is otherwise absent in vertical discourse.

By putting teachers into a position where they were able to confront their own self-limiting behaviours and pre-existing views, *Lesson Visits*, *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching* supported much greater self-awareness and in turn much greater ownership of personal and professional development. With the development of agency as central aim and a core characteristic, *Lesson Visits* in particular supported teachers to develop far greater awareness of their teaching practice including; their existing knowledge, expertise, and know-how. The importance of awareness can be seen in Méhaut (2011) who discusses how French vocational education and training (VET) offers a greater focus on the achievement of vocational competencies independently of how the learning took place. “*The “kernels of competence” are larger, they are articulated in a more holistic perspective and “competence” is not synonymous with performance*” (Méhaut, 2011, p. 37).

Méhaut, (2011) suggests that a level of mastery, underpinned by the concepts of *Savoir* (knowledge), *Savoir-faire* (expertise) and *Savoir-être* (Know-how), can be achieved through a strong relationship between taught scientific/technical knowledge, the practical

implementation of this knowledge learnt through professional practice and the interpersonal-relationships integral in solving problems and knowing how to behave as part of the learning process. There are strong parallels between the approach illustrated by Méhaut (2011) and the structure and purpose of the *Lesson Visit* process, which promotes the value of interpersonal relationships between teachers and observers recognising the teachers role within the context of a practice and in solving problems collaboratively thereafter.

#### 5.4.3.1.3 Focus

The third characteristic of *Lesson Visits* is *focus* and relates to the individual needs of the practitioner. The ability to differentiate between the needs of individuals is important to retain a sense of meaning and relevance to CPD. In the context of this thesis, the differentiation issue for teachers might be taken to be addressed in the choice given to teachers in selecting which aspect of their practice they wanted feedback on. Following the *Lesson Visit*, teachers continued to make their own choices on development goals and actions, and whether they wanted to develop an aspect of their practice individually or with the support of another. As Clarke (2001) suggests, when carrying out classroom observations it is important that the criteria for observation are clear for the person being observed, so that both observer and teacher are aware of the aspects being judged. Refining the focus of lesson observation to a particular theme or problem, empowered some teachers to try something new or get better at something already integral to their practice. It also helped the observer to understand and appreciate the context in which the observation took place.

Previously, under the tick list approach of graded observations, with its many criteria causing observers to spend the entire observation trying to keep track of what has and has not been seen, the teacher was “...cast in the role of the child who does not know the learning

*intention of a task*” (Clarke, 2001, p. 108). With *Lesson Visits* the teachers’ choice of a focus for observation was reported by participants as having a more immediate impact on pedagogy and practice with observers appearing more inclined to highlight “good” aspects of teaching (wow factors) in the absence of a “tick list”. This change in approach meant that the “real gems” of teaching practice no longer went unseen, but instead, were celebrated and shared with others across the growing community of practitioners:

*“It is through participation in conversations that arise in the context of focused tasks that people truly develop their repertoires of thinking, feeling, speaking and acting... Creating contexts that elicit and sustain such conversations is the great challenge”.* (Buber, 1969, in Dunne, 2021, p. 157).

#### 5.4.3.1.4 Context

The fourth characteristic of *Lesson Visits* is *context*, which supports the understanding that an assessment of teaching practice requires more than just a superficial list of objective criticisms. Education involves more than just “*qualification*” (Biesta, 2015) and as such an objective assessment of practice lacks credibility. Teaching practice is grounded in context and therefore cannot simply be guided by pre-determined “*principles*” or “*rules*” (Carr, 1995). Understanding the local context, as well as making the right choice of support system and intervention design are integral to ensuring CPD is effective (Sims et al., 2021). This should be no different to the decisions made for teaching in the classroom.

Through *Lesson Visits*, teachers valued the opportunity to discuss practical teaching and learning strategies, especially for things they were unaware of. Context could then be considered by observers when making “*judgements*”, improving the relevance of feedback through a different perspective. An understanding of context supported teachers and observers

to enter into a *shared endeavour* of educational improvement with a greater degree of openness and honesty. Data also reveal that trust relationships between teachers and observers also improved as a result of higher levels of interaction and interest, before, during and after the *Lesson Visit*.

In addition, data indicate that *Lesson Visits* also allowed the observer to develop a greater understanding of a teacher's situation or background to contextualise the judgements made regarding teaching practice. This increased familiarity benefits both parties, the observer is able to better understand why certain things may be taking place, and the teacher is more likely to accept the judgement because it is embedded in context. Data from this study lend support to the finding that this mutual understanding leads to a horizontal discourse during the post-visit professional discussion, which allows for the exploration of these judgements, and any corresponding actions to be agreed upon. In this scenario, the tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967) of the teacher can be explored in far greater depth with the context, experience, practice and values all playing a role in demonstrating a clearer understanding of the situation, be it good or bad.

What we have learnt here is that this type of approach is dependent on the ability of the two parties to engage in meaningful discourse. In order to facilitate a coaching style conversation, which employs Socratic questioning, observers are required to have the relevant skill set and understanding of how to do so. There is evidence in Chapter 4 to suggest that this did and did not work at times. The majority of participants reported the professional discussion as an open and honest, learning and pedagogy focused conversation, yet a minority of staff were less amenable and still expected feedback rather than a collaborative discussion, which would indicate either a flaw in communications relating to the policy and processes, or a reluctance amongst some teachers to act with agency.

In the professional discussions, there seemed to be a consensus on the importance of providing constructive feedback that is practice-focused, and is done with respect and understanding, taking context into account. Teachers appreciated the recognition and appreciation of their hard work, and they felt inspired to push both themselves and their students further. In contrast to the previous graded observation policy, *Lesson Visits* were not used to watch and critique individual teachers, rather, they served as a platform through which the observer might understand the context of the classroom before entering into a two-way, collaborative discussion. This approach supported reflection on the *Lesson Visit* focus and wider themes relating to teaching practice, but with consideration of the bigger picture. Some teachers said that as a result, line managers left with a much clearer grasp of the purpose and execution of their teaching practice, and that both sides were able to explore problems from an alternate perspective.

It should be noted that the *Lesson Visit* paperwork and documentation was more important than I had anticipated in helping both parties to understand the process and effectively meet the needs of the teacher and still meet the organisational objectives (RQ2). There is an argument (Sherrington, 2023) that in an ideal world there would be a complete absence of formal paperwork, in favour of instructional coaching. However, in order to support a more effective transition it served a purpose in clarifying expectations and provided the necessary scaffolding to ensure that the process was followed as intended. This was particularly important with staff who were new, inexperienced or may otherwise lack the confidence to be given complete agency over their actions.



#### 5.4.3.1.5 Agency

The fifth characteristic of *Lesson Visits* was *agency*, which was supported by creating conditions in which learning might take place “...through activities that are meaningful and relevant to learners, driven by their interests, and often self-initiated with appropriate guidance” (Ballou, 2020). The confidence required to work with agency is embedded with Bernstein’s (1996, 2000) three pedagogical rights of enhancement, inclusion and participation discussed in Chapter 2. There is evidence to suggest that the successful interventions employed in this thesis, *[College] Projects*, *Collaborative Teaching* and *Lesson Visits* in particular support the fulfilment of these conditions.

The conditions for enhancement are the creation of new possibilities or “*tension points condensing the past and opening possible futures*” Bernstein (2000, p. XX). Both *[College Projects]* and *Lesson Visits* in particular supported opportunities for enhancement. For the majority who did have a positive experience it is clear that their confidence grew, and with confidence being the capability associated with “*enhancement*” (Table 2.2) we can suggest that this pedagogic right was met. However, it cannot be guaranteed that all staff achieved “*enhancement*”, as we have discussed already there were a few participants who did not have the “full” experience that others did. One manager commented, “*I do not feel staff are still yet empowered or confident in setting their own goals*”, which infers the likelihood that not *all* participants were able to develop confidence and the opportunity for enhancement may have been missed.

The second pedagogic right of inclusion relates to the feeling that you belong and have a say. To be “...*included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally*”. (Frاندji & Vitale, 2015, p. 15). Through a collaborative process in which the development of teaching and

learning becomes a *shared endeavour* teacher became part of a community (developing the capability of *communitas*) and as a result the second pedagogic right was met.

The third pedagogic right of participation refers to the right to participate in discourse and reflection as well as the level of practice, "*procedures whereby order is constructed, maintained and changed*" (Bernstein, 2000 p. XXI). The opportunity to choose a *Lesson Visit* focus, the freedom to demonstrate the "reality" of day to day teaching practice and the opportunity to engage in open and honest discourse (the capability of civic discussion) with the observer whilst retaining the opportunity to exercise judgement and agency all indicate that this third pedagogic right was met.

Key to achieving these pedagogic rights has been the intention to support teachers to work with agency. Teacher agency was an important factor in the acquiescence of the participants in this study and their willingness to engage with *Lesson Visits* and the preceding interventions. What we must recognise, though, is that although agency may be promised that doesn't mean it will actually be achieved:

*"Standards of practice can be difficult to reach because of the discipline required to respond to them. This discipline is not a suppression of desire but the desire must be awakened, drawn in by the good that the practice has to offer". (Dunne, 2021, p. 155)*

The findings of this thesis show that agency is less about letting staff loose and more about providing conditions through which teachers have an element of choice in how they learn and develop their knowledge and skills in relation to good educational practice. What was apparent during the wider roll out of *Lesson Visits* in phase 5, was that it cannot be assumed that teachers know how to work with agency. For some, guidance and/or the scaffolding of

learning is essential, particularly in the first instance to afford them the opportunity to develop the understanding and confidence they need to be able to “take the leap”. We must consider that many teachers have been conditioned to work in a certain way, namely the top-down, technical-rational, expert led approach to professional development, which has dominated the educational landscape for so long and still does in some cases.

Data from this study suggest that the development of agency is dependent upon the individual capacity of teachers as well as the culture of the organisation. Full agency over actions, with regards to the development of teaching practice, would appear to be difficult to achieve through any singular process, and needs to be encouraged and supported over a period of time. However, during *Lesson Visits*, the opportunity for robust conversations around teaching, learning and pedagogy, as well as other emerging and enduring educational issues has given teachers a voice. This voice allows them to play an active role in their own professional development and in the advancement of teaching and learning within the organisation. Data reveal that this approach has helped to develop a confidence amongst teachers to “release themselves” from the shackles of pre-existing assumptions, in order to challenge the status quo and reclaim control over their own practice from the ground-up!

#### *5.4.3.1.6 Reflection*

The sixth characteristic of *Lesson Visits* is “reflection”, which is supported by a democratic and pragmatic approach to educational improvement that considers the practical elements within teaching practice. Data indicate that this model is capable of admitting the nature of a practice (Dewey, 1933; Carr, 1995; Dunne, 1997; Noddings, 2003), instead of *chasing* the outstanding lesson.

Educational systems have the capacity to shape and distribute power within a society through the development and regulation of more refined specialist knowledge. The language and communication or “pedagogical discourse”, used within these systems is fundamental to the distribution and regulation of knowledge. Without the opportunity for reflection, pedagogical discourse might become stuck within the confines of what is right and wrong rather than what is educationally good and why. Through accepting that there are different ways of knowing we can accept that there are different ways of assessing and addressing a situation.

With the premise of *Lesson Visits* being observation grounded in context, reflection on the different perspectives of what constitutes “good” practice is essential in supporting democratic and pragmatic discourse. In education we do not want to “knowledge prisons”, we want to explore the boundaries and tension points through which learning can take place in order to develop a far greater understanding of what could be rather than what is. Clark (2005) suggests that change occurs as a consequence of the inner potential of the “*pedagogical device*”, defined by Singh (2002, p. 571) as “...*the ensemble of rules or procedures via which knowledge is converted into classroom talk, curricula and online communication*”. Through the regulation of knowledge, rather than simply acting as an agent of change, the educational system becomes a site of cultural reproduction categorised by cultural forms, values, practices, and shared understandings. In this thesis *Lesson Visits* acted as a “*pedagogical device*”, through which we reflect on making the unthinkable, thinkable, taking us beyond the status quo and influencing real change with educational systems.

## **5.5 Summary**

So far, I have reviewed the three research questions set out in Chapter 1 and have demonstrated the degree in which these questions have been answered by the actions

illustrated in Chapter 4, with reference to the supporting literature in Chapter 2. To summarise Chapter 5, I will provide some reflection on what has been learnt from these findings.

Firstly, I have come to understand that we must consider the individual nuances of teaching practice and the context in which it is enacted, and in order to do so we must *imagine* the possibility of an alternative to how things are done. As an educator, it is easy to become frustrated by the slow pace of change, be this locally within an individual college, or more widely as an education sector. However, by demonstrating, in microcosm, that change is possible, I have been able to show, as posited by Dale (1988, p. 17) in Fielding (2007, p. 71) that, “...education through its processes, the experiences it offers, and the expectations it makes... should not merely reflect the world of which [we] are a part, but be critical of it, and show in [its] own processes that its shortcomings are not inevitable, but can be changed”.

The term education in this context applies to teacher education and more specifically professional development, in which we have learnt that although there may be “desirable” characteristics of CPD, there is no panacea and “one-size fits no-one”.

As educators we appear to be conditioned to act in a certain way because of the balance of power and the expectations to meet set standards (imposed by Ofsted). Although the intent to provide a “quality” education for all is a worthwhile aim, the means by which this achieved seem somewhat misjudged and this has led to a degree of apathy (at best) and fear (at worst) amongst teachers who feel powerlessness to affect a change. I recognise that we need to create tension points in order to do things differently and we also need to ensure public accountability, especially when it is taxpayers’ money which funds a service, but I believe we can do this as part of a far more collaborative and developmental way.

I have demonstrated how changing the conditions of professional development in order to promote a practice-focused, *shared endeavour*, supports leaders, managers and teachers to

take joint responsibility and accountability for educational improvement. Although it is clear that no single person is able to change things single-handedly, if more colleges can demonstrate themselves the virtues of approaching educational improvement in this way, then a much wider impact may be felt across the sector. Indeed, Ofsted itself would likely benefit from a more pragmatic approach to educational improvement, taking some responsibility themselves in helping to fix the problems they say schools and colleges have.

This *shared endeavour* might offer a sense of accountability and responsibility for their judgements and help to restore a sense of credibility to Ofsted's role. In becoming part of the model of change Ofsted might be seen to be playing a more positive role in educational improvement than it does currently and in turn, models of educational improvement within colleges would inevitably evolve to mirror their approach, as they often do now. Wholesale, sector-wide reform could usher in a cycle of continuous development rather than the current and rather dubious naming and shaming labelling exercise, which has been shown to limit innovation and stifle change, whilst having a detrimental effect on staff morale, health and wellbeing.

## **Chapter 6 - Recommendations and Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this final chapter I reflect upon data and findings presented in Chapter 5. I also provide recommendations regarding how the findings of this thesis might be applied in other educational contexts, while also being mindful of potential limitations. In addition, I trace and discuss the evolution of this thesis and the original contribution to knowledge that it makes as well as identifying where further research might be undertaken.

### **6.2 Reflections on the factors affecting CPD in the Further Education Sector including recommendations going forward**

The quest for award of an Ofsted Grade of “Outstanding” is a contentious point of discourse, particularly as the word outstanding implies perfection. Referring once again to the words of the esteemed French philosopher “*Perfect is the enemy of good*”, inferring that a quest for perfection often prevents the implementation of good actions and improvements. College leaders are, maybe unknowingly or even unwillingly, fixated upon the pursuit of “outstanding” which has been so eagerly, vigorously and often stridently promoted, by Ofsted representatives as the gold standard for education, even in situations when, ironically, often good is good enough to see real and tangibly positive change. However, as long as "good" is not considered sufficient, the education sector will keep pushing its staff to their limits for what many might view as an unnecessary and costly venture.

In concluding this thesis, I argue that we stand on the precipice of change in education with considerable curriculum reform in the FE sector already underway, and with no doubt more to come. Post-COVID recovery plans, including related concerns with missed learning, mental health and behavioural issues in schools and colleges, a retention and recruitment crisis across the entire education sector, and strong criticism of Ofsted and their treatment of school and college leaders during inspection, have led to even stronger calls for educational policy makers to “think again” about how we approach educational change and improvement in England, including how and how well we support the professional learning and development of teachers.

Drago-Severson (2012) in Hilton et al. (2015, p. 107) suggests that “...*leaders struggle to find ways to create...climates that are supportive of teachers’ growth and which promote improved practice*”. To ensure that teachers’ needs are met I argue in this thesis that we must have a more inclusive and democratic approach to professional learning, which considers and realises Bernstein’s pedagogic rights. I also retain the belief that it is education leaders who are best placed to take the biggest stand in facilitating a transition to more positive times. Leadership Culture has a significant impact on teachers and, “...*collaboration between leaders and teachers has the potential to ensure sustainability of professional development programs beyond the life of the programs themselves and thereby have an impact in the longer term*” (Hilton et al., 2015, p. 122).

The traditional model of CPD and approaches to educational change and improvement in England infers that a mechanical technical-rational process of causality, in which “real” feedback is ignored in favour of putative quantitative measurements, is the route to educational improvement. However, this assumption does not hold up to scrutiny in the light of the day to day experiences of teachers working in further education. Recipes for success or



“top tips” can often override the personal and moral judgments, which are most important when considering the context of the individual classroom. It is a recommendation of this thesis that education leaders (and teachers) should be supported in coming to the realisation that the solutions to educational problems cannot be reduced and relegated to fad, gimmick or instrumental technique. On the contrary, pedagogic interventions need to be researched, developed and implemented in authentically educative ways capable of increasing research capacity across the sector in order to move closer towards a long term, sustainable, and impactful self-improvement. This thesis argues that the technical-rational model of educational change and improvement and its preoccupations with “quick-fix” techniques has not served the sector, its workforce or its learners well. Incremental adaptations to the current model can be used as a stepping stone towards change, however, in practice it becomes much, much more than that. Teaching is more than a lesson plan. More than a simple “blueprint” or “recipe” for what an “outstanding” lesson should look like. Things that should work often do not and can and should as discussed above, be tested within the environment of the classroom and in contexts which shapes educational practice and belies the effectiveness of any singular technique.

This thesis argues that current models of CPD in further education are heavily technique focused, portraying the idea that “best practice” not only exists, but also needs to be constantly and consistently displayed by “outstanding” teachers. However, as discussed above, this notion simply encourages practitioners to instrumentally latch onto a technique which may or may not then work in practice, once the classroom dynamics and individual students’ personalities are applied.

