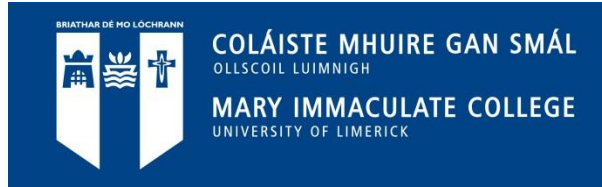


Coláiste Mhuire Gan Smál
Mary Immaculate College
University of Limerick



How do school networks operate to support DEIS schools? A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

Thesis presented to Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick,
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Ruth Margaret Bourke, B.A., M.Ed.

March, 2021

Under the supervision of
Dr. Sandra Ryan, Department of Learning, Society and Religious
Education
and
Dr. Margaret Nohilly, Department of Learning, Society and Religious
Education
Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

Abstract

How do School Networks operate to support DEIS schools? A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

Ruth Bourke

This research sought to understand two networks of DEIS schools, PLUS and OSCAILT, from members' perspectives including their evolution, how they operate to support members and how learning and knowledge creation take place within and beyond the networks.

A qualitative, instrumental case study research design (Stake 1995) was adopted involving primary data collection through focus groups, individual interviews and surveys and secondary analysis of relevant documents.

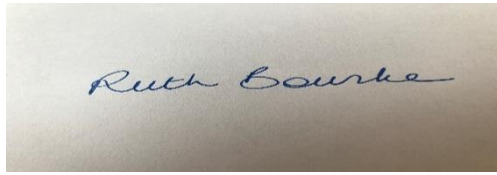
A Conceptual Framework to understand PLUS and OSCAILT is presented, informed by policy, practice and theory. This encompasses influential policy developments and draws on school network literature to establish the practice base and key elements in the analysis of school networks. Social capital theory and Communities of Practice (CoPs) are adopted as theoretical lenses to illuminate how the networks operate at the individual and collective level and the way in which learning occurs. Given the DEIS school context, the Framework draws on the theory of Bourdieu on economic, cultural and social capital to highlight social class and other differentials in educational outcomes in Ireland and address the persistence and perpetuation of inequality in education through social reproduction and the ideology of meritocracy.

Four key propositions are proffered based on the research findings. Firstly, the networks enhance bridging, bonding and linking social capital of members. Secondly, the networks are Communities of Practice that enhance learning, professional development growth and leadership skills of members. Additionally, the networks support key policy areas for schools including wellbeing, DEIS plans and School Self-Evaluation. Finally, the challenges of networking as experienced by participants and limitations of these particular networks are explored.

Essentially, PLUS and OSCAILT have been found to support DEIS schools to respond to intractable social issues by building professional capital, supporting wellbeing, connecting network priorities to those of key stakeholders and building lateral capacity for systemic change.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all citations and references are correct and complete.

A rectangular photograph of a piece of paper with a handwritten signature in blue ink. The signature reads "Ruth Bourke".**Signed:****Date:** 12/03/2021

Acknowledgements

Many people inspired and facilitated my PhD journey.

To my husband Aidan, who was with me every step of the way and encouraged, supported and loved me through all of the ups and downs, thank you.

To my mother and father who always believed in me and told me that I could do anything I set my mind to and could be whatever I wanted to be, thank you.

To my wonderful daughters, Molly and Isobel, your light and love lit a fire in me that inspired and sustained me through this journey, thank you both.

To my supervisors, Sandra and Mags, you encouraged, supported and guided me through every step of this journey, including family bereavement and a global pandemic, with great wisdom, professionalism, compassion and friendship. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

There are many others who supported this journey and indeed, made it possible and I would particularly like to thank Dr. Ann Higgins, TED Coordinator and Eucharía McCarthy, Director Curriculum Development Unit, MIC, and the other members of the TED Steering Committee for supporting this research. Special thanks also to Professor Robert Stake, Dr. Caroline Healy, Dr. Carol O' Sullivan, Dr. Angela Canny and Dr. Áine Cregan.

I would like to sincerely thank all the members of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks who participated in this research and shared their insights and experiences with me. Thank you for your generosity and, most especially, your dedication to improving outcomes for children.

Many people in MIC supported me in conducting this research and I would particularly like to thank the Executive Team for supporting my PLOA application. Thank you also to the many staff in the Research and Graduate School, Student Services, Finance Office and Library who were so helpful with every query that I had along the way. A very special word of thanks to the person/people that redacted twenty years of minutes of meetings.

Finally, to the rest of my family and many friends and colleagues who encouraged me throughout this journey, thank you for your interest, support and encouragement; it really meant a lot and kept me going when I was fed up with it all!

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Margaret Bourke and in memory of my father, Philip Anthony Bourke.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 - Introduction	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Background to the research	1
1.3. PLUS and OSCAILT Networks of DEIS Schools	3
1.4. Rationale for the research.....	6
1.5. Research aims and objectives.....	9
1.5.1. Research Aim 1 – Understanding the development of PLUS and OSCAILT	10
1.5.2. Research Aim 2 – Understanding how the PLUS and OSCAILT networks operate and function and connections between network members and other stakeholders.....	10
1.5.3. Research Aim 3 – Understanding knowledge creation and sharing within and beyond the networks	10
1.5.4. Research questions	11
1.6. Researcher positionality	11
1.6.1. The ‘biographically situated researcher’	12
1.6.2. Personal observations of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks	13
1.6.3. Perspective on the networks and members	14
1.6.4. Perspective as a researcher	15
1.7. Overview of Thesis Chapters	16
1.8. Conclusion	19
Chapter 2 - International and national policy developments in networking and collaboration	20
2.1. Introduction	20
2.2. The emergence of networking and collaboration in education	20
2.3. Networking, collaboration and educational reform	21
2.4. Networking, collaboration and teacher professional learning.....	24
2.5. Developments in Irish educational policy and practice that have influenced networking and collaboration.....	27
2.5.1. Cosán: Framework for Teachers’ Learning	29
2.5.2. Government Action Plans on Education and DEIS Action Plan	30
2.5.3. Wellbeing in schools	36
2.5.4. What do we mean by wellbeing and why is it important?	36
2.6. Conclusion	40
Chapter 3 - School networks in practice	41

3.1. Introduction	41
3.2. Rationale for participating in a school network	41
3.3. Key elements in the analysis of school networks that guided the research	42
3.3.1. Composition	42
3.3.2. Structure	43
3.3.3. Purpose	45
3.3.4. Processes/Interactions	47
3.3.5. Internal network processes:	48
3.3.6. Dynamics	51
3.3.7. Effectiveness	53
3.4. Challenge of participating in a school network.....	54
3.5. Conclusion	55
Chapter 4 - Understanding the role of Social Capital in Teacher Professional Learning and the Social Learning Theory of Communities of Practice	56
4.1. Introduction	56
4.2. Social capital theory	57
4.2.1. Definition of social capital and important aspects	57
4.2.2. How social capital works	59
4.2.3. Social capital, teachers' professional learning, collaboration and innovation	61
4.2.4. Social capital at the individual and collective level	63
4.2.5. Social capital and trust	64
4.2.6. Social capital linking the micro, meso and macro levels	65
4.2.7. The 'dark side' of social capital	65
4.3. Communities of Practice and Social Learning Theory	66
4.3.1. Definition of a Communities of Practice	67
4.3.2. Key elements of Communities of Practice.....	68
4.3.3. Learning in Communities of Practice	71
4.3.4. Identity and Communities of Practice.....	73
4.3.5. Boundaries and Landscapes of Practice	73
4.3.6. Benefits of Communities of Practice	74
4.3.7. Critique of Communities of Practice.....	76
4.4. How Social Capital Theory and Communities of Practice have informed this research	77
4.5. Individual teacher wellbeing	79
4.6. Conclusion	83