As educators we need to be willing to learn from practice rather than looking to technique or abstract theory as the silver bullet. We need to avoid the inevitable problems

created by the “just add water” model of change and be comfortable that there is not necessarily one fixed way of delivering “good” education. This has certainly been the case during the evolution of this thesis and the research which underpins it and this is the most powerful consequence of my inquiry. In the past, as a practitioner, I have always been happy to try out new fads, often spending considerable time bending and shaping them to what I want to do. Very rarely though, did this process of transformation occur during practice, more often than not it was done during lesson planning then applied in practice and cast aside if it “did not work”. I have learnt in the course of this study, that it should be ok to admit defeat when something that “should” have worked, does not, and that this experience in itself is an opportunity to develop new knowledge that can and should be applied to shaping curriculum and pedagogical decisions going forward.

I accept that not everyone in education is on board with this way of working and during the discussion on liminal space in Chapter 5 it was duly noted and discussed that being in liminal space, “*at the precipice of something new*”, can be uncomfortable for some. Through my own experience of, “*wide-awakeness*” (Greene, 2005), I have been able to loosen my own grip on more positivist notions *episteme* as the truest form of knowledge and through doing so I have developed greater confidence that others can and will follow suit. During this thesis, I have been able to demonstrate, to those committed to a technical-rational, controlled, top-down approach, less in favour of teacher agency as a core characteristic of CPD, that things can and should be done differently.

One of the ways in which I feel a more permanent change can be made to how we perceive “good” education is through the development of more open and honest initial teacher education programmes. At present, these are almost entirely objective focused processes through which prospective teachers must learn the “correct” theory and technique for teaching

and learning. Once deemed competent in their understanding of what to do they are then “allowed” to teach and it is at this point that the impact of practice and the importance of context are felt. The retention rates for new teachers in further education are not good and they are even more troubling within schools. National recruitment drives and the millions of pounds ploughed into them are all well and good, until it gets to such a point that those who have been recruited do not actually want to do the job to which they have recruited. An important question here is that the extent to which in this “*age of measurement*” we are setting our teachers up to fail before they have even become teachers? Is there not a better way? A way in which we can be more open and honest about the practice of teaching. Furthermore, we need to ask if the definition of teaching practice is sufficiently well understood by teacher educators, policy professionals and ministers for education across England who dictate the criteria for measurement, evaluation and improvement of further education.

Whether new to the profession or an experienced practitioner, it is evident that some education leaders and teachers appear to be locked in a cycle of “empty rituals” demanded by the current model of educational change and improvement operating in across the FE sector in England. As discussed above, it takes courage and commitment to see that things do not have to be the way they are. After all, if the current system of educational change and improvement was going to work it would have by now! Maintaining the status quo, I argue, will not only continue to restrain the open mindedness of teachers and college leaders, but will also result in the predictable failure of top- down, “expert” led CPD, which proposes that solutions for any problem can be easily found and prescribed like medication for a sick patient. This approach remains widespread, across the sector and at a time when the FE is suffering from the triple whammy of a retention, recruitment and financial crisis, this thesis contends that a different

path may need to be taken in order to “save” the FE sector from an expensive, dysfunctional and demoralising merry go round of hollow traditions.

It is not that I am calling for, or expect dramatic changes overnight. My intention, through demonstrating the virtues of a model of educational change and improvement, which promotes practice-focused CPD that works from the ground-up, is to illustrate that the “new” path can be trodden in advance of others joining the journey towards a more democratic and pragmatic process of educational improvement. It is likely, as we proceed, that we may end up taking two steps forward and one step back, but ultimately every step in the right direction is an indication of progress towards a more positive and productive way of doing things.

Again, I refer to the courage and commitment required to do this, from all parties. I am in no doubt that at times the journey will be uncomfortable, and it seems that the dark cloud of Ofsted will constantly be overhead. However, if we are able to incrementally instil a sector wide, self-improving culture of practice development which is democratic, pragmatic, open, honest and realistic, then education leaders and practitioners across the sector will need to take a collective deep breath. Under these “new” conditions colleges could learn new ways to adapt to the inevitable peaks and troughs of finance and inspection that they must navigate in the complex and unstable world of education, in their pursuit to provide a high-quality student experience through research-informed teachers, managers and education leaders.

Acknowledging different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing (Aristotle, 384-322 BC) is helpful in developing our understanding of the nature of teaching practice and the processes and time frames in which teaching practice improves. Through practice-focused CPD, such as that introduced and discussed in this thesis (*Lesson Visits, [College] Projects and Collaborative Teaching*), data from this study suggest teachers feel empowered to be more open and honest about the problems in practice that they encounter in the classroom.

Education leaders and managers can then act accordingly to support teachers in overcoming practical problems and issues encountered in practice as a *shared endeavour*, rather than allowing enduring problems and issues to remain hidden, ignored and undiscovered, which is unfortunately all too common in educational settings.

Professionals in education are charged with the moral responsibility to ensure that young people (and adults) are afforded opportunities to grow and to fulfil their potential. *“Educational practice is a form of power - a dynamic force both for social continuity and for social change...teachers play a vital role in changing the world we live in”* (Carr, 1995 p. 1). As Dunne (2021, p. 158) states *“There are hopeful signs that, despite the contrary pressures, spaces for such ‘conversations’ have been growing in recent years”*. However, there is more work to be done if this approach is going to become the norm, not the exception in how we treat our teaching staff.

### **6.3 Reflections on what CPD could and should be including recommendations for going forward**

The Ofsted model of educational change and improvement, which often mirrors policy within colleges, is I contend, doomed to end in predictable failure as it lacks an understanding of the realities of educational practice faced by schools and colleges on a day to day basis. In contrast, the model employed in this thesis starts with the realities of actual problems encountered in educational practice (context), and through openness and collaboration these educational challenges are, in collaboration and cooperation, addressed by insiders. Carr (1995) notes that:

*“Despite the recognition among avant-garde theorists that practitioners are not mindless functionaries performing in accordance with the theories of others, or the apparent recognition that practice and theory develop reflexively and together many researchers still proceed to study practice ‘from the outside’, believing that their insights won in the intellectual struggle of the postgraduate seminar or the invitational international conference ...will produce changes in the educational practice of teachers who attend neither.” (p. 2-3)*

As a practitioner researcher I have experienced at first-hand the dynamic relationship between theory and practice. I have also been able to accept and adapt to fallibilities in both. Indeed, I have come to understand their mutual interdependence as this research has proceeded. This has included deepening my understanding of the need to test theory (any theory) out in the arena of practice in the interests of contributing to theory development in the development of practice.

Bernstein, (2000) discusses how, with a *“cultivated gaze”*, insiders are able to recognise and realise what is valued within a given context. It is the legitimacy of insiders as the *“judges”* of practice in *Lesson Visits*, which advances a significant shift in the culture of lesson observation and practice development. Collectively in this study, we have embedded and enacted a new way of doing things. Mistakes have been made along the way, but subsequently development has taken place and in a sense the evolution of this policy/process reported in this thesis mirrors exactly the same experience it is designed to promote for its participants. It is this acceptance of fallibility and a commitment to develop and improve, which has given people greater belief in the long-term benefits of the project.

I am conscious when reporting on the “success” of these interventions not to be too “evangelical” or prescriptive in how to replicate these pedagogical interventions or to contradict the constructivist ontological and interpretive epistemological positions adopted in this thesis. In other words, I offer not recipes nor do I present any blueprints for success. Instead I offer insights into my own experiences of implementing this alternative approach to educational change and improvement as well as those of my colleagues. In order to avoid a statement of hypocrisy, it is important that I consider the “one-size fits no-one” discussion I set out in Chapter 5 and I accept that the model adopted in this research will not work for everyone and will undoubtedly need to be adapted and developed in different educational contexts. However, I believe that the flexibility offered within this new model of CPD makes it much easier to adapt to the individual needs and contexts of different practitioners, whilst retaining the pedagogic principles behind the changes made.

The absence of an objective-driven “blue-print” for educational change and improvement, I contend, supports Bernstein’s (2000) pedagogic rights and conditions for agency amongst teachers and observers of teaching. Both are able to act freely in identifying, discussing and acting together in the interests of educational change and improvement. The *Lesson Visit* policy changes introduced and discussed in this study, I argue, have restored a confidence in teachers professional judgement as well as their willingness to share concerns and lay the foundations for a wider culture shift.

This culture shift can be linked to practice and including a sense of “how we do things around here”. An understanding of practice is therefore both vital and inherent in understanding culture and facilitating change. However, careful consideration needs to be given in order to strike a balance between theoretical knowledge and knowledge in practice.

Eraut (2001) in Fielding et al. (2005), suggests that this balance might be achieved in the “organisation” of a suitable microclimate, which supports the transfer of practice through:

- A. *A blame-free culture which provides mutual support*
- B. *Learning from experiences, positive and negative, at both group and individual level*
- C. *Encouraging and talking about learning*
- D. *Trying to make full use of the knowledge resources of its members*
- E. *Locating and using relevant knowledge from outside the group*
- F. *Enhancing and extending understandings and capabilities of both the group as a whole and its individual members. (p. 98)*

These micro climates, Eraut (2001) argues, provide conditions through which “communities of practice” might form as an open, collaborative, practice-focused approach to professional development, which addresses educational improvement as a *shared endeavour* between leaders, manager and practitioners. Another strength of this model is the acceptance of fallibility from both the teacher and the reviewer perspectives. In this setting, teachers in the study appear to be more willing to identify and share areas of concern and areas for development, whilst the observers appear more willing to accept the complexity of problems encountered in educational practice. Sensitivity towards the context in which these problems emerge and the variety of ways in which they might be addressed, as well as the uniqueness of individual teachers and their classrooms in order to better understand the context and possibilities in the educational issues being faced, are vitally important in identifying and addressing the ‘real’ issues faced by practitioners.

Such a culture shift, I contend, might further be supported by the careful use of language. In order to be told what really matters education leaders and teachers must be



pragmatic and democratic in the language we use, “...a shift in language should mirror an important conceptual re-alignment” (Fielding et al., 2005, p. 72). To start with, in this thesis, it became clear that the term observation, so synonymous with a traditional top-down objective driven forms of quality assurance, held considerable potency and currency amongst teachers. Very little of this was positive. It was, therefore, very important for me to choose language carefully when devising and framing a new observation policy. I recognise now how easy it was to slip back into language which carries negative connotations, particularly when elements of my role required me to provide evidence that we were meeting organisational objectives amid impending Ofsted scrutiny. However, as Fielding et al. (2005) suggest, great care must be taken in messaging, if the relays of power are not to be easily contradicted and betrayed by the language we use.

This thesis is not alone in its findings and a shift towards practice-focused professional learning is being supported by the rise in Further Education Research and other collaborative CPD opportunities including practice development groups. In the examples, reported in this thesis the value of CPD comes from taking a solution-focused approach to problem-solving rather than reaching for an “off the shelf” CPD package, blueprint or recipe. The uniqueness of practice-focused research and development provides participants with the opportunity for “an” experience and in avoiding “*submission to convention*” (Dewey, 2005). In this thesis I argue that the *Lesson Visit* model of CPD helps to create conditions where new experiences can be had by teachers working in collaboration cooperation in situations where a sense of “*heightened vitality*” might be achieved as CPD itself becomes a “genuinely” educative experience.

Although characterised by a democratic and pragmatic approach to educational improvement, *Lesson Visits*, I argue, do not shy away from making judgements but recognise

the need for experiences of previous boundaries and barriers to educational change and improvement as tension points in order to do things differently in the future. The findings of this thesis support the argument that we need public accountability, especially when it is taxpayers money which funds a state education system and service. My contention is that such experiences can be developmental rather than performative. The roots of the problem, I maintain, appear to reside in the current Ofsted EIF and herein is where a deeper problem lies. So many college policies are based upon the fulfilment of Ofsted inspection criteria, if and when they arrive. A consequence of this is that these policies and actions are often taken to the detriment of potentially good pedagogic CPD interventions. This inevitably limits a college's ability to make sustainable changes in how things are done, and plays a significant part of simply maintaining the status quo.

A recommendation of this thesis is that, if we can make Ofsted responsible for improvement as a *shared endeavour* then, the inspectorate could become part of the new model of educational change and play a more positive role in educational improvement. This change has been demonstrated in microcosm (Fielding et al, 2005) within this research, to be a practical and useful model in the improvement and development of educational practice. Key to supporting this has been the conversion of managers, previously seen as the "doers" of observation, into collaborative reviewers of lessons, who welcome, accept and share responsibility and accountability for the improvement of educational practice. In taking up the position of "*critical friend*" (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2005), the observation is no longer focused on what has and has not been seen as part of an the ticking off of an objective tick list. Instead lesson observation becomes a shared experience where responsibility for the improvement of teaching practice is shared in the context in which it is enacted.

## 6.4 Practical considerations for implementation

*“Classrooms need to become crucibles of learning for teachers as much as for their students”.* (Pedder et al. 2005, p. 237)

The findings of this thesis support the following recommendations for the practical implementation of two new models of educational improvement. The first model proposes *Lesson Visits* as an alternative approach to graded teacher observation. These offer teachers a choice in how they identify and address areas for development within their own teaching practice. The second model, focuses more widely upon a programme of CPD which encourages teachers to work agentically and collaboratively to enhance their understanding of teaching practice, address educational problems and issues encountered in practice in order to develop their teaching pedagogy.

### 6.4.1 Model 1 - Lesson Visits as a model of teaching observation

Ofsted inspection models and inspectors seems convinced that “they” know what the truths they seek look like, an approach, which implies that *“people do not know what they are doing, and far less do they know why they are doing it”* (Carr, 1995, p. 4), and further suggesting that teachers are not trusted to provide a rationale for their actions. Parallels can be made here between the Ofsted EIF and the role that graded lesson observations play in promoting the very same narrative.

The work of this thesis has been about more than just exploring conditions for agency in professional development in FE contexts. This thesis has also been an evolution of thinking for me as a researcher, teacher and leader in education. It has informed my ways of working and influenced changes in policy and processes within my organisation. These have led to

systemic change and contributed to shifting the mindset of teachers, managers, education leaders and governors, in order to imagine and bring about a better way of approaching educational change and improvement.

Unlike current models of graded-observation, which are often ingrained in the Ofsted EIF and methodology, I have been able to create and implement a distinct model of educational change and improvement that functions from a totally different epistemic position. Ofsted holds technical and rational thinking at the core of its values, in which technique and rules for teaching are heralded and rationally expected to be enough to bring about educational change and improvement. Under this regime, practitioners are often caught in the grip of adopting instrumental techniques touted as the guiding principle for outstanding teaching. This fosters a belief that all you need to be an outstanding teacher is to know what it is to be an outstanding teacher and by following a prescribed set of rules and techniques so that an outstanding status can be achieved. A contention of this thesis is that the Ofsted model totally misunderstands the nature of a practice and what it takes for practice to develop and improve. Instead the Ofsted model makes teachers fearful of not meeting the expectations of (assumedly prescient and “perfect”) observers/inspectors, which by all accounts may be themselves be widely disparate in their levels of pedagogic experience and expertise (Inwood, 2020).

As the work of Ball (2003), Coffield and Edward (2009), and Biesta (2010), suggests, we must stop pretending the experience of practitioners in the classroom is not real. As discussed, teaching practice is a, *“complex set of activities and tasks that has evolved cooperatively and cumulatively over time”* (Dunne, 2021, p. 153). As a such, we are unlikely to achieve sustained improvement in educational practice through generic, prescriptive models of CPD. *“Observers only ever get to see the tip of the iceberg”* (Didau, 2017, para 1), when most of what goes into making lessons *“finely crafted things of beauty”* remains invisible.

#### 6.4.1.1. Conducting a Lesson Visit

A recommendation of this thesis is that *Lesson Visits* offer a practical example of how ungraded, practice-focused lesson observation might be carried out. This practical example, it is argued, supports conditions through which teacher agency might be enacted when identifying and addressing areas for development regarding actual problems encountered within teaching practice by teachers. As previously discussed in Chapter 5, there was an appreciation that not all teachers and managers would be in the position to act with complete agency when entering into a new model of CPD, particularly where this included classroom observation. It was therefore deemed necessary, in order to support their transition, to provide a guide for meeting the expectations of the *Lesson Visit* focus.

I do not share this now as a “blueprint” but as a means to illustrate more accurately what was introduced as an alternative to the existing policy. I again would like to make it clear that I accept that the *Lesson Visit* model adopted in this research will not work for everyone without being adapted and developed to fit different educational contexts.

The guide for meeting the expectations of the *Lesson Visit* process used in this this can be seen below in Table 6.1. Examples of the paperwork used to support *Lesson Visits* can be seen in Appendix E.

**Table 6.1**

*A guide for meeting the expectations of the Lesson Visit process*

**Lesson Visits**

**Meeting the expectations of Lesson Visits**

**For information:**

- *Lesson Visits* will take place during 2 halves of the year (Sept-Jan and Feb-June)
- All staff 0.4 FTE or above are expected to request a minimum of 2 *Lesson Visits* per academic year
- All staff below 0.4 FTE are expected to request a minimum of 1 *Lesson Visit* per academic year
- It is expected that at least 1 visit is completed by a curriculum manager for all staff 0.4 FTE or above

**Step 1 - Scheduling a Lesson Visit**

- At the beginning of each *Lesson Visit* period (The first half of the year starting Week 1 and the second half of the year starting after February half term), the TEACHER will have 2 weeks to identify the time and date of a lesson to visit and their preferred reviewer (Curriculum manager or TLC) using the *LESSON VISIT SCHEDULER*
- If a *Lesson Visit* has not been scheduled by the third week of the *Lesson Visit* period the CURRICULUM MANAGER may propose a date to the TEACHER who will be given the opportunity to change the date/time if not appropriate
- If a *Lesson Visit* is still not agreed upon by the fourth week of the *Lesson Visit* period the CURRICULUM MANAGER will schedule a lesson to visit and notify the teacher of the date and time

**Note:** The teacher has full autonomy in the first 3 weeks of the term to arrange a *Lesson Visit* at a time of their choosing. However, if this is not done, to ensure that all staff are visited, as per the *Lesson Visit* policy, it may be necessary for the curriculum manager to

decide when the *Lesson Visit* takes place. In all cases, the teacher retains full autonomy over the focus of the *Lesson Visit* and feedback.