Chapter 5 - Inequality and social reproduction in education	84
5.1. Introduction	84
5.2. Inequality in education in Ireland	84
5.3. Overview of DEIS programme	86
5.4. Inequality, educational disadvantage and social class	90
5.5. Social reproduction of inequality in education	91
5.6. School processes that perpetuate inequality.....	93
5.7. The myth of meritocracy, equality of opportunity and equality of condition.....	95
5.8. The emancipatory power of education - What schools and teachers can do	96
5.9. Conclusion	98
Chapter 6 – Methodology	99
6.1. Introduction	99
6.2. Research focus and the challenge of delineating the approach.....	99
6.3. Research paradigm and philosophical assumptions.....	101
6.4. Research approach – Case Study Research.....	102
6.5. Research methodology	105
6.6. Research methods.....	105
6.6.1. Focus Groups	107
6.6.2. Individual Interviews	108
6.6.3. Self-completion surveys.....	109
6.6.4. Documentary Analysis	110
6.7. Data Collection Phases.....	111
6.8. Data Analysis	114
6.8.1. Step one.....	115
6.8.2. Step two.....	115
6.8.3. Step three.....	115
6.8.4. Step four	116
6.8.5. Step five	117
6.8.6. Step six	118
6.9. Research Management	118
6.9.1. Sampling	118
6.9.2. Insider research	119
6.9.3. Negotiating access.....	122
6.10. Research design issues	127
6.10.1. Internal validity - trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility	127
6.10.2. Construct validity	128

6.10.3. Reliability - consistency, stability, dependability and audibility	129
6.10.4. External validity – transferability.....	129
6.11. Ethical Considerations	130
6.12. Conclusion	132
Chapter 7 - Profiling the Networks and Respondents	133
7.1. Introduction	133
7.2. Background and context to the PLUS network.....	133
7.3. Background and context to the OSCAILT network.....	138
7.4. Profile of DEIS schools surveyed autumn 2018	144
7.4.1. School details	145
7.4.2. School enrolment	146
7.4.3. Principal Status	147
7.4.4. Availability of facilities out of school time.....	147
7.5. Focus group and individual interview feedback on networks schools.....	148
7.6. Profile of survey respondents.....	150
7.7. PLUS Network survey respondents	151
7.7.1. PLUS respondents – Age and gender.....	151
7.7.2. PLUS respondents – Highest level of qualification	151
7.7.3. PLUS respondents – Length teaching in school, role and length in HSCL role.....	152
7.7.4. PLUS respondents – Other supports	154
7.7.5. PLUS respondents – professional training in partnership and collaboration and working with parents	154
7.7.6. PLUS respondents - Formal and informal professional learning in previous 12 months	155
7.8. OSCAILT Network survey respondents	157
7.8.1. OSCAILT respondents - Age and gender	157
7.8.2. OSCAILT respondents - Highest level of qualification.....	158
7.8.3. OSCAILT respondents - Length in principal role.....	159
7.8.4. OSCAILT respondents – Other supports	162
7.8.5. OSCAILT respondents – Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and professional training in partnership and collaboration and working with parents.....	163
7.8.6. OSCAILT respondents – Formal and informal professional learning in previous 12 months	166
7.9. Participants’ descriptions of their roles.....	168
7.9.1. PLUS members’ perceptions about the HSCL role	168
7.9.2. OSCAILT members’ perceptions about the principal role	169

7.10. Summary and conclusion	170
Chapter 8 – PLUS Case Study Report	172
8.1. Introduction	172
8.2. PLUS Network Model.....	172
8.2.1. Purpose.....	172
8.2.2. Ethos.....	174
8.2.3. Structures	174
8.2.4. Processes and Interactions.....	176
8.3. Challenges	180
8.4. Outcomes of PLUS	182
8.4.1. Support for DEIS schools	182
8.4.2. Third level link.....	182
8.4.3. Promoting access to third level	183
8.4.4. DEIS Elective students.....	184
8.4.5. LEGO Education elective	185
8.4.6. Resources and expertise	185
8.4.7. PLUS initiatives	186
8.4.8. Learning and knowledge creation	188
8.4.9. Building relationships and trust	189
8.4.10. Support for HSCLs and other representatives.....	191
8.5. Review of PLUS in relation to its stated mission and aims	194
8.6. Conclusion	196
Chapter 9 - OSCAILT Case Study Report	198
9.1. Introduction	198
9.2. OSCAILT Network Model	198
9.2.1. Purpose.....	198
9.2.2. Ethos.....	199
9.2.3. Structures	200
9.2.4. Processes and interactions.....	203
9.2.5. Multiagency approach.....	208
9.3. Challenges	209
9.3.1. Time pressures and school context	209
9.3.2. Teaching principals	209
9.3.3. Participation in meetings.....	210
9.3.4. Confidentiality and competition.....	211
9.3.5. Sustainability.....	211

9.4. Key outcomes of the OSCAILT network.....	211
9.4.1. Support for DEIS schools	212
9.4.2. Support for DEIS principals.....	214
9.4.3. Learning and knowledge creation	218
9.4.4. Building relationships and trust between stakeholders	222
9.4.5. Advocacy and raising awareness of the DEIS school context.....	225
9.5. Review of OSCAILT in relation to the stated mission	227
9.6. Conclusion	228
Chapter 10 – Discussion	230
10.1. Introduction	230
10.2. Developing the Conceptual Framework.....	230
10.3. The Conceptual Framework.....	232
10.4. Propositions based on the research findings and literature	236
10.5. Proposition 1 – The PLUS and OSCAILT networks enhance social capital of members through the process of networking	237
10.5.1. Bonding social capital.....	238
10.5.2. Bridging and linking social capital	245
10.5.3. Considering Proposition One in relation to the literature	252
10.6. Proposition 2 – The networks are Communities of Practice that enhance the learning, professional growth and development and leadership skills of members..	255
10.6.1. Definition of Communities of Practice	256
10.6.2. Domain.....	256
10.6.3. Community.....	258
10.6.4. Practice.....	260
10.6.5. Learning and Identity	262
10.6.6. Boundaries and Landscape of Practice	267
10.6.7. Considering Proposition Two in relation to the literature.....	269
10.7. Proposition 3 – The networks support key policy areas for DEIS schools including wellbeing, DEIS plans and School Self-Evaluation.....	271
10.7.1. How the networks support wellbeing in schools.....	271
10.7.2. How the networks support whole school wellbeing	271
10.7.3. How the networks support wellbeing of individual network members ...	273
10.7.4. The networks support DEIS plans and School Self-Evaluation.....	275
10.7.5. How PLUS and OSCAILT support Teaching and Learning in DEIS schools	275
10.7.6. How OSCAILT supports Leadership and Management in DEIS schools	279
10.7.7. Considering Proposition Three in relation to the literature.....	284

10.8. Proposition 4 - There are challenges to networking and limitations to PLUS and OSCAILT	285
10.8.1. Considering Proposition Four in relation to the literature	288
10.9. Limitations of the research.....	288
10.10. Conclusion	290
Chapter 11 - Conclusion and Recommendations	291
11.1. Introduction	291
11.2. Summary of key findings and conclusions from the research in relation to the research questions	291
11.2.1. Development of the networks and sustainability	291
11.2.2. Understanding the features, attributes, form, function, operation and role of the networks	293
11.2.3. The significance of connection in the networks.....	294
11.2.4. Understanding knowledge creation and sharing in the networks	297
11.2.5. Changes in thinking and practice for schools and other stakeholders	299
11.3. Key contribution of this research to the knowledge base	301
11.3.1. Contribution to theory on school networks and CoPs.....	302
11.3.2. Contribution to the evidence base on school networks.....	303
11.3.3. Contribution to practice.....	305
11.4. Implications of the research and recommendations	307
11.4.1. Practice implications and recommendations	307
11.4.2. Policy implications and recommendations.....	310
11.4.3. Research implications and recommendations	311
11.5. Conclusion	313