## **Step 2 - Preparing for the *Lesson Visit***

- Once a *Lesson Visit* has been scheduled the TEACHER is expected to identify a *LESSON VISIT FOCUS*, for example:
- Addressing a particular problem or concern
  - Feedback on teaching pedagogy or practice
  - Development of digital skills
  - Embedding or English, Maths and/or employability skills
  - Sharing good practice
  - Addressing a particular QIP target (see the programme area QIP for details)
- *Lesson Visit* documentation should be shared between the TEACHER and REVIEWER
- The TEACHER should include the lesson focus and any contextual information

**Note:** *It is suggested that Lesson Visit documentation is shared via Google Classroom to ensure that all relevant parties have access.*

## **Step 3 - Conduct the *Lesson Visit***

- The *Lesson Visit* should take place as scheduled
- The REVIEWER will identify lesson strengths and points for discussion (relevant to the *Lesson Visit* focus) using the documentation provided
- Points for discussion should be posed as questions with the purpose of finding out more about a particular activity, resource or incident within the lesson
- Additionally, “Teaching and Learning Themes” such as management of learning, meeting individual needs etc. should be identified as a particular strength, good or point for discussion to support the post-visit feedback

- A “Point for discussion” should be used within “Teaching and Learning Themes” where the REVIEWER has a specific question to raise or wants to know more about a theme.
- If the REVIEWER has seen something in the lesson they feel should be shared with others, they may identify it as a WOW factor on the *Lesson Visit* paperwork
- The TEACHER has the opportunity to request learner voice feedback if desired. Any information should be added to the appropriate box on the *Lesson Visit* documentation
- The TEACHER has the opportunity to provide their own reflection on the lesson using the appropriate box on the *Lesson Visit* documentation

**Note:** *It is not expected that teachers “perform” during a Lesson Visit. The reviewer should be aware of the lesson focus and may benefit from seeing a “normal” lesson in order to make a more accurate review.*

#### **Step 4 - Feedback**

- The TEACHER and REVIEWER will meet to discuss the lesson focus
- Feedback will be provided on particular strengths and points of discussion
- Feedback may also be provided on learner voice (where requested)
- Wider teaching and learning themes should be discussed for a more holistic overview of the lesson, paying particular attention to those identified as “Points for Discussion
- You may wish to change the “Point for discussion” label if further conversation suggests the theme is a PARTICULAR STRENGTH or a GOOD example of the practice.

**Note:** *Feedback should be provided through a professional discussion during which a solution-focused approach should be taken to address the individual needs of the teacher. It is important not to make “judgements” on teaching practice but to be open and honest in relation to the lesson focus. Guidance on holding coaching-style conversations can be*



*seen [here](#)*

### **Step 5 - Goal Setting**

- Before completing the professional discussion, the TEACHER and REVIEWER should discuss potential development goals. These should be short-term (6 weeks) and mid-term (12 weeks)
- Development goals must be set via the *LESSON VISIT-DEVELOPMENT GOALS SUBMISSION FORM* (a link is available on the *Lesson Visit* documentation)
- For the first *Lesson Visit* of the academic year, an additional “[College] Project” goal should be set as a long-term focus.
- The TEACHER will be able to request any support required to meet each goal
- Where possible the *Lesson Visit* development goals should be replicated in the PDR to ensure continuity

**Note:** *It is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that the Lesson Visit development goals are set and submitted after the professional conversation has taken place. A copy of the goals submitted will be shared with the respondent as well as the relevant curriculum managers and members of the teaching, learning and quality team*

### **Step 6 - Review Progress**

- After 6 weeks the TEACHER will review their progress in addressing their short-term development goals by editing and re-submitting the *LESSON VISIT-DEVELOPMENT GOALS SUBMISSION FORM*
- The *SHORT-TERM IMPACT REPORT* should be completed identifying “Goal Met” or “Goal not met” with revised completion dates et where necessary
- After 12 weeks the TEACHER will review their progress in addressing their mid-term development goal by editing and re-submitting the *LESSON VISIT-DEVELOPMENT GOALS SUBMISSION FORM*

- The MID-TERM IMPACT REPORT should be completed identifying “Goal Met” or “Goal not met” with revised completion dates et where necessary
- Once both the short-term and mid-term goals (including any revisions) have been met, a short reflection of the impact should be provided.
- For “[College] Project” goals the TEACHER should submit the [College] PROJECT-REVIEW on completion (or by the end of the academic year if not completed in the year)

**Note:** *If the short-term and mid-term development goals are not met after an additional 6-week period then the lesson reviewer will be notified by the Quality Office and a meeting between the 2 parties arranged to provide further support in completing the development goals. It is expected that ALL teaching staff comply with the Lesson Visit policy.*

#### 6.4.1.2 Setting Development Goals

Key to supporting agency in this process is the teacher’s role is setting their own development goals. This can be done independently or with the support of the lesson reviewer, but the choice must remain with the individual teacher. Table 6.2 illustrates the guidance provided to teachers for setting their goals.

During this study participants submitted their individual development goals using a formal document (Appendix E). Based upon feedback from participants, this process was revised for the beginning of 2023-24 and a Google Form was used for the submission of goals in order to support auditing within the Quality Office and to automate deadline reminders for development goals.

It is important to note here the obvious technical-rational underpinnings of the SMART mnemonic (see Table 6.2) and its prescriptive-predictive ethos, which seeks to control the “parameters” for change (Carr, 1995; Kemmis, 2012; Dunne, 2021). However, this technique can also be defended to some extent in that it offers a beginning, as a focusing device which can help individuals (if not followed too slavishly) to begin to plan their practice. The importance of a scaffolded approach to individual change and improvement of practice was a point raised in Chapter 5, in reference to the characteristic of agency and how, in offering a scaffolded approach (e.g. SMART goals), we might create conditions under which practitioners can develop the understanding and confidence they need to “take a leap” and change their practice.

**Table 6.2**

*Guidance for teachers on setting individual development goals post Lesson Visit*

<b>Setting Development Goals</b>	
It is important that development goals are SMART:	
<b>Specific</b>	The development goal(s) must be relevant to the <i>Lesson Visit</i> focus or other identified points for discussion between the teacher and reviewer
<b>Measurable</b>	The development goal(s) must have a measurable outcome that benefits the teacher and/or students
<b>Agreed</b>	The development goal(s) must be owned and agreed upon by the teacher
<b>Realistic</b>	The development goal(s) must be achievable within 6 weeks of the <i>Lesson Visit</i>
<b>Time-bound</b>	The development goal(s) should be addressed within 6 weeks of the <i>Lesson Visit</i>

## WHAT GOALS DO YOU NEED TO SET?

### Short-term goal - 6 weeks

This goal should focus on something you can do in the next 6 weeks to develop your teaching practice, address a problem or concern or engage with internal CPD opportunities.

### Mid-term goal - 12 weeks

This goal could still focus on developing your teaching practice, addressing a problem or concern or engaging with CPD opportunities, but may involve more time working with the course team, a TLC, the digital lead or signing up to external courses/webinars/conferences.

### *[College] Projects*

As a long-term goal over the academic year we continue to encourage **[College] projects**. We had over 160 projects submitted when we launched as a cross-college initiative in 2021/22. [College] Projects can be large or small in scale, independent or team-focused. If you require support from the TLQ team or would like to conduct your own action research then please indicate this on your goals form.

## EXAMPLE GOALS

Development goals should also be varied and progressive. You may wish to focus on pedagogy in the classroom, the development of IT skills outside of the classroom or even external webinars of CPD.

### Examples of development goals

Addressing a particular "Lesson Themes"	Review of curriculum structure or specification
Sharing a WOW factor and/or resources	Review of SOW/Lesson planning
Collaboration with a colleague	Implementing behaviour management strategies
Attending internal CPD	Developing existing teaching materials

Attending external CPD	Implementing a new teaching resource
Delivering internal CPD	Implementing a new teaching strategy
Delivering external CPD	Trying a new EdTech tool
Request a 6-week TLC Coaching Cycle	Addressing an existing QIP target
<b>Examples of support available</b>	
Working with a TLC	Internal CPD
Working with Colleague	External CPD
Working with Line Manager	Join Action Research Group
Independent Working	Join NQT/ECT Group
Accessing [College]: Learn Resources	Shadow a member of the Executive Team

#### 6.4.1.3 Reacting to concerns around teaching performance

Due to the shift towards elective observations it was deemed necessary to redefine the process for supporting “underperforming” teachers, normally referred to as a capability process. It is not that observations cannot take place at any time in the year for teachers in need of support but the principle of the visit being agreed by the teacher must be retained in order to not contradict the underlying ethos at the heart of the changes being made.

It was therefore defined that in the first instance, addressing a problem or concern should happen through a professional discussion between the line manager and teacher. This helped to retain the sense of a practice-focused, collaborative approach to developing teaching practice. Consequently, the focus of any agreed visit must then relate to the issues or concerns raised and discussed in open conversation. Coaching support from the teaching, learning and quality team was available on request at any time to support members of the teaching staff. It was important to be clear to managers who were ordinarily conditioned to react in a more

autocratic manner how to conduct this process so as not to have a detrimental impact in the teacher and manager relationships so integral to *Lesson Visits* (Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3**

*Guidance to managers on how to address concerns with teacher capability*

Example - A concern is raised around teaching performance through student voice.
<p>The process for dealing with this should be as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The line manager does the appropriate background research to triangulate associated data with the concern (outcomes, retention, learner voice, complaints, general conduct)</li><li>2. A conversation should take place between the teacher and line manager and where evidence indicates a support need,<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. A <i>Lesson Visit</i> should be agreed with a focus on addressing the issues raised, or</li><li>b. An alternative 6-week coaching model with a TLC can be offered.</li></ol></li></ol> <p>It is the responsibility of the line manager to hold a professional conversation in the first instance, where concerns may have been raised about the performance of a member of the teaching staff. A <i>Lesson Visit</i> alone will not contribute to capability proceedings and it is up to the line manager to determine other factors contributing to the concerns raised. If concerns still remain after a period of coaching support, informal capability may be the next course of action to ensure that the teacher is supported to improve.</p>

#### 6.4.1.4 Transferability of Model 1

From the findings of this inductive research process I could reasonably infer that the same model would work more generally across other organisations. This is something which could have a wider impact in other organisations across the sector as well as other public service providers. There are likely to be some contexts in which *Lesson Visits* fare better than others and it is incumbent on leaders to support a more democratic and pragmatic approach to educational improvement within their organisations. The ability to do this is one of the potential limitations which I will discuss at the end of this chapter.

A recommendation of this thesis is that, when addressing issues of educational improvement, we must ensure we do not just put a number on or attach an adjective to a teacher and walk away with no acceptance of any responsibility or accountability for that teachers improvement, as is case in graded observations, particularly when evidence shows us (O’Leary, 2013; Inwood, 2020; Randall, 2023) that this results in no sustained improvement to teaching and learning. We do not need top-down technical rational interventions to “drive” improvement in education (Fielding et al., 2005). Things can be different within the sector and I have demonstrated this in microcosm, in this thesis. The feeling that we are all “in the same boat” and “on the same side” in a shared mutual endeavour is critical if education leaders and teachers are to take joint responsibility and accountability for improvement regardless of which position they occupy in the organisation.

Regarding the transferability of the *Lesson Visit* model, I might even suggest that Ofsted itself could benefit from a more pragmatic approach to quality improvement, taking some responsibility and accountability by helping address the problems they say schools and colleges have. A recommendation of this thesis is that this *shared endeavour* might help to restore a

sense of credibility to Ofsted's role and ensure that quality improvement is sustained as a collaborative and democratic process.

#### *6.4.2 Model 2- Lesson Visits, [College] Projects and Collaborative Teaching as a Model for CPD*

A recommendation of this thesis is that the intervention of *[College] Projects*, *Collaborative Teaching* and lastly *Lesson Visits* operate to emphasise the importance of practice-focused CPD which was embedded within the context of the classroom. As is supported by Dunne (2021, p. 156) this approach helps to, "...combat the tendency, endemic [in many educational establishments] towards a 'recitative script' with the expectation that teachers will 'instruct and assess' and that pupils will 'absorb and regurgitate' ". This study, therefore, has implications for the design of professional development and quality improvement processes across the education sector, for the benefit of educational leaders, managers and practitioners. Model 2, incorporates Model 1 alongside 2 other complementary initiatives, *[College] Projects* and *Collaborative Teaching* (see case studies below).



### 6.4.2.1 Case Study - [College] Projects

Table 6.4 outlines the premise of [College] Projects with reference to the role out across 3 campuses in October 2021.

**Table 6.4**

*An overview of [College] Projects*

<i>Overview</i>
Although I don't wish to dilute the importance of these projects they were not specifically research-driven. The fundamental aim is to recognise the iteration, development and evolution of teaching pedagogy and resources, which naturally occur on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis. It is my feeling that we do not regularly acknowledge the effort of some staff to change the way they do things for the better. It is, for this reason, we launched our [College] Projects in October 2021 so that teachers felt that they could address an underlying issue or concern they had within their teaching practice, without fear of criticism or failure. After all, who is best placed to identify and solve problems within the classroom, the 335-teaching staff who live and breathe them on a daily basis or the 43 managers, many of whom are far removed from the realities of day to day teaching.
<i>How does it work (is it funded, do staff have time allocated? Are staff tutored/mentored?)</i>
There is no additional time, remission or financial incentive offered beyond the initial launch at our October staff development day, a half-day event that then gives the afternoon for teams to meet and discuss possible projects. Staff have been offered professional coaching from our Teaching and Learning Coaches but in the main, these have remained autonomously led projects with little external interference from managers. The range of projects is therefore quite vast from small scale resource focused projects run by individuals to curriculum strategy projects involving whole teams. The key was to ensure staff did what they felt they had time to do and what they felt would be most valuable to them. If we cannot offer them time or money then we cannot expect teachers to take on

additional workload, although many clearly have through their own volition.

*Does research align with organisational priorities?*

As a new initiative, we have chosen not to specifically map to organisational priorities to encourage a greater buy-in. It is without a doubt though that some of the projects will naturally align to overall college objectives but more importantly will play a part in a deliberate culture shift to a more autonomous, empowerment and agentive driven model of professional learning and development where we create conditions for the development of teacher agency.

*What are the benefits of projects to the wider organisation? (e.g. innovation, changes to practice, impacts on learner experience)*

This initiative started with an initial 137 project entries, some with multiple participants and now stands at over 160 projects. This initiative is very much in its infancy but it is expected to form a valuable part of the College's annual development programme. Ultimately there is some expectation that these projects will impact the quality of teaching and learning and the student experience as this should be the main focus but the wider impact on staff agency and a culture of innovation and drive for change is the greater ambition as in turn it is hoped that this will lead to improvements in teaching and learning by proxy. For me, personally this is a great opportunity to make a difference in the working lives of everyone at the college, through a more positive focus on professional learning and self-development.

#### 6.4.2.2 Case Study - Collaborative Teaching

Table 6.5 outlines the premise of *Collaborative Teaching* and the guidance sent to all teachers and student focused support staff across 3 campuses. The original infographic poster can be seen in Appendix H.

**Table 6.5**

*Guidelines for Collaborative Teaching*

<i>Purpose</i>
<p>There are many benefits to observing each other’s practice; enhancing students’ learning through reflective practice, demonstrating leadership by observing and supporting other teachers or celebrating excellent teachers and teaching practice. However, it is not always easy to find the time to “observe” with busy teaching schedules. In <i>Collaborative Teaching</i> the focus is upon making the most of opportunities to share your teaching and learning practice with others through general conversation, joint lesson planning, team teaching or peer observation, identifying strengths and areas for development but managed on your terms.</p>
<i>Process</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Identify a colleague whom you may want to work with and arrange a meeting. (This can be inside or outside of your own department). Contact the Quality office for a FREE coffee voucher, to be redeemed at one of the [College] Starbucks outlets.</li> <li>2. Discuss your current teaching practice with your colleague. This could be a general chat or you may wish to focus on areas such as:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Perceived Areas of Strength</li><li>b. Perceived Areas for Development</li><li>c. New Teaching Pedagogy</li><li>d. EdTech Tools</li><li>e. Classroom Management</li><li>f. Embedding English, Maths and Employability Skills</li><li>g. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</li></ol></li></ol> <p>(Whatever you discuss, make sure it is relevant to you and your teaching practice).</p>

3. Decide between you the best way to collaborate on your chosen area. For Example:
  - a. Peer Observation
  - b. Joint Planning
  - c. Team Teaching
  - d. Regular Meetings
  - e. Sharing Resources
  - f. Delivering CPD

(Again, do what is most appropriate for you and your teaching practice. These can take place over a period of weeks or as one-off activities)

4. To ensure that these important interactions are recognised please complete the *“Collaborative Teaching Log”*.

#### 6.4.2.3 Transferability of Model 2

Model 2 promotes a method of change improvement which is a pragmatic one, informed by Aristotle’s discussion of forms of knowledge and grounded in experience and Dunne’s (2005) definition of a practice. This model is able to admit that practice is a complex process developed over time, through many factors. This proposed model of CPD operates to address the concerns of teachers and what they “know” needs to be improved within their teaching practice. Professional development, therefore, becomes professional learning as part of a *shared endeavour* between teacher, education leaders and managers as well as between teachers and their peers. In sharing responsibility and accountability for educational improvement, all parties play a role in changing practice from the inside.

The perceived success of all three initiatives in the context of this thesis suggest that the underlying principles are supported by a wider range of FE practitioners. From this we might reasonably infer that this model of CPD could receive a similar response in and across other

organisations. As with Model 1 there are potential limitations, particularly if there is a conflict between the model of educational change and improvement operating in the existing culture of a college, as experienced at various stages of this thesis

## **6.5 The limitations of my findings and recommendations for further study**

This thesis attempts to address the technical-rational, top-down approach to CPD in favour of a more pragmatic, democratic and carefully considered approach, delivered without the pretence that any one-off CPD “event” will make all the difference. An acceptance of fallibility, on the part of all parties concerned, teachers, manager and senior leaders, recognises that there is no “silver-bullet” and that a shared responsibility and accountability for educational improvement is the best course of action. I must, however, accept that there are potential limitations within the findings of this thesis and I attempt to identify these now before providing my final reflections.