List of Tables

Table 1. Primary Liaison with University Service (PLUS) Network Schools 2021	4
Table 2. OSCALIT Network Primary Schools 2021	5
Table 3. OSCALIT Network Post Primary Schools 2021	5
Table 4. Teaching and Learning Domains and Standards.....	32
Table 5. Leadership and Management Domains and Standards	34
Table 6. Purpose based Typology of Networks	45
Table 7 Support provided for DEIS schools	86
Table 8. Primary sources of data.....	106
Table 9. Secondary sources of data.....	107
Table 10. Individual interview participant codes	109
Table 11. Focus group participant codes.....	109
Table 12. Data collection phases and data collected.....	113
Table 13. Negotiating access and permission	124
Table 14. School enrolment statistics	146
Table 15. Type of principal.....	147
Table 16. School facilities open evenings.....	147
Table 17. School facilities open at weekend.....	148
Table 18. School facilities open out of term	148
Table 19. PLUS survey participants' age and gender	151
Table 20. PLUS survey participants' highest level of qualification	151
Table 21. PLUS survey participants - Length teaching in schools	152
Table 22. PLUS survey participants' age and role.....	152
Table 23. PLUS survey participants - Length in HSCL role	153
Table 24. Why PLUS survey participants became the PLUS rep?	153
Table 25. PLUS survey participants – Other support	154
Table 26. PLUS survey participants' professional training in partnership and collaboration.....	155
Table 27. PLUS survey participants' professional training in parental involvement ...	155
Table 28. PLUS survey participants' formal professional learning specific to DEIS in previous 12 months	156
Table 29. PLUS survey participants' informal professional learning specific to DEIS in previous 12 months	157
Table 30. OSCALIT survey participants' age and gender	157
Table 31. OSCALIT survey participants' highest level of education.....	158
Table 32. OSCALIT survey participants - Length principal in current school.....	160
Table 33. OSCALIT survey participants - Length principal other school.....	160
Table 34. OSCALIT survey participants - Length principal DEIS school	161
Table 35. OSCALIT survey participants - Length principal in a DEIS school	161
Table 36. OSCALIT survey participants - Other support groups	162
Table 37. OSCALIT survey participants' Initial Teacher Education input on partnership and collaboration	163
Table 38. OSCALIT survey participants' Initial Teacher Education input on partnership with parents	164
Table 39. OSCALIT survey participants' professional training on partnership and collaboration.....	164

Table 40. OSCAILT survey participants’ professional training on partnership with parents	165
Table 41. OSCAILT survey participants’ formal professional development in previous 12 months	166
Table 42. OSCAILT survey participants’ informal professional development in previous 12 months	167
Table 43. Indicators for the existence of Communities of Practice	255
Table 44. Teaching and Learning Domains and Standards supported by PLUS and OSCAILT	278
Table 45. Leadership and Management Domains and Standards supported by OSCAILT	282

List of Figures

Figure 1. Timeline of relevant policy developments in Ireland	28
Figure 2. Nodes, threads, knots and nets.....	52
Figure 3. The core components of teachers' occupational wellbeing	81
Figure 4. Type of School.....	145
Figure 5. School Category.....	146
Figure 6. Age and gender of OSCAILT survey participants	158
Figure 7. OSCAILT survey participants' highest qualifications	159
Figure 8. The policy, practice and theoretical base to the research	232
Figure 9. Conceptual Framework - Domain, Community and Practice overlap with key elements of TED networks.....	235
Figure 10. How bonding social capital is built in PLUS and OSCAILT.....	241
Figure 11. How bridging social capital is created in PLUS and OSCAILT	249
Figure 12. How PLUS and OSCAILT connect the micro level of individual schools, to meso, to macro	252

List of Appendices

Appendix 1. Draft Conceptual Framework October 2016.....	344
Appendix 2. Ethical Clearance.....	345
Appendix 3. Focus Group Schedules.....	346
Appendix 4. Interview Schedules.....	349
Appendix 5. Surveys.....	355
Appendix 6. Precode List.....	363
Appendix 7. PLUS Tree Node.....	366
Appendix 8. OSCAILT Tree Node.....	368
Appendix 9. Emerging Propositions October 2019.....	370
Appendix 10. PLUS and OSCAILT member Information Letters and Consent Forms.....	372
Appendix 11. Letter of request to and approval from TED Steering Committee April 2018.....	396
Appendix 12. PLUS Original Aims and Objectives.....	398
Appendix 13. Revised PLUS Network Mission Statement and Aims 2014.....	399
Appendix 14. PLUS Network Meeting Agenda Items.....	400
Appendix 15. Article about secondary school places.....	421
Appendix 16. DEIS schools in Limerick involved in Dormant Accounts Scheme 2009-2011.....	424
Appendix 17. OSCAILT Network Logo.....	425
Appendix 18. OSCAILT Agenda Items.....	426

List of Acronyms

ABC	Area Based Childhood Initiative
BEd	Bachelor of Education
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSL	Centre for School Leadership
CYPSC	Children and Young People's Services Committee
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEIS	Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools
DJELR	Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform
DoE	Department of Education
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EDNIP	Embracing Diversity Nurturing Integration Programme
ERC	Educational Research Centre
EU	European Union
FSCEP	Family School Community Educational Partnership
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison Coordinator
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals Network
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
JMB	Joint Managerial Board
LANS	Local Area Needs Assessment
LEA	Local Education Authority
LEC	Limerick Education Centre
LCEN	Limerick Community Education Network
LCETB	Limerick Clare Education Training Board
LoP	Landscape of Practice
MEd	Masters of Education