As this research has occurred solely within a single organisation it would be remiss of me not to accept that there may be some limitations in the transferability of these findings across the wider sector, particularly when I have put such an emphasis upon the importance of context. Similarly, despite the experiences of practitioners in this study being a strength of the constructivist approach taken, I am limited in the generalisability of these results and may therefore only offer insights and provide tentative recommendations for other colleges going forward, although I see this as more of an endorsement of the suggestion that there is no blueprint for educational improvement rather than a significant limitation of findings.

A quest for inalienable truth, as appeared to be the early focus of this thesis with regards to “technique”, would not have aligned with the constructivist-interpretive-pragmatist

methodology discussed and justified in Chapter 3 and would only have provided a fairly superficial and narrow view of the underlying issues relating to CPD and the value placed upon within my organisation. In shifting to a broader focus on the pedagogic and epistemic principles underpinning CPD, rather than the preoccupations with technique employed, CPD no longer becomes an “event” but instead a process and means by which staff could engage in a mode of educational change and improvement that encourages the acceptance of a shared responsibility and accountability for educational change and improvement through collaborative and cooperative learning.

The Models of change proposed in Chapter 6 are rooted in conditions in which agency and collaboration might be supported and developed. As discussed in Chapter 5, this is highly dependent on the ability of individuals to work under the conditions described in this thesis. This presents a potential limitation for the application of these models in other organisations and careful consideration needs to be given to the communication, training and support provided to teachers, managers and college leaders in order to enable them to move towards this new approach to educational change and improvement in FE.

Another limitation of this study is the dependency on college leaders to show courage in moving beyond the confines of the Ofsted EIF in order to embrace a risk tolerant model of educational improvement. This is not an easy transition, particularly in colleges who find themselves firmly within the scope of Ofsted inspection, and I can empathise with the difficult balancing act that college leaders must undertake. However, I also contend in this thesis that without these external influences and the need to “measure” education, teaching practice development within the context of the classroom is far more valuable to teachers and students alike. The obsession with mainstream education being risk-free at all levels (Biesta, 2015) is concerning and as Nišavić and Maja (2019, p34) discuss this is often for no better reason than

the “...*effective production of pre-defined learning outcomes*”. The promotion of this form of education, which is strong, secure and practicable keeps us firmly rooted in the realms of an existing (and rather dubious) epistemology where theory, research and practice are considered to be separate. This makes it difficult for some teachers, education leaders managers, policy professional and inspectors of education to “imagine” a change let alone bring it about. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, in microcosm, educational change and improvement does not have to be this way.

## **6.6 Reflections on the evolution of this thesis and the original contribution to knowledge**

### *6.6.1 The evolution of this thesis*

*“...research can only inform practice because it can never replace other knowledge which teachers bring to bear on practical problems...even the best research evidence is not available as fixed, universal relationships between methods and outcomes, but as local, context-sensitive patterns which have to be interpreted by teachers within their particular working environments.” (Edwards, 2000, p. 301)*

This research started in Chapter 1 in what I now see as a misguided quest for certainty. It evolved into a narrative of development and maturation (Carter et al. 2012, p. 58) as I grew to understand that we do not need to search for or accept certain inalienable truths. The only inalienable truth I have found in the course of this research is that we, as human beings, are

always trying to make sense of what's going in ourselves and in the world around us so that we can try to make the right decisions on how to move forward.

In Chapter 2 I came to understand the concept of gamification and its application within an educational context (Deterding, 2011; Kapp, 2012). I considered literature relating to professional development (Dede et al., 2016; Collin & Smith, 2021; Sims, 2021), and explored the development of online learning models (McAuley et al., 2010; Salmon, 2013; Carpenter, 2016;) and I was interested in how these principles might work in my context, but it was the literature on the purpose of education (Biesta 2010b; 2015), pedagogic rights (Bernstein, 1996, 2000; McLean et al. 2013) and discourses and definitions surrounding the nature of educational practice (Dewey, 1933; Carr, 1995; Fielding et al., 2005; Dunne 2005; Coffield & Edward, 2009), which offered me the first opportunities for enlightenment. It was from this point that I felt able to challenge the status quo and imagine an alternative to how we approach educational change and improvement in further education. My motivation to enact real and sustainable change was further increased as I engaged with the work of Ball (2003, 2018), Coffield and Williamson (2011) and Coffield (2017), which resonated so keenly with my own experiences of working in education. Finally, the work of Bernstein (2000), Biesta (2015), Priestley et al. (2015) led me to identify the importance pedagogic rights and teacher agency as key considerations going forward as I became convinced that educational improvement is best addressed, within context, by grass-roots, insider-practitioner-researchers, from the ground up.

Chapter 3 brought with it the complexities of methodological paradigms and my ontological and epistemological perspectives. I wrestled with this for some time, partly due to a pre-existing tendency towards empirical research, but through exploring educational research literature I was able to consider contrasting philosophical viewpoints, which resulted in a change of perspective. I argued that neither positivism or interpretivism could be judged



as “ideal” methodologies and as such I had found my epistemological position to be aligned to that of pragmatism. Ontologically, I felt that a constructivist approach was most appropriate, to support an inductive exploration and analysis of the lived experience of my participants as they changed incrementally over time. As Fielding et al. (2005) discusses, I was able to demonstrate, in microcosm, that there is an alternative way of doing things.

In Chapter 4 I was able to analyse the data from five phases of intervention. Phase 1 (pre-intervention) helped to identify the desirable characteristics associated with CPD according to practitioners; *relevant, self-determined, meaningful, focused*. Phase 2 illustrated that it was the nature of CPD not the mode of delivery which was the main barrier to engagement. Phase 3 indicated that a culture shift was required to support a change of direction in how educational improvement was viewed and enacted, with new initiatives being trialled (*[College] Projects and Collaborative Teaching*). Phase 4 piloted an alternative model of teacher observation to support the *new* way of doing things more holistically, and finally, phase 5 involved the launch of a new lesson observation policy, which supported a democratic and pragmatic approach to educational improvement that was practice-focused and driven from the ground-up. This culminated in an improvement in teachers morale, relationships with education leaders and managers, the development of teaching, learning and assessment practice in the classroom and overall willingness to share and address areas for development as a *shared endeavour*.

In addition to these outcomes, in Chapter 4 I was also able to reflect for the first time on my own journey in education. When starting this thesis, I had little influence over decision making and no influence over policy. As an experienced teacher, I made changes to my teaching practice based on trying to “get better” and I was able to learn from my mistakes and continually develop my own practice. In essence, I was doing what I am now advocating

for others to do, developing my practice with agency, within the context of the classroom. As a teacher my sphere of influence to elicit change was relatively narrow even as a Teaching and Learning Coach. I am sure I was not alone in this situation with many practitioners across the FE sector feeling restricted by the impact they can have on the decision made outside of the classroom.

However, when my role changed to that of a senior leader within the college, I had the opportunity I had craved from the outset of this thesis to change the way in which things were done. This illustrates rather poetically one of the underlying issues unearthed during this thesis in that it is college leaders who appear to make quite significant decisions on how colleges progress strategically, but not always with teaching and learning at the forefront of their minds. This may not come as a surprise when we consider that most leaders no longer find themselves in the confines of the classroom, certainly not on a daily basis, so how well placed are they really to understand the issues faced by the teachers of today. That is not to say that leaders do not understand their organisations or how they are run, in the modern era of market education, colleges are big business, with many different priorities. However, without truly hearing the voices of teachers and their own lived experience, college leaders cannot fully understand the complexities at work in the context of practice or the issues arising from them.

Without the autonomy they need to make the changes they feel are necessary, practitioners too often feel isolated in "*pedagogical solitude*" (Shulman, 2000), and powerless to make any real change whilst continually being held accountable for data-driven outcomes, student behaviour etc. From the findings analysed in Chapter 4 I was able to identify preoccupations with meeting Ofsted expectations, coupled with the complexities of a market education and how these have distorted educational practice and led to organisation priorities that are not directly aligned with the improvement of teaching and learning. Because of this,

and despite the positive impact that the changes made in this thesis have had on the way teachers are trusted and supported to develop their practice, I remain discontented with the wider influence that Ofsted still has on college cultures, and the models of educational improvement they adopt as a result.

In Chapter 5 I highlighted several findings from my data analysis. Firstly, in review of RQ1, the notion that “one size fits no-one” was discussed in relation to participant feedback, which formed the desirable characteristics of CPD. From this it was deduced that the mode of delivery is less important than the nature of CPD. The response to RQ2 indicated that “it takes time to affect change!” and in order to support change certain conditions need to be met. Unfortunately, college priorities and individual teacher priorities are unlikely to be the same, which can cause resentment or apathy when it comes to engaging with the CPD. Here I also considered the impact of Ofsted on decision making in education and the role of leaders in advocating for change, this led to the notion that “nothing will change if the culture is wrong”.

As an education leader and senior manager, I found it very difficult to compromise on what I felt was the right thing to do and I became disheartened by the fact that despite my best efforts and the seemingly positive impact of my work, there continue to be too many “other” factors to contend with. I would expect that this is a feeling shared by many education leaders, and although some may feel willing and able to carry on, others like me have made the difficult decision to leave the sector to which they have devoted a large portion of their lives. I still ask myself the question, “*If I had been looked after (i.e. the terms and conditions led me to feel valued) would I have still left the sector?*”. I hope in the light of the findings of this thesis that the DfE and its partners (Ofsted, ETF) can do more to support FE leaders and teachers, so that they might stay in the job they love.

Only in Chapter 5 did I realise that there was no right way to conduct a thesis. During the previous four chapters I had been searching for some sort of scaffolding to guide my hand. This was unsettling and frustrating and certainly invoked a degree of anxiety, but it has since dawned upon me that this was the exact scenario I was putting the teachers through by introducing a completely new way of doing something (i.e. unstructured lesson observations and projects). This revelation has helped me to better understand and empathise with those who felt lost and needed a guiding hand themselves during this process. This realisation has also illustrated the volatility of a totally agentic process, which is dependent on the confidence and skills of the individual. This was further discussed in the review of RQ3 which explored the lived experiences of practitioners and the role of teacher agency in educational improvement processes. Here I concluded that CPD should be practice-focused, support “*an*” experience (Dewey, 1934), and approach educational improvement as a *shared endeavour*.

Now in Chapter 6 I can see that this thesis offers a story of trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility, and through listening to the voices of practitioners and taking into consideration their lived experiences, I have been able to faithfully portray what it is like to be a teacher in FE in the current climate. This has allowed me to make informed recommendations as to how we might support individual practitioner development and wider educational improvement through an alternative model of professional learning, which puts teaching practice front and centre of the decision-making process. This thesis accepts that we cannot always offer teachers agency but we can create conditions in which agency can be enacted. Conducting this research has been a study of self-exploration and understanding of the deeper issues affecting the development of teaching, learning and educational practice worthy of the name.

### *6.6.2 Recognising an original contribution to knowledge*

In this thesis I offer insights into and practical examples of an alternative way of “doing” CPD, which at a local level adopts practices which put teachers at the heart of making decisions on how they develop their own educational practice. The focus on individual practice and the corresponding outcomes in terms of practitioner motivation and morale, as well as the quality of teaching and learning are apparent. However, I accept that they are not in themselves an original contribution.

More broadly, the findings of this thesis make powerful claims regarding the importance of culture within colleges and the benefits of promoting a collaborative, shared responsibility for educational change and improvement. It is here that I feel the original contribution has been made. In seeking the input of practitioners at the beginning, middle and end of this journey I have been able to listen to and represent the voices of those on the frontline of education. Voices in the classroom that were not heard before, but are now!

In deepening my understanding of the nature of human experience, the nature of practice and the processes through which practice change, as well as by taking practitioner voices seriously, I was able to change the culture of my organisation and ensure that decisions relating to CPD and associated educational improvement policy, such as lesson observations, are contextually attuned. No longer seen as box-ticking events, instead, this new model provided opportunities for practitioners to exercise agency in their professional development. A key point here is that agency is not something that can be given or handed on a plate to someone, although it can be encouraged. At this point I want to reaffirm that “nothing will change if the culture is wrong”. However, if we are able to create cultural conditions which support practitioners, enabling and encouraging them to work with agency,

then, as my findings have shown, we may be able to uncover more of the problems being faced in the classroom and pragmatically and democratically go about addressing them.

The findings of this thesis demonstrated that when it comes to models of educational change and improvement, educational leaders can be kind and decent to people and still get results. From this starting point, educational leaders can take more teachers from where they are to where they could be, and in turn provide the best possible experience for students. I hope that these findings will resonate with educational leaders in the further education sector and beyond, inspiring them to adopt a different approach to educational change and improvement, one which might foster a culture within their institutions that values educational practice and the unique contexts in which it sits. In leading educational change and improvement from the ground-up we may be able to tackle the issues of performativity affecting both teachers and leaders, and in turn this could help address declining recruitment rates and the growing challenge of teacher retention across the further education sector.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

Every attempt has been made to ensure the trustworthiness of this research, which is underpinned by the transparency with which this thesis has been conducted and written. I have accepted where I have made mistakes or been deficient in my understanding of a situation and provided a full account of key events and pivot points to show that I have worked reflexively. A pragmatic approach to data collection and data analysis has retained an element of dependability whilst the constructivist ontological perspective has supported credibility through a narrative of real stories of lived experience provided by the participants of this study as well as myself as an insider. My epistemic interpretation of qualitative data has been

triangulated with quantitative data sets and member checking has established further credibility of results. By virtue of meeting the conditions of credibility, transferability and dependability, conditions of confirmability have also been satisfied.

Personally, and professionally I have benefited significantly from engaging in this research and have experienced first-hand the realisation of Bernstein's pedagogic rights in practice as well as what it takes and makes to bring them about. The individual "*enhancement*" I have felt as my confidence has grown has encouraged me to continue when faced by barriers and blockers. I have experienced "*inclusion*" and the sense of Bernstein's (1996; 2000), "*communitas*" as I have developed social relations with colleagues inside and outside of my organisation, and I have experienced "*participation*", demonstrated through the civic discussion and action I have taken to manage change within the college. The sense of accomplishment I have from taking a research-informed approach in an effort to address enduring educational issues, and witnessing the impact this has had on my friends and colleagues has been fulfilling. I have learnt that when research (or action) is embedded within work it can be enjoyed and can make a difference to those around, even if you cannot change the bigger things. The evolution of this thesis has afforded me what Dewey (1934) describes as "*an*" experience, through which I have developed a "*wide-awakeness*" (Greene, 2005) to the educational landscape and sense of "*heightened vitality*" (Dewey, 2005).

What I have learnt during the evolution of this thesis, is that further consideration must be had for the role of early adopters, visionaries and innovators in advocating for what Biesta (2015) calls the, "*Beautiful risk of education*", because without these people, nothing will change. *Lesson Visits* and the preceding interventions have provided a form of professional learning which relies upon the capacity for staff to work with agency. Teachers have been empowered to recognise their own cultural capital and regain pedagogic control as they

participate directly in the shaping of educational practice from the ground up. As Dunne (2005) reminds us, it is through a coherent policy and a complete set of activities and tasks, which evolve cooperatively and cumulatively over time that leaders, that managers and teachers can commit to develop and sustain good educational practice. Standards of excellence can still be upheld while at the same time remaining subject to development and redefinition, and no longer immutable in nature.



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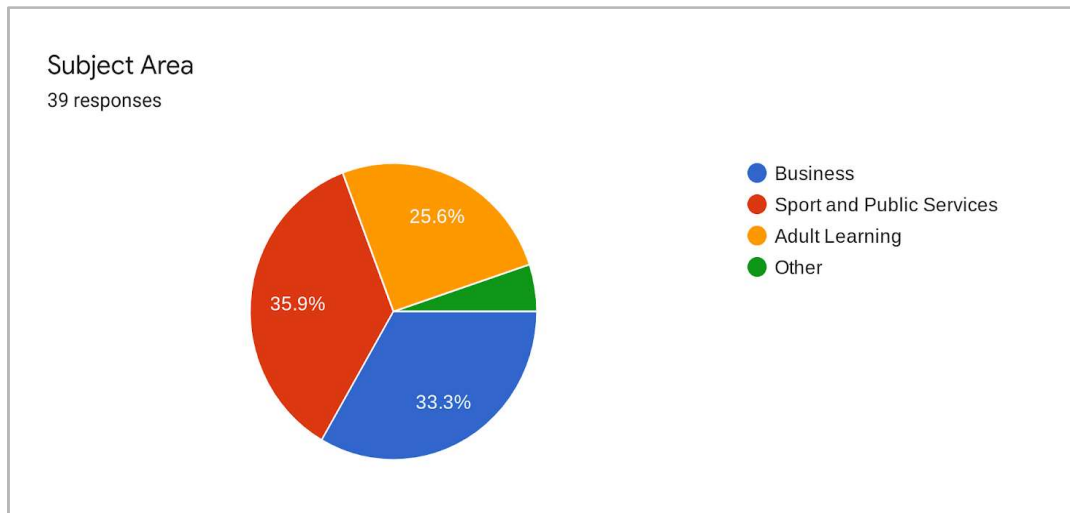
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# 8. Appendices

## Appendix A

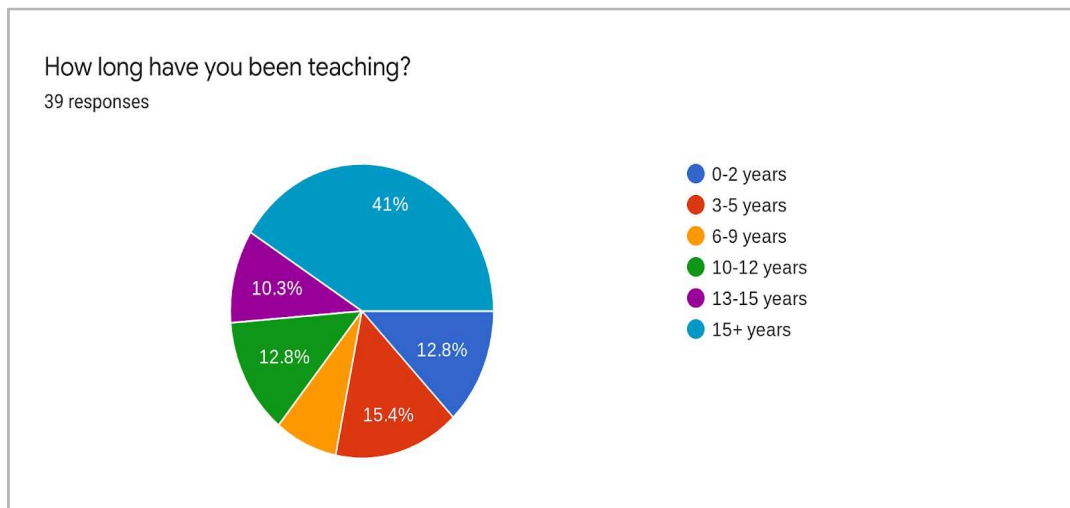
**Appendix A – Figure 1.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (Subject Area)*



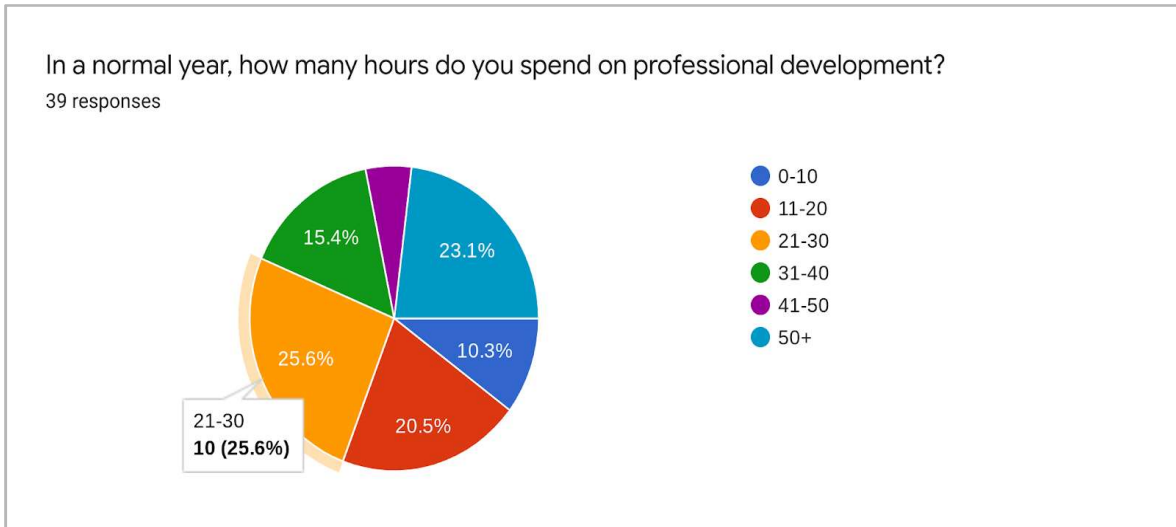
**Appendix A – Figure 2.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (Length of Service)*



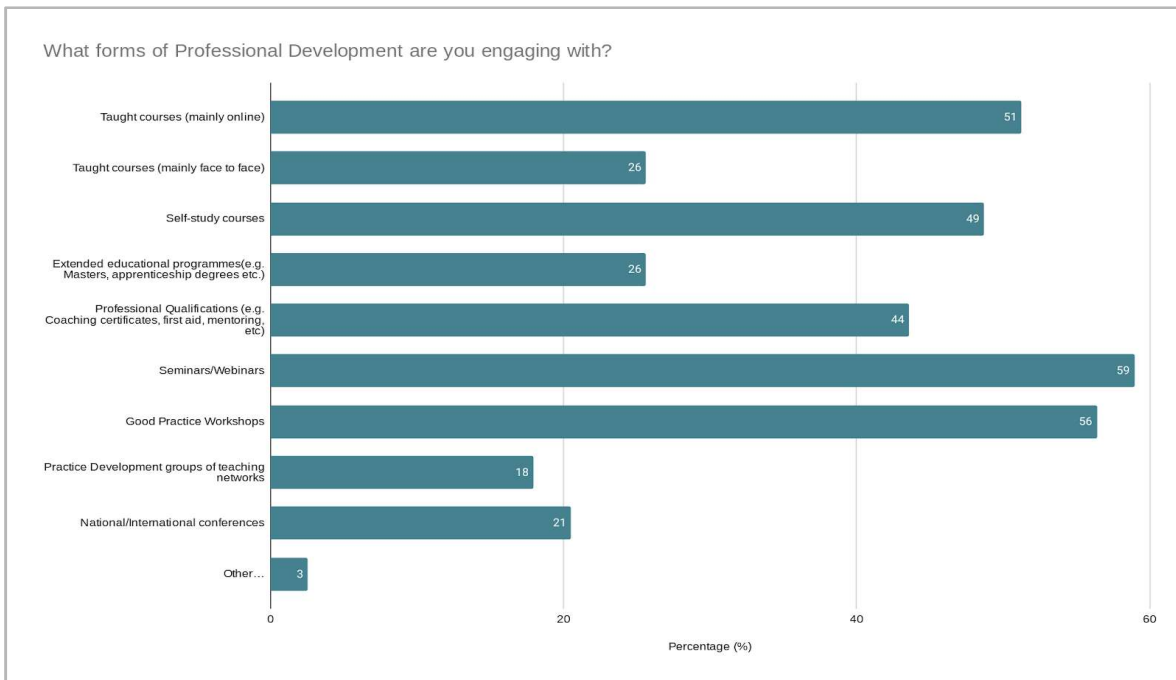
**Appendix A – Figure 3.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (CPD Hours)*



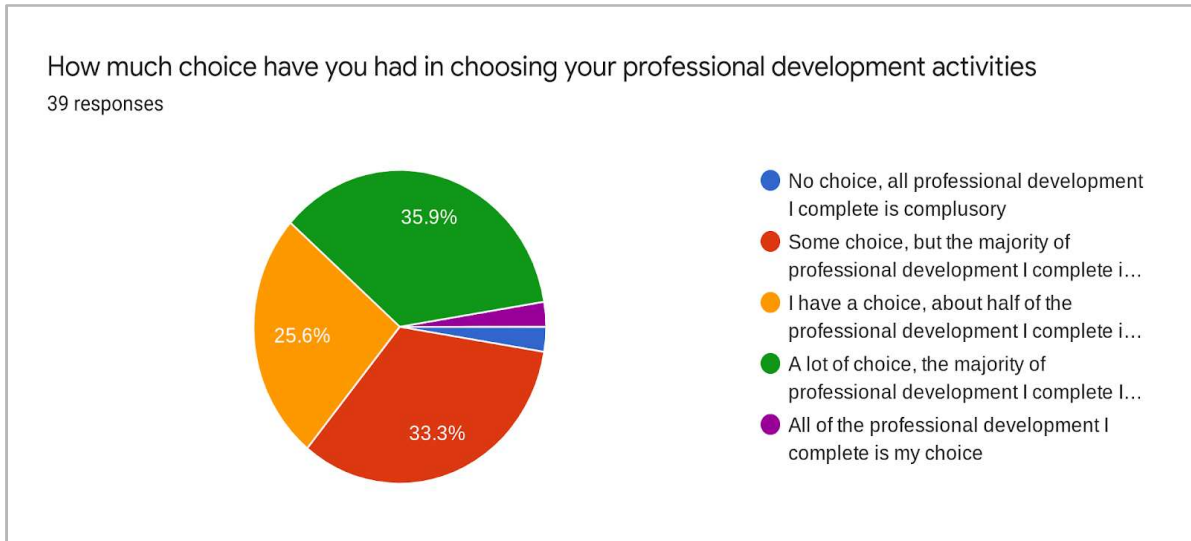
**Appendix A – Figure 4.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (CPD Format)*



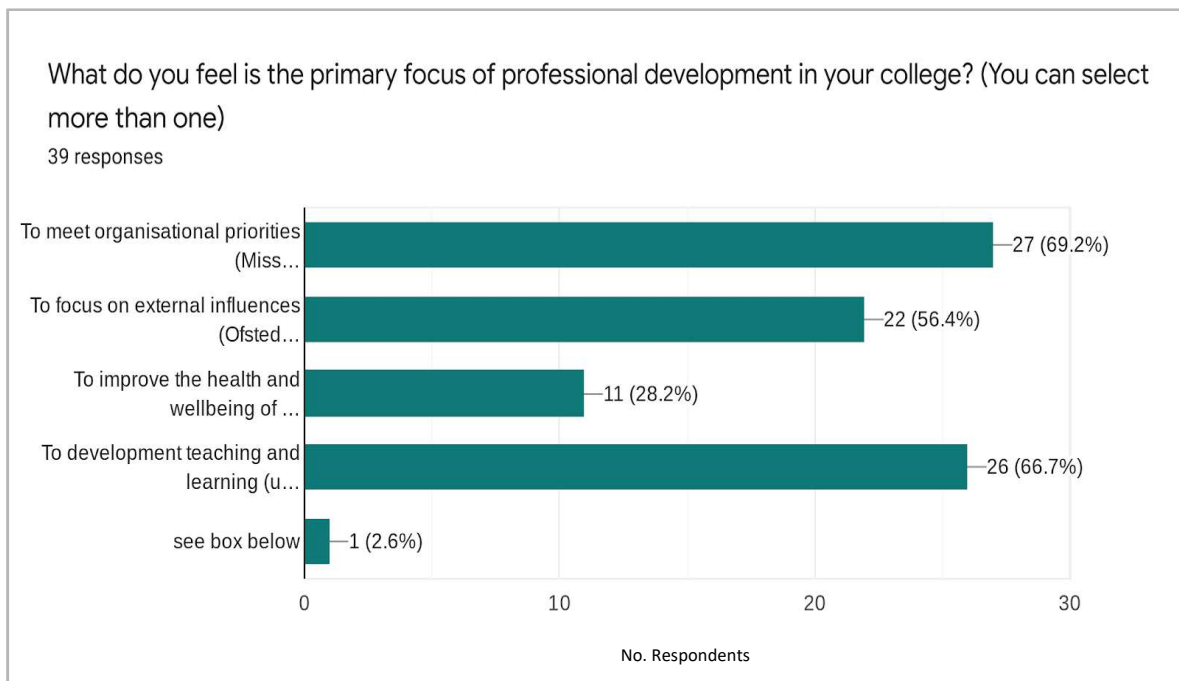
**Appendix A – Figure 5.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (Choice)*



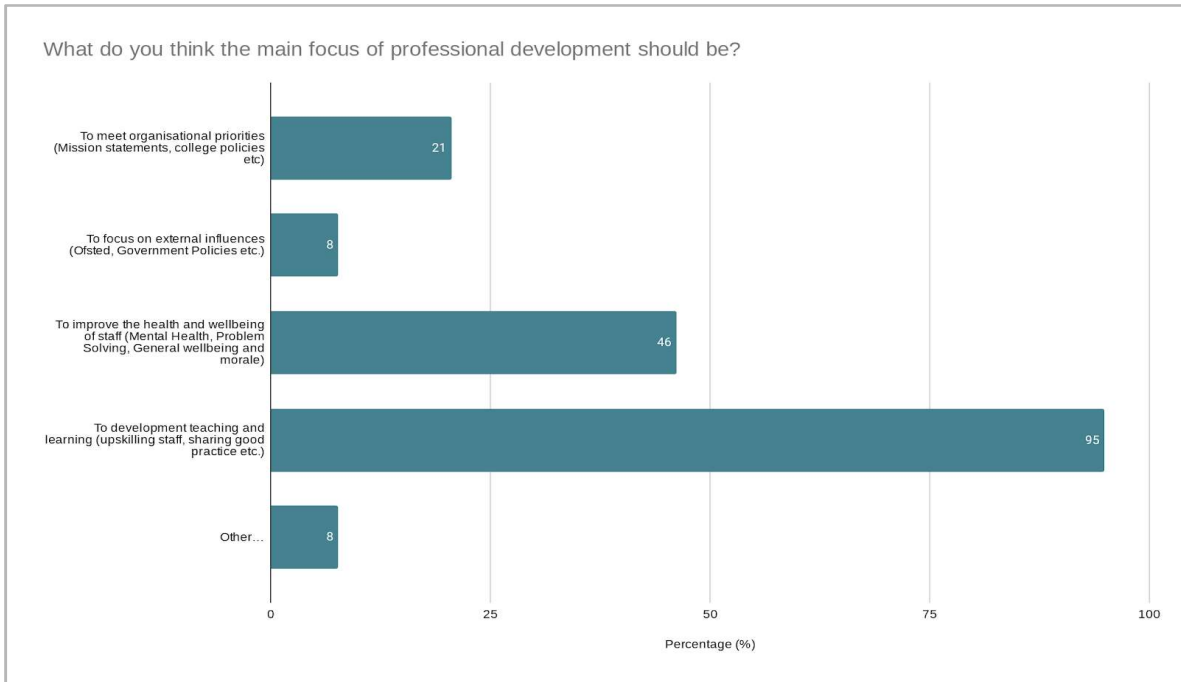
**Appendix A – Figure 6.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (CPD Focus -Actual)*



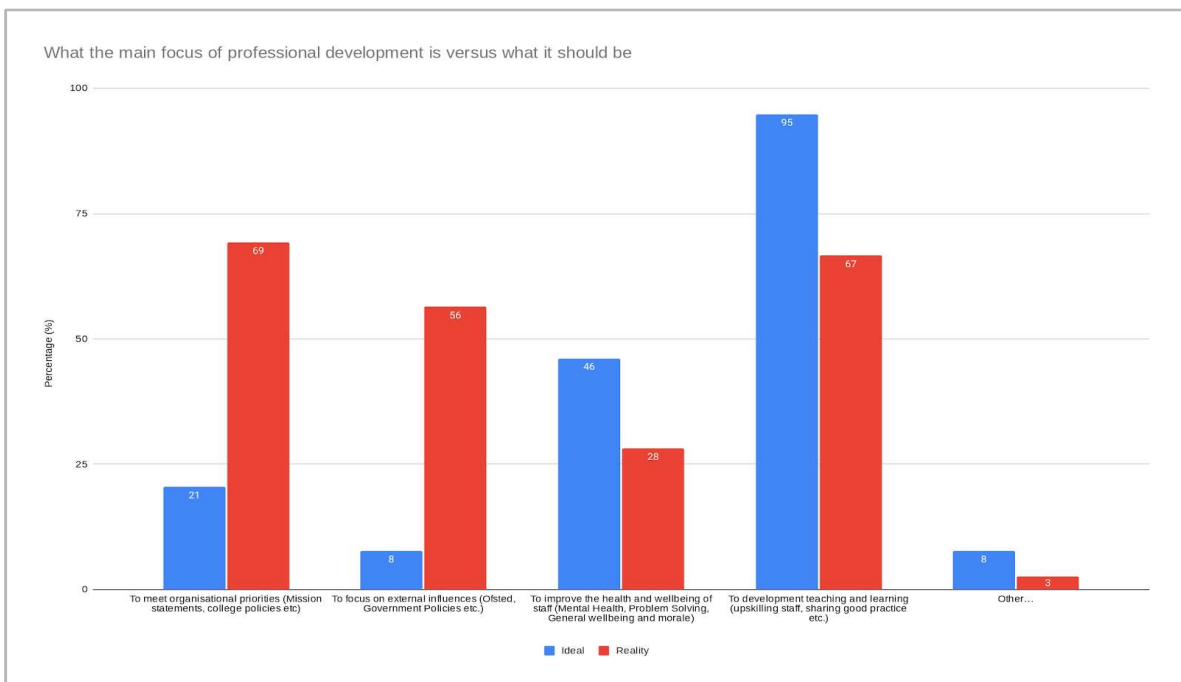
**Appendix A – Figure 7.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (CPD Focus - Preferred)*



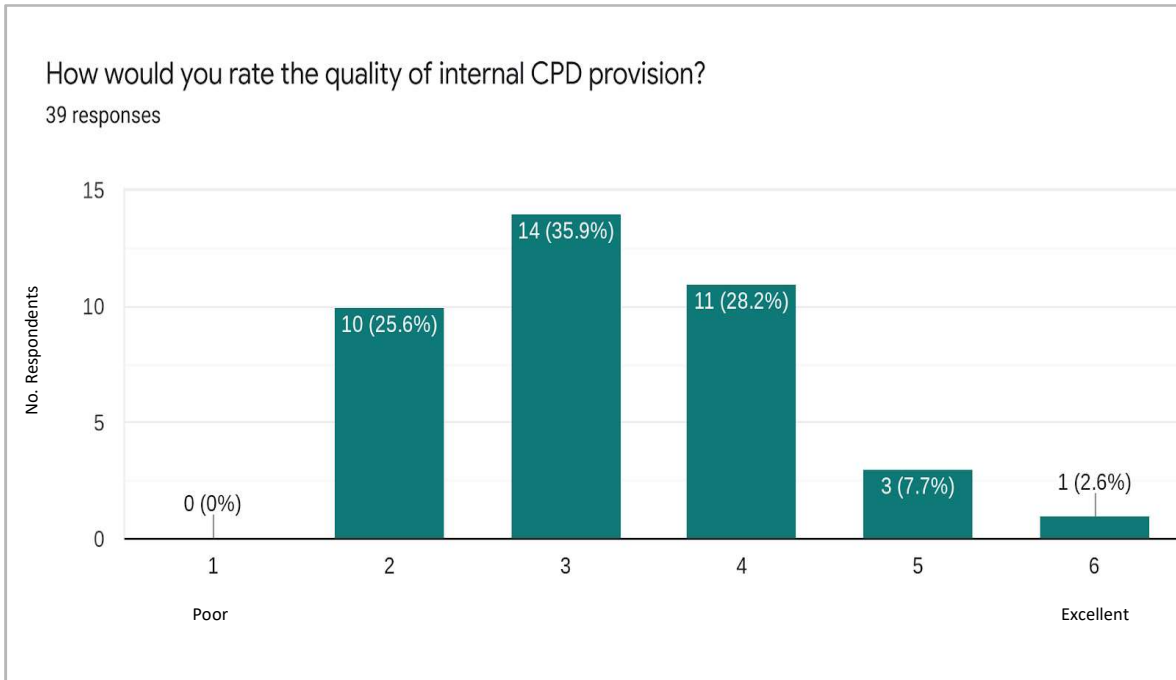
**Appendix A – Figure 8.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (CPD Focus – Actual vs Preferred)*