MIC	Mary Immaculate College
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputies
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PIDF	Programme Innovation and Development Fund
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PLUS	Primary Liaison with University Services
PR	Public Relations
SCP	School Completion Programme
SEF	School Excellence Fund
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLT	Speech and Language Therapy
SSIRL	Supporting Social Inclusion and Regeneration in Limerick
SSP	School Support Programme
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TD	Teachta Dála
TEAL	TED English as an Additional Language Project
TED	Transforming Education through Dialogue
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
WTP	Working Together Project

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Chapter one provides the background to and overview of this research with two networks of DEIS schools and the thesis itself. A brief introduction to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks and rationale for conducting the research is outlined with reference to key literature and developments in the field and the research aims and objectives are discussed. I outline my own positionality regarding this ‘back yard’ research and an overview of the subsequent thesis chapters is then provided.

1.2. Background to the research

It is widely held that a network of schools entails more than bringing schools together in a ‘club’ or to share ‘good practice’ (Hopkins 2003; Hadfield and Chapman 2009). Conceptions of school networks encompass the role they can play in the improvement of learning and outcomes for students (Hadfield et al. 2006), in building capacity and the professional learning of teachers (Kools and Stoll 2016), in schools working collaboratively towards common goals (Muijs et al. 2010) and in educational change at school and system level (Hopkins 2003; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). Many school networks involve a shared purpose, commitment to development of teaching and learning and an ideological basis underlying the choice to voluntarily participate in an organisational structure that is democratically operated (Lieberman and Grolnick 2005). Networks of schools in ‘challenging circumstances’ involving other stakeholders have developed in response to a wide variety of measures to improve outcomes for children (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín 2020; Herrera-Pastor et al. 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020). Collaborating with other schools experiencing similar challenges provides opportunities for joint problem solving, a key aspect of the following definition of school networks adopted in this research that resonates clearly with the PLUS and OSCAILT networks:

A network ... is a group of organisations working together to solve problems or issues of mutual concern that are too large for any one organisation to handle on its own (Mandell 1999). Applied to school, the idea of networks suggests that schools working together in a collaborative effort would be more effective in enhancing organisational capacity and improving student learning than individual schools working on their own (Wohlstetter and Smith 2000; Wohlstetter et al. 2003, p. 399)

School networks have also emerged alongside Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Stoll and Seashore Louis 2007; Harris et al. 2018), Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) (Brown and Flood 2019; Brown and Flood 2020), Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (Kaser and Halbert 2014; Halbert and Kaser 2019) and Communities of Practice (CoPs) (Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) as part of a collection of approaches involving peer interaction, dialogue, reflection and collaborative inquiry as the foundation of the development of strategies to respond to the issues encountered by teachers or school leaders in their day to day practice.

The difference between networks and these other approaches e.g., PLCs (Stoll 2011; Harris et al. 2018), PLNs (Brown and Flood 2019; Brown and Flood 2020) and CoPs (Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015), is that while networks come together voluntarily for a shared purpose or joint activity (Church et al. 2002), this does not always encompass learning from each other as explicitly expressed in the title of PLCs or PLNs or to deepen practice as in CoPs. In some instances networks function purely to create connections with others in other organisations to share information and resources or address a particular concern. Learning that arises is secondary to the primacy of the shared purpose that brought the group together. PLCs and PLNs, on the other hand, have an explicit formalised aim to enhance the learning of members and it is often to enhance teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and practice to improve student outcomes. While CoPs are less formal entities than PLCs and PLNs, and less explicit about their aim to enhance learning of members, a key aspect of the definition is the desire to 'deepen knowledge and expertise' (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 4) of members through interaction about their particular practice and a social process of learning.

In Ireland, we have begun to see such initiatives emerging more prominently in the last decade, be it in the form of PLCs, CoPs or Lesson Study groups within or across schools or clusters of schools and other partners for example, through the School Excellence Fund (SEF) which commenced in 2017 (DoE 2017). A body of research on these forms of teacher professional learning (TPL) is starting to emerge including work by Parker et al. (2012) on CoPs as professional development in Physical Education, Literacy PLCs in

DEIS schools (Griffin 2016), empowering teachers through professional development in a learning community (Tannehill and McPhail 2017) and lesson study (Hourigan and Leavy 2019).