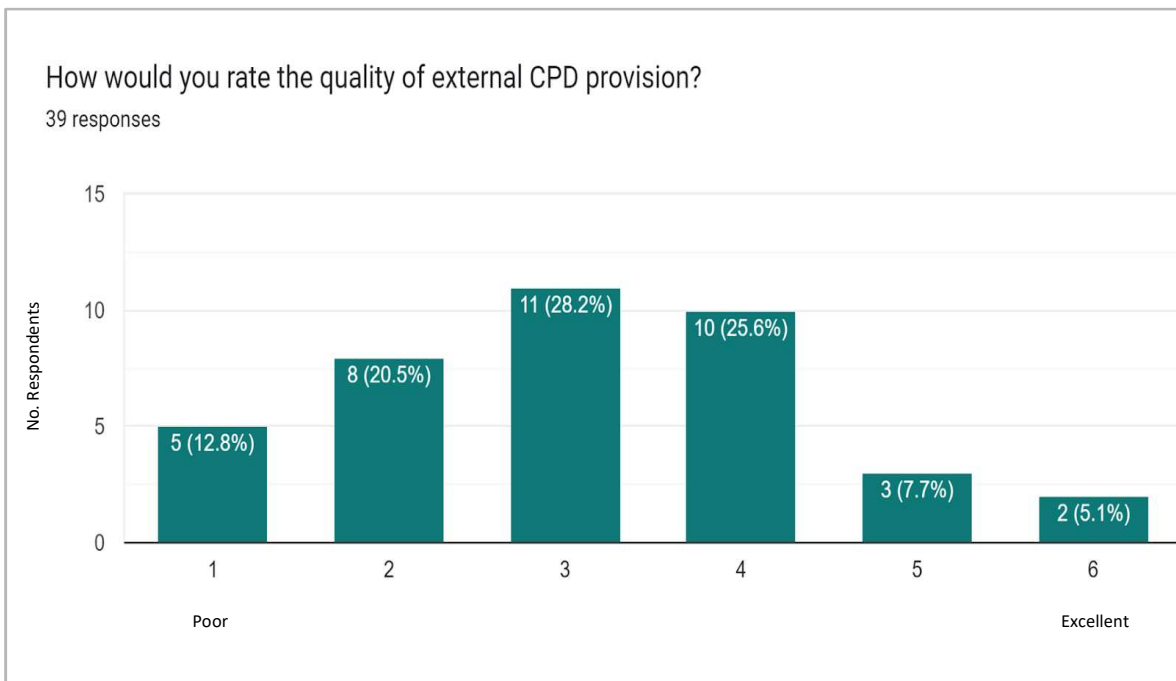
**Appendix A – Figure 9.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (CPD Quality - Internal)*



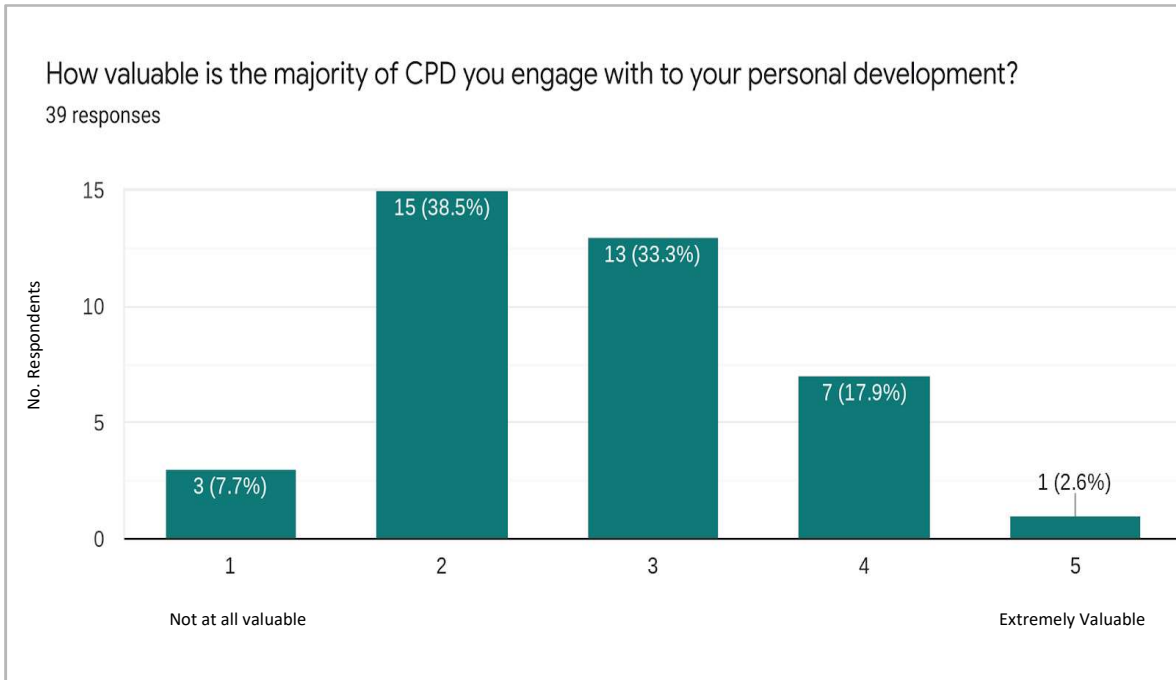
**Appendix A – Figure 10.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (CPD Quality - External)*



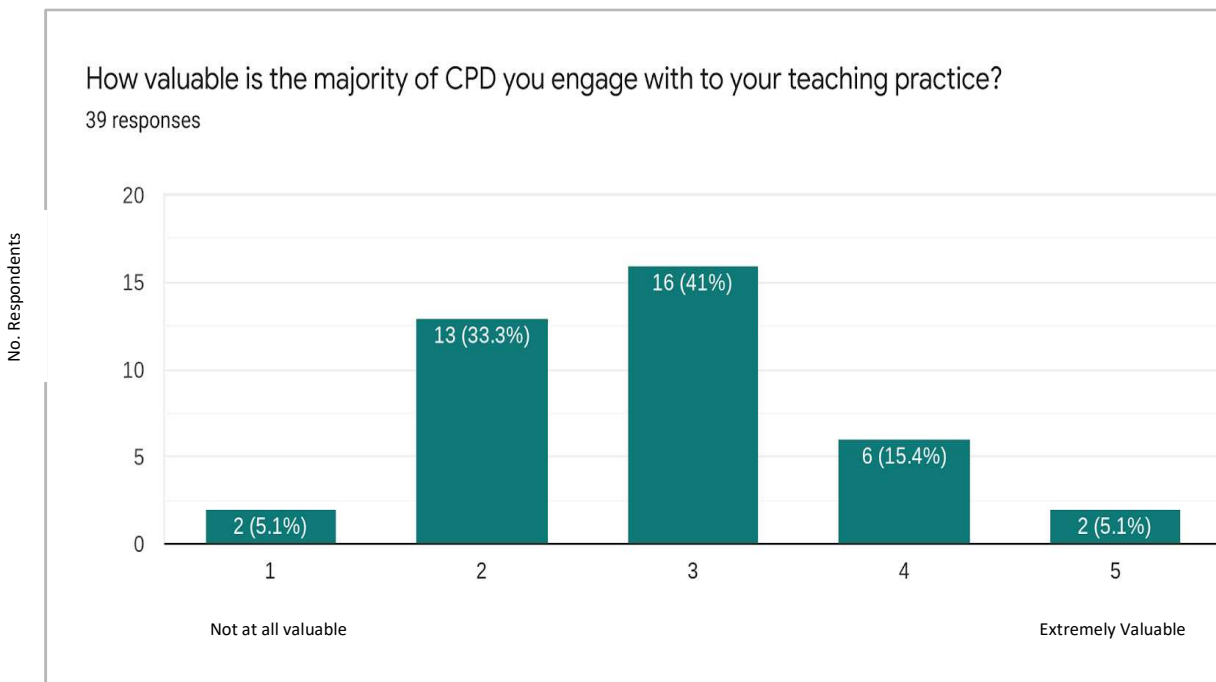
**Appendix A – Figure 11.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (CPD Value-Personal Development)*



**Appendix A – Figure 12.**

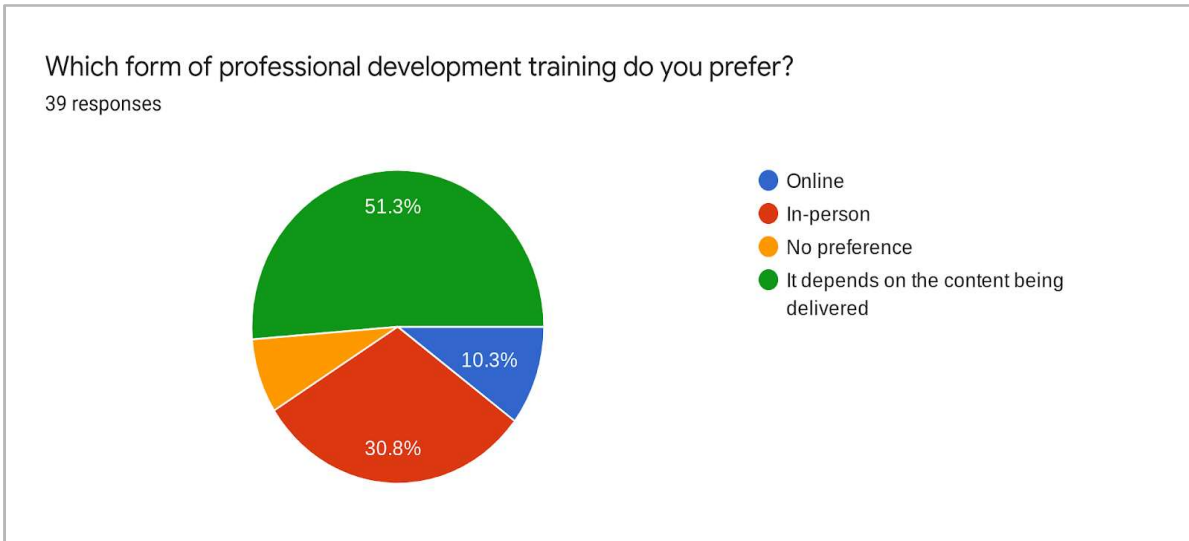
*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (CPD Value-Teaching Practice)*





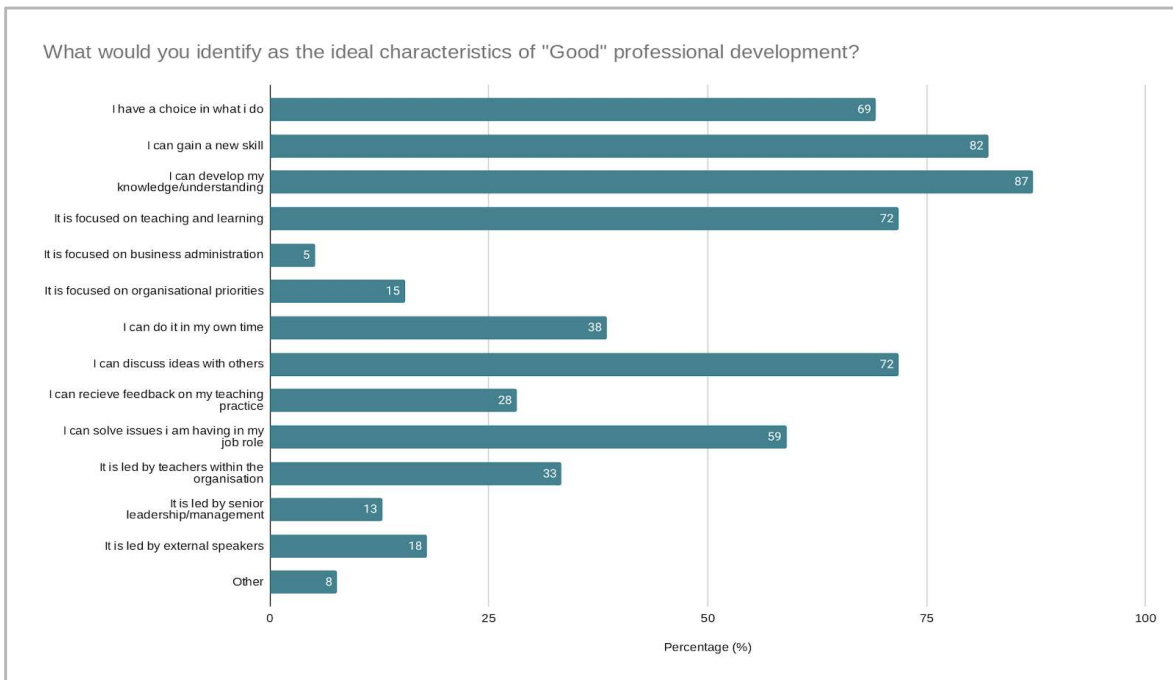
**Appendix A – Figure 13.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (CPD Mode)*



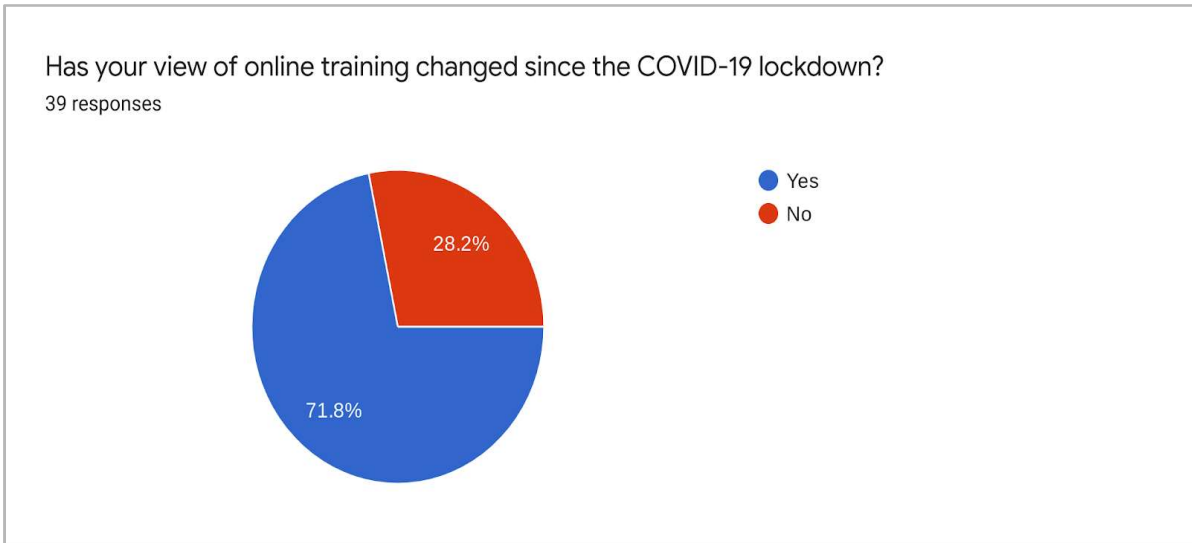
**Appendix A – Figure 14.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (Characteristics of 'Good' CPD)*



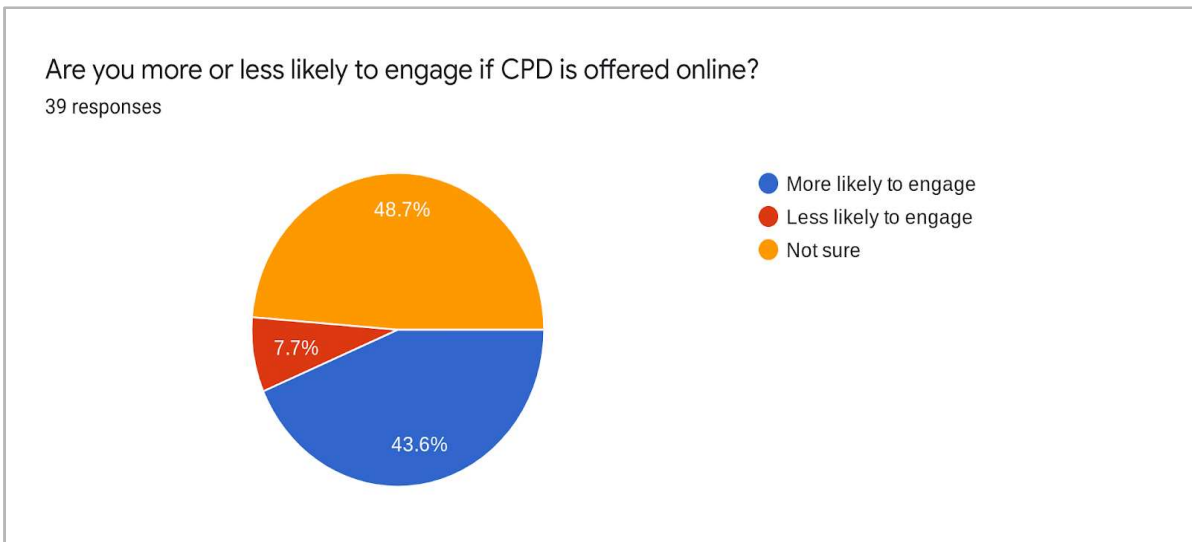
**Appendix A – Figure 15.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (Online Training)*



**Appendix A – Figure 16.**

*Pre-intervention Survey Respondents (Online Training - Engagement)*

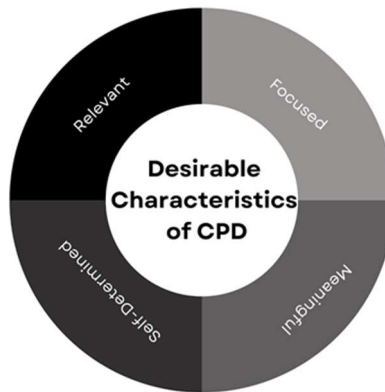


*Note: Data sets from quantitative analysis of the pre-intervention survey. (Qualitative [thematic] analysis of open questions is available in Chapter 4).*

## Appendix B

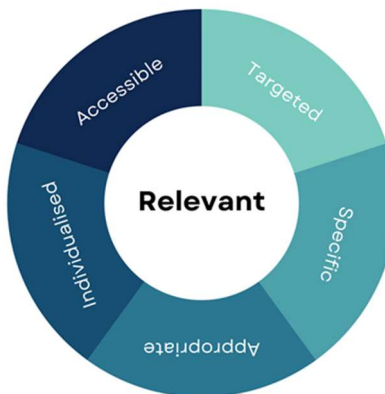
### Appendix B – Figure 1.

*Desirable characteristics of CPD according to teachers*



### Appendix B – Figure 2.

*Sub-themes which contribute to CPD being relevant*



### Appendix B – Figure 3.

*Sub-themes which contribute to CPD being self-determined*



**Appendix B – Figure 4.**

*Sub-themes which contribute to CPD being meaningful*



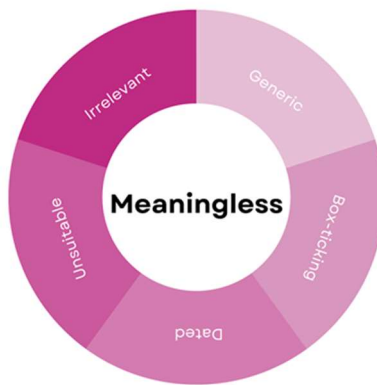
**Appendix B – Figure 5.**

*Sub-themes which contribute to CPD being focused*



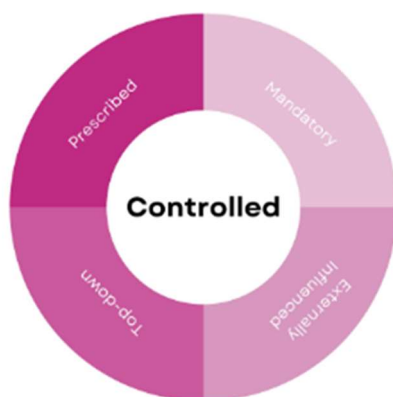
**Appendix B – Figure 6.**

*Sub-themes contributing to poor examples of CPD as being meaningless according to teachers*



**Appendix B – Figure 7.**

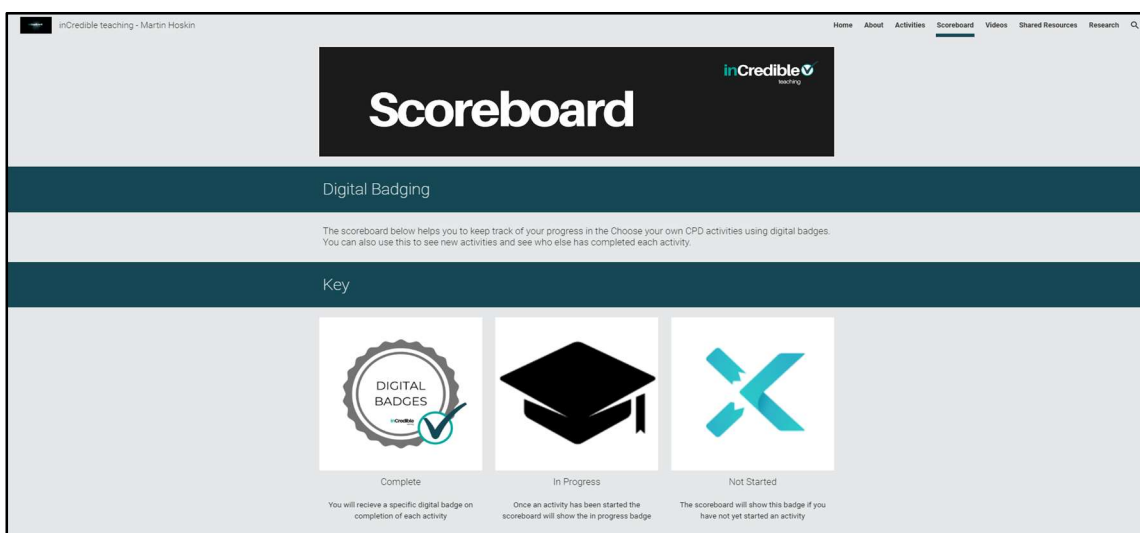
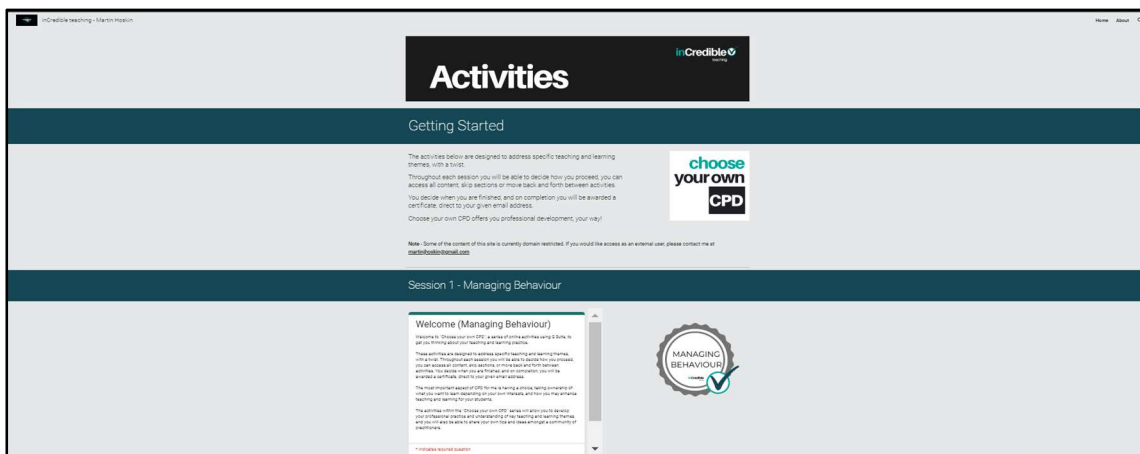
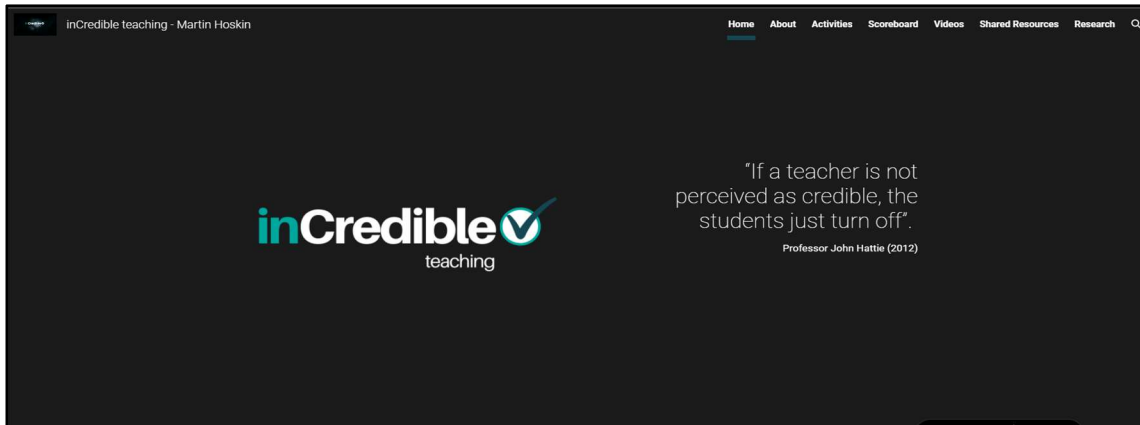
*Sub-themes contributing to poor examples of CPD as being controlled according to teachers*



# Appendix C

## Appendix C – Figure 1.

Screenshots of the 'inCredible teaching' website launched in Phase 2 of intervention



inCredible teaching - Martin Hoskin

Home About Activities Scoreboard Videos Shared Resources Research

# Videos

Google for Education Applications - Tutorial Videos

Want to know more about G Suite for Education? Discover what you can do with the apps available by watching the tutorial videos below:

Note - Some of the content of this site is currently domain restricted. If you would like access as an external user, please contact me at [martin@hoskin@gmail.com](mailto:martin@hoskin@gmail.com)

Google Chrome Google Drive Google Classroom Google Sites

Google Docs Google Slides Google Forms Google Sheets

inCredible teaching - Martin Hoskin

Home About Activities Scoreboard Videos Shared Resources Research

# Shared Resources

Uploads and Recommendations

Teachers trust teachers, and because of this I think it is vitally important that we share the ideas that we think may make a difference in teaching.

This page hosts user uploads from CYPD activities and recommended EdTech apps, creating an online community of shared practice for the benefit of our students.

Quizlet Kahoot! Kaizena

Mote Screencastify Bitly

Youtube Playlists

*Note: Screenshots from the 'inCredible teaching' website and Choose Your Own CPD activities*

## Appendix D

### Appendix D – Table 1.

#### Pre-intervention Teacher Interview

**What are your general feelings about the quality of the CPD received at the college?**

*[CPD is] All the same, lots of people in a room sharing best practice ideas, which is fine but it's not always relevant and can be filled with things I am not interested in or going to apply to my teaching practice*

*When you give up the whole day for something that you're not going to get anything out of it becomes quite frustrating, I'd probably say, maybe if I'm lucky, one day a year of staff development might be relevant to what I do.*

**Is CPD a valuable thing for you as a member of staff?**

*Absolutely I just think there needs to be more of a focus on stuff that is relevant or if you are going to dedicate a lot of time, such as whole days, I just think it needs to be fine-tuned to get more out of it because I personally speaking I don't get enough out of a full day's worth of that development as it's currently delivered*

*Last year I delivered a session to some people who had a choice which session they signed up for. I think people chose two sessions in a day to sign up to. The whole event was really positive, 2 x 45-minute sessions led by people who were passionate about what they were delivering. It was directly relevant to teaching, you could take away a toolbox of ideas and actually you knew right away that it was meaningful as the focus was on my teaching.*

*The focus of most sessions appears to be for sharing good practice and sharing each other's ideas. It just seems that seems to be the go-to sort of format for staff development and it's not always relevant (to your own practice).*

**What do you think of the idea of an online CPD session?**

*I suppose it depends on the content. Some of the activities that work are those directly linked to teaching and learning. There are some benefits to being in a room with people sharing ideas, particularly if they are passionate about delivering something.*

*I would possibly say some of the other things that are more data-driven, I don't personally feel they need to be delivered in a face-to-face format for several hours. Going through that kind of stuff, possibly using videos online would work. For example, when completing compulsory Prevent training, we used an online system and we were given time to read through the training material and answer the questions online. Some training benefits from face-to-face delivery, however, for the stuff I find a bit monotonous and boring, we would probably benefit from online video tuition and activities.*



**What would you perceive to be meaningful professional development?**

*If it's going to directly impact my job, my role as a teacher, teaching 24 - 25 hours a week I would say it is meaningful.*

**What would you describe as being the least relevant CPD you have received?**

*The flipside! Anything that isn't going to have a direct impact on the students I teacher develop my roles as a course manager or as a tutor. I think the balance between that and the meaningful stuff that I was alluding to is slightly out of balance. I think they spend more time on process-driven CPD than we do on what I would say is the meaningful stuff. I'm really looking at them to allow for more meaningful training to take place, in your own time, with your own decision-making.*

**What do you feel about the idea of online professional development versus face-to-face more traditional in the classroom?**

*I don't think it should fully replace face-to-face training. Meeting people across College and campuses, in a room, undertaking CPD is valuable, but with some of the CPD delivered we kind of try to reinvent the wheel or redeliver it just in a slightly different way maybe a year or two down the line. If this training is online or available from a different sort of Media outlet, it is kind of there and it's easily accessible five times year, once a year, once every 2 years.*

*Getting the right content for online CPD would probably be the challenge I guess and obviously, the mechanism as well, to make sure it's appropriate for the people using it.*

**Do you perceive there to be any potential barrier to online CPD?**

*If the resources and the way it was sold is presented to a high standard and the content included topics that people would generally like to get something out of I think it would be good. I think all the while people are very busy and the profession continues to increase workloads, then online quizzes or questionnaires, including things to watch would ensure that people would always find something relevant to access.*

*The important thing is the time it takes for them to do it and whether or not they see the point in it. If it was relevant, then doing one or two activities online might work because it should be accessible to staff. In my experience, at the moment, staff don't always turn up to CPD sessions or meetings, maybe because they are part-time staff or they don't work certain hours or days, so the idea of CPD being online would make it more accessible to them.*

**What would be your plan to deliver meaningful CPD?**

*From my point of view, in my role, if you're delivering to the masses, I think the majority of people on a staff development day have the primary role of teaching. First and foremost, as a teacher and I think that the CPD absolutely should have a focus on teaching and learning. I'm not suggesting we scrap the data and process-focused content as that sort of thing is important, but as I said earlier, I think the balance between the two, the data-driven and the processes focused CPD definitely outweighs the stuff that is more relevant to teaching, so I would shift the focus around the other way.*

*I think on the whole, staff development days need to be face-to-face with the focus on teaching and learning. Fun and enjoyable, short and sharp activities with groups of staff,*

possibly with an option of what is to be discussed rather than being scripted. I remember a session which was a bit like speed dating you had 5-10 minutes to teach or explain something to a colleague. In the whole session, which was about an hour, I think we covered about eight or nine different things and 2 or 3 of those were little starter activities which I applied to my own teaching, which made this a worthwhile session.

**My initial idea focuses on the concept of a sort of the Choose Your Own Adventure kind of staff Development. Essentially you can map a route through the content and access what you want to. There will be a general introduction and then you have an option to go off into different areas related to that topic. How do you feel about being in control of what you engage with?**

Some people are more tech-savvy than others, some people might have issues but some people will do it. I would do it so that I don't have to sit for an hour session on "managing behaviour" if it's not something I've ever had a problem with. In a face to face session, if the topic is something I believe I will do well in my practice, I would switch off very quickly and if I was forced to sit through that I would feel like it is a waste of my time. If you get an option to sign up to something I just think you buy into it a lot more, you engage with it a lot more if you're choosing the topic that you're going to do rather than just blanket training sessions. I sometimes dread a whole CPD day where I might take 45 minutes of positive training out of six or eight hour day.

I do think that staff want to engage in staff development but we're all very busy in the first instance so having predetermined CPD or a whole day for staff development, although you may think teachers would welcome it because they don't have to teach, it's actually hours you've lost teaching which when you spend the whole day doing stuff you don't see as relevant or won't impact you or your students, you kind of resent doing it knowing that you've lost 4 hours with one group, which you have to try and catch up with. I think the long staff development days where you are sat down with some flip chart paper in a very similar format, I think it just turns people off. It doesn't have enough variation in how it's delivered and I certainly don't think there's enough impact or relevant content directly linked to teaching.

**What would you say is the main focus of CPD at the college?**

For example, staff development day in the majority I'd like to say it's probably a 60/40 split in favour of processes, systems and data, which is fine, it's part of my job and I get that we need to be able to use the systems, but that is 60% or more of the CPD you do in a year that's not developing members of staff and their teaching and learning practice, which is ultimately what we want to do as a teacher. We need to be able to share some of the good practice or learn from others, possibly tailor content depending on what is most relevant to departments, or even better, individual teachers.

**How well do you think online CPD would be received?**

I think that once people start using it then engagement would probably improve and it would be quite positive. I think getting people to buy into it and use it in the first instance might be a bit of a hurdle. If it wasn't monitored or it wasn't compulsory I think people would try to get around it, but if we had Monday meeting times or some of the teaching days set aside to access it, then it could work. I don't think engagement is the problem I think Staff will engage

*in most things they see as meaningful or valuable but I think at the moment we do not necessarily provide them with opportunities that they deem to be worth their time, particularly when this is to the detriment of teaching or preparation time.*

*Most members of staff will engage or want to engage with anything that can help them in their day-to-day jobs. (As a teacher) you naturally have those conversations with colleagues and re-evaluate yourself and lessons. Those chats in the coffee room about what you did and how you might change it, what went right and what went wrong. Sharing with each other in this way is really important, so I think in terms of engagement, most members of staff will naturally engage in those sort of conversations and maybe CPD needs to reflect this. Staff may then look forward to the opportunity to discuss their own individual needs, which is what was said about things being meaningful and relevant. My biggest turn off in any staff development is when I feel I'm just doing it to tick a box and get something completed rather than a focus on something that will ultimately impact on what I do on a day-to-day basis.*

# Appendix E

## Appendix E - Figure 1.

Screenshots of the 'Lesson Visit' documentation

**LESSON VISIT LOG 2023-24**

Teacher		Department		Reviewer		Date of Visit	
---------	--	------------	--	----------	--	---------------	--

**Lesson Context (Please select from the drop down options)**

Learner Type	Please select ▾	Provision	Please select ▾	Level	Please select ▾	Staff Contract	Please select ▾
Course Title						Facilities	Please select ▾
LSA Present	Please select ▾	Details	If you are adding a comment, please provide the name of the LSA(s)				
Visible ID	Please select ▾	Attendance	Please select ▾	Punctuality	Please select ▾		

**Lesson Visit Focus (please select an option and also provide brief details)**

Please select ▾	
-----------------	--

Lesson Visit	
Strengths	Points for discussion

Teaching and Learning themes			
For each section, highlight the description you feel best describes the professional practice during the lesson.			Comments
Management of Learning	Supporting all students to ensure that all are on track & supporting the ablest to make significant progress.	Please select ▾	
Teaching pedagogy and Resources	All students are challenged through the use of well-planned teaching methods and resources, enabling deeper knowledge acquisition and skill development.	Please select ▾	
Engagement and Motivation	Students are curious, keen and interested to learn.	Please select ▾	
Meeting Individual Needs	All students participate in demanding work helping them to realise their potential.	Please select ▾	
Assessment for Learning	Work is set that builds on previous learning, this extends students' knowledge and skills well.	Please select ▾	
Development of English skills	Clear and effective promotion/embedding of English skills which enables students to recognise why these skills are important.	Please select ▾	
Development of maths skills	Clear and effective promotion/embedding of maths skills which enable students to recognise why these skills are important.	Please select ▾	
Development of employability skills	The session promotes transferable skills relevant to the world of work.	Please select ▾	
Development of digital learning skills	The session develops digital learning well, for example, relevant online apps/software. This learning may be outside of lessons but referred to in class.	Please select ▾	
Equity, Diversity & Inclusion	Appropriate challenge to students' use of stereotypes/inappropriate language. students are treated fairly based on their individual needs. Diversity is promoted through embedding experiences of individuals outside students' own community within teaching materials/discussions.	Please select ▾	
Safeguarding and welfare	The session takes into account the importance of students' physical and emotional safety in the classroom and their own understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy.	Please select ▾	
Learning Support	The session makes good use of additional learning support assistants with all student's needs met. (Please add the name of the LSA(s) if you have a comment.	Please select ▾	

**Guidance Note:** POINT FOR DISCUSSION indicates an area where the reviewer has a specific question to raise or wants to know more about the theme. You may wish to change this label after the professional discussion if further conversation suggests the theme is a PARTICULAR STRENGTH or GOOD example of practice.

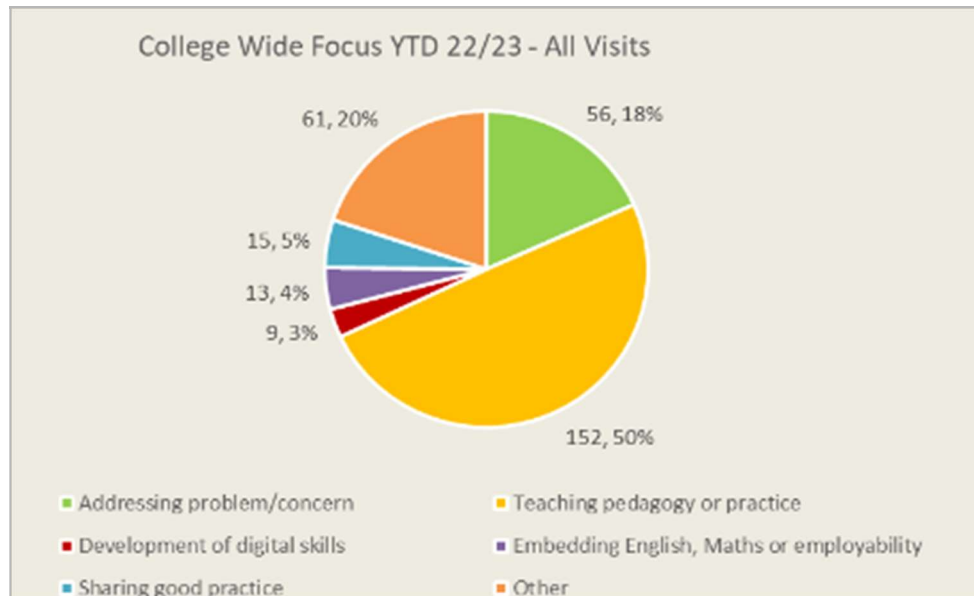
<b>Lecturer Reflection/Comments</b>
<b>Learner Voice Feedback (ONLY if requested by the teacher)</b>
<b>Feedback specific to lesson focus</b>
<b>The WOW Factor .... (Did you see something in the lesson that you feel should be shared with others?)</b>

Note: *Examples of the Lesson Visit documentation used in phase 5 of intervention*

## Appendix F

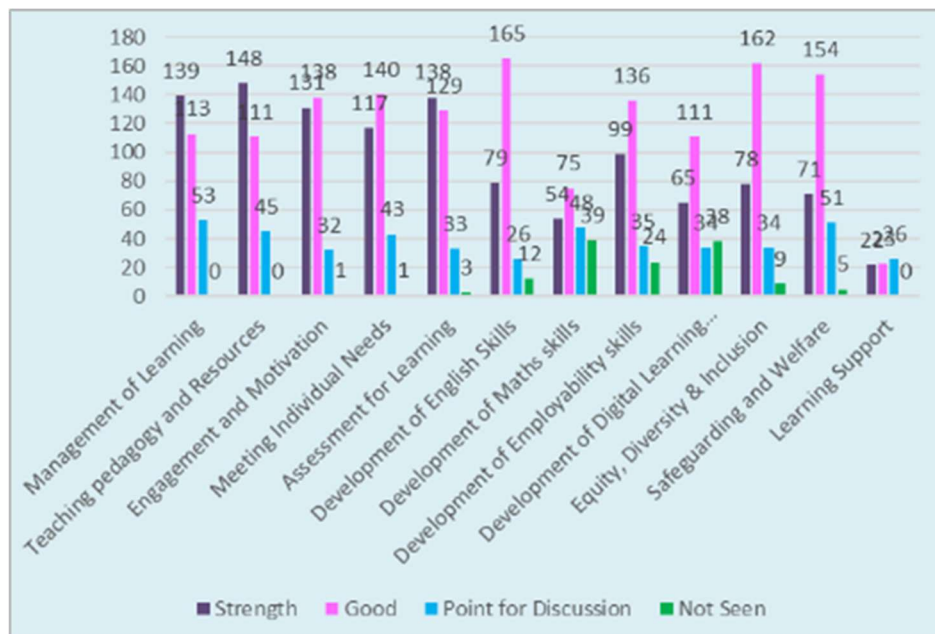
**Appendix F - Figure 1**

Participant's chosen focus for Lesson Visits



**Appendix F - Figure 2.**

College profile term 1 of teaching and learning themes.



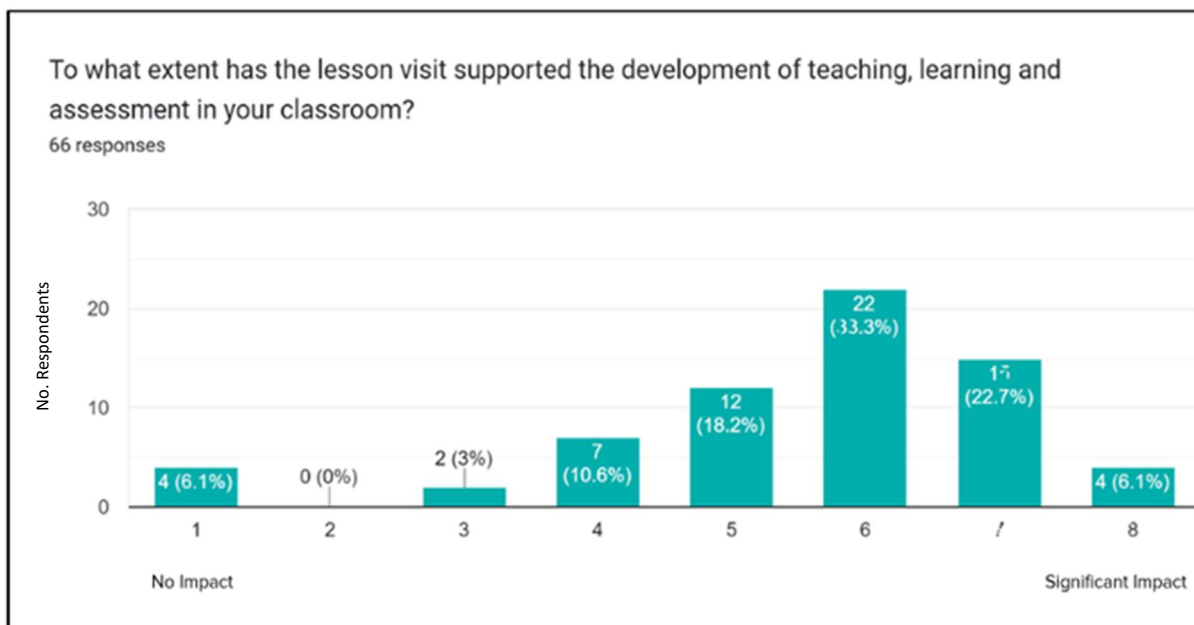
**Appendix F - Figure 3.**

*Ratio of participants by role in Lesson Visit*



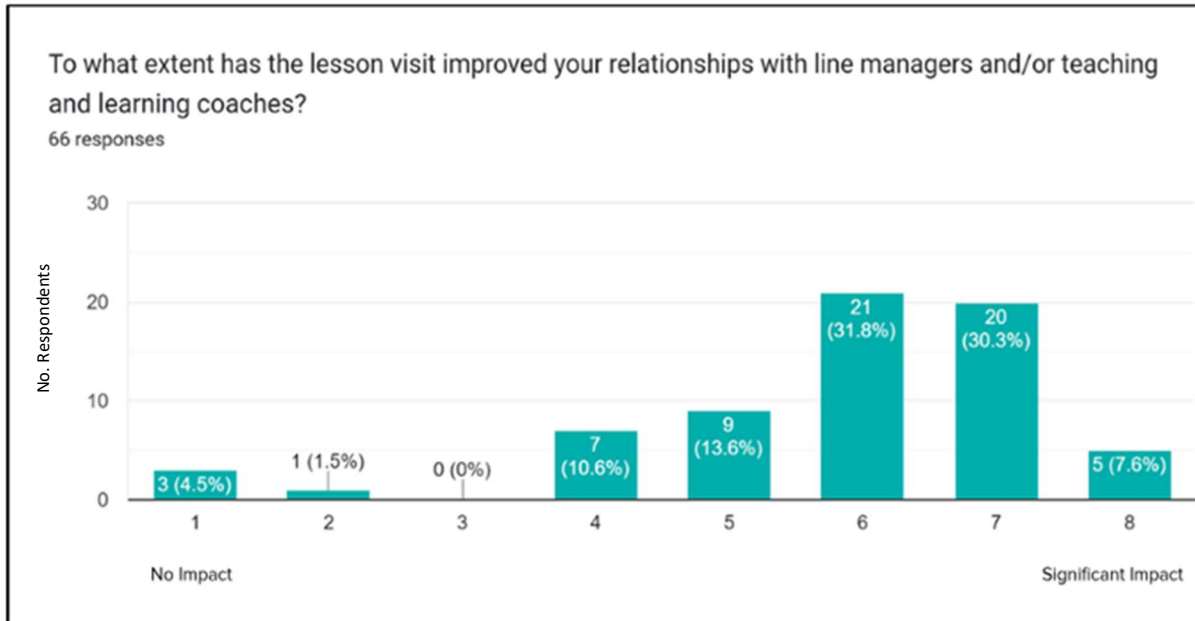
**Appendix F - Figure 4.**

*Impact of Lesson Visits on TLA in the classroom*



**Appendix F - Figure 5.**

*Impact of Lesson Visits relationships*



**Appendix F - Figure 6.**

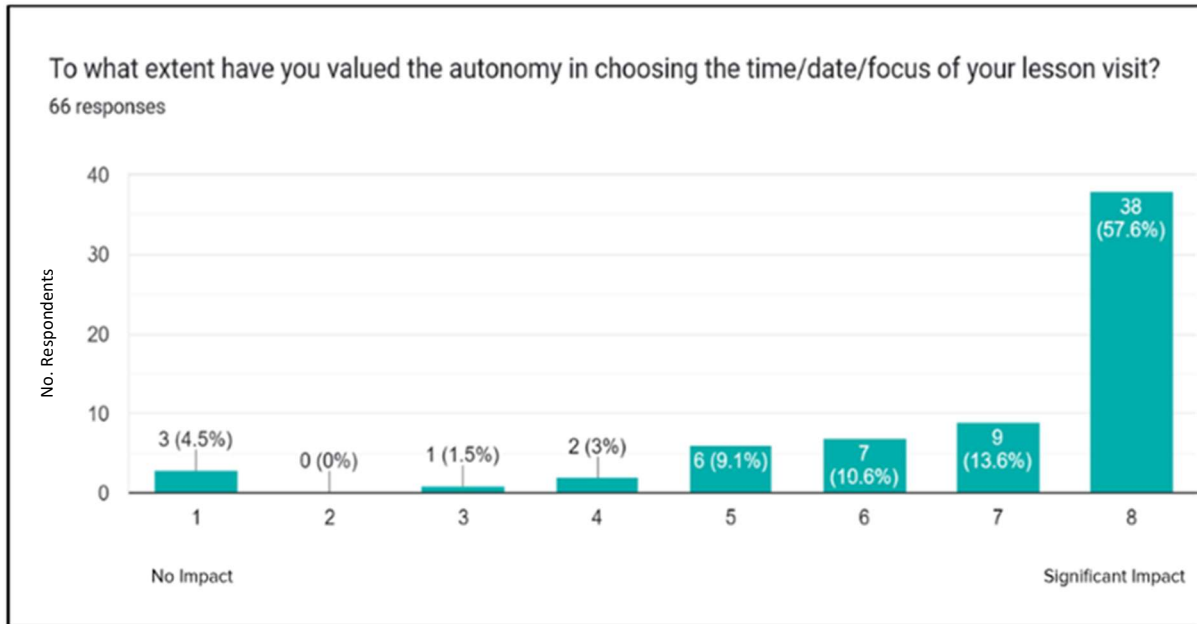
*Impact of Lesson Visits on professional development*





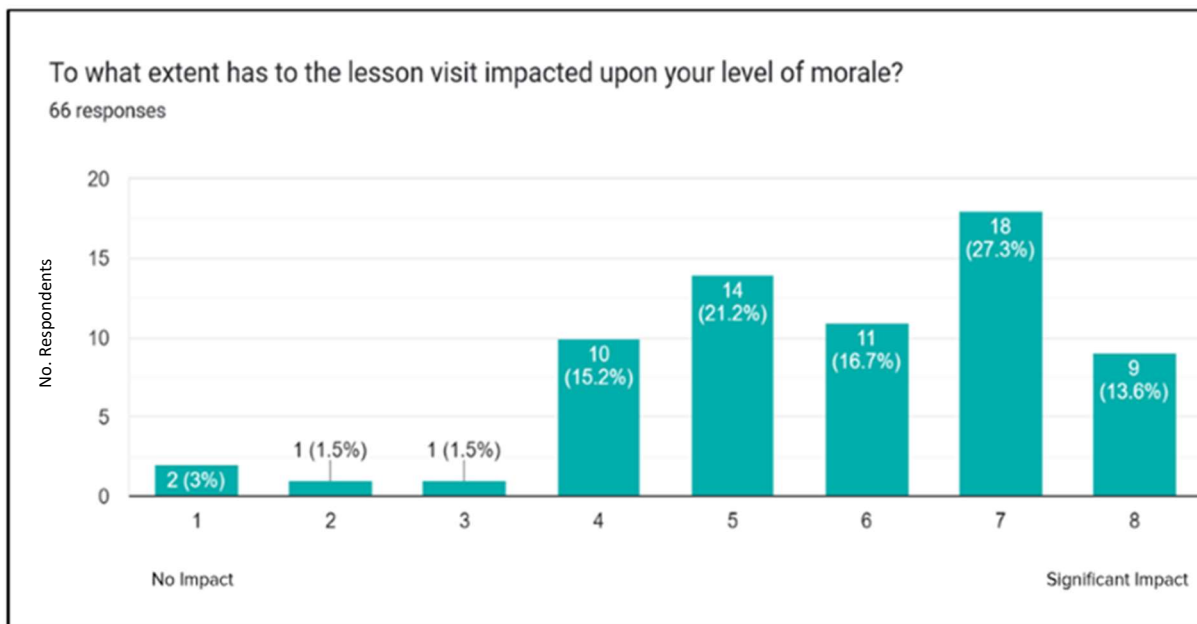
**Appendix F - Figure 7.**

*Value of autonomy in Lesson Visits*



**Appendix F - Figure 8.**

*Impact of Lesson Visits on morale*



## Appendix G

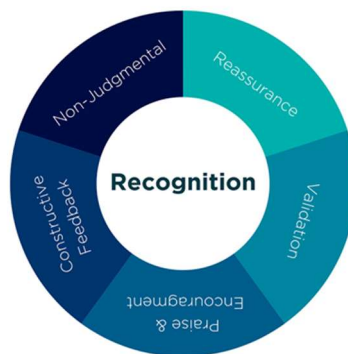
### Appendix G - Figure 1.

Positive themes associated with Lesson Visits according to teachers and managers



### Appendix G - Figure 2.

Sub-themes which highlight the role of recognition in Lesson Visits



### Appendix G - Figure 3.

Sub-themes which highlight the role of collaboration in Lesson Visits



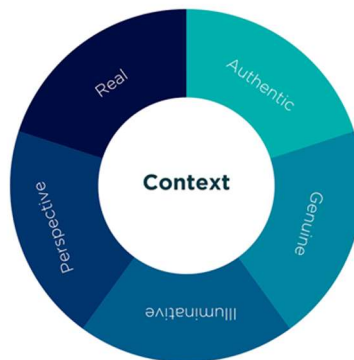
**Appendix G - Figure 4.**

*Sub-themes which highlight the role of focus in Lesson Visits*



**Appendix G - Figure 5.**

*Sub-themes which highlight the role of context in Lesson Visits*



**Appendix G - Figure 6.**

*Sub-themes which highlight the role of agency in Lesson Visits*



**Appendix G - Figure 7.**

*Sub-themes which highlight the role of a holistic approach in Lesson Visits*



**Appendix G - Figure 8.**

*Sub-themes which contribute to misconception being an area for development in Lesson Visits*



**Appendix G – Figure 9.**

*Sub-themes which contribute to human error being an area for development in Lesson Visits*



**Appendix G - Figure 10.**

*Sub-themes which contribute to administration being an area for development in Lesson Visits*



## Appendix H

### Appendix H – Figure 1.

#### 'Collaborative Teaching' infographic

**COLLABORATIVE TEACHING**  
- WHERE THE JOURNEY TO 'OUTSTANDING' BEGINS -

**PURPOSE**

There are many benefits to observing each other's practice; enhancing students' learning through reflective practice, demonstrating leadership by observing and supporting other teachers or celebrating excellent teachers and teaching practice. However, it is not always easy to find the time to 'observe' with busy teaching schedules.

'Collaborative Teaching' will focus on making the most of opportunities to share your teaching and learning practice with others through general conversation, joint lesson planning, team teaching or peer observation, identifying strengths and areas for development but managed on your terms.

**PROCESS**

- 1** Identify a colleague whom you may want to work with and arrange a meeting. (This can be inside or outside of your own department).  
Contact the Quality office for a FREE coffee voucher, to be redeemed at one of the outlets.
- 2** Discuss your current teaching practice with your colleague. This could be a general chat or you may wish to focus on areas such as:
  - Perceived Areas of Strength
  - Perceived Areas for Development
  - New Teaching Pedagogy
  - EdTech Tools
  - Classroom Management
  - Embedding English, Maths and Employability Skills
  - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion(Whatever you discuss, make sure it is relevant to you and your teaching practice).
- 3** Decide between you the best way to collaborate on your chosen area. For Example:
  - Peer Observation
  - Joint Planning
  - Team Teaching
  - Regular Meetings
  - Sharing Resources
  - Delivering CPD(Again, do what is most appropriate for you and your teaching practice. These can take place over a period of weeks or as one off activities)
- 4** To ensure that these important interactions are recognised please complete the 'Collaborative Teaching Log'.  
This can be found on the Intranet Site under 'College Admin', or accessed via the following link:

Note: A screenshot of the 'Collaborative Teaching' Infographic used during phase 3