1.3. PLUS and OSCAILT Networks of DEIS Schools

This research focuses on the development two networks of DEIS¹ schools, PLUS and OSCAILT, that have been facilitated and supported by the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project, Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick since 1998 when PLUS was established. The networks emerged in a ‘grass roots’, organic fashion, and continue to inform the work of the project as it endeavours to respond to issues identified by members. MIC primarily resources the networks, the facilitation of which falls under the remit of the TED staff. The project Coordinator facilitates OSCAILT and the Project Support Worker facilitates PLUS. Administrative support is also provided through the college. The activities delivered through the networks are funded either by an external funding source for large projects or, in the case of PLUS, some activities are funded through a small TED annual budget provided by the college. A brief introduction to PLUS and OSCAILT is provided here with a more detailed account on the development of both networks available in Chapter Seven.

The PLUS network commenced in 1998 and currently (spring 2021) there are fourteen DEIS Band 1 primary schools from Limerick city and county in the network and two special schools. A full list of schools is included in table 1². Schools are mainly represented by the Home School Community Liaison Coordinator (hereafter HSCL) but there are some class teachers as well. The network meets on a regular basis (approximately 4 - 5 times per year) and meetings focus on issues pertinent to the schools involved as well as a number of ongoing PLUS initiatives. A full list of agenda items from 1998-2017 is available in Appendix 14.

¹ Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), is the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, which was launched in May 2005 and remains the Department of Education policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. The second Action Plan was introduced in September 2017.

² There is a degree of overlap in school membership of the two networks. The PLUS network includes the twelve DEIS Band 1 primary schools in Limerick city, two DEIS Band 1 schools from Limerick county and two special schools. OSCAILT also includes the twelve DEIS Band 1 primary schools as well as the four DEIS post primary schools in Limerick city. Tables 1 and 2 include a list of schools in the networks in 2021.

Table 1. Primary Liaison with University Service (PLUS) Network Schools 2021

School	Address
Corpus Christi N.S.	Moyross
Gaelscoil Sheoirse Clancy	Roxboro Road
Le Chéile N.S.	Roxboro Road
Our Lady of Lourdes N.S.	Rosbrien
Our Lady Queen of Peace	Janesboro
Presentation Primary	Sexton Street
C.B.S. Primary	Sexton Street
St. Anne's G.N.S.	Rathkeale
St. Augustine's	Sexton Street
St. Canice's	Mulgrave St.
St. John's Girls and Infant Boys'	Cathedral Place
St. John the Baptist B.N.S	Downey Street
St. Joseph's B.N.S.	Rathkeale
St. Mary's N.S.	Bishop Street
St. Michael's Infant School	Sexton Street
Thomond Primary School	Ballynanty

The OSCAIT network emerged from a Dormant Accounts³ funded initiative led and administered by the Department of Education (DoE) that was introduced in 2009 in response to a government commissioned report by John FitzGerald⁴ (2007) to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion which led to the establishment of the Limerick

³ Dormant Accounts Scheme – now called the Dormant Accounts Fund – was established by legislation and enables unclaimed funds from accounts in credit institutions in Ireland to be used to support 1) the personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged, 2) the educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged and 3) persons with a disability (within the meaning of the Equal Status Act 2000). For further information, please see <https://www.pobal.ie/programmes/dormant-accounts-fund-daf/> .

⁴ John FitzGerald is a former Research Professor, head of the macroeconomics and resource economics division and former coordinator of the research programme of macroeconomics of the Economic and Social Research Institute in Dublin, Ireland. He is also a contributor to the Irish Times newspaper.

Regeneration Agencies in 2007. Amongst other recommendations, FitzGerald highlighted the need for greater support for families in Moyross and other communities in the city, including ‘improved levels of remedial teaching/psychological services’ (2007, p. 6). Chapter Seven details the full background to the establishment of OSCALIT. Facilitated by MIC and the Department of Education (until 2019), this network of the DEIS Band 1 primary and DEIS post primary schools in Limerick city began meeting in January 2009 to support the roll out of the Dormant Accounts initiative. Principals represent their school on this network, which also meets approximately 4-5 times per year. Details of the schools involved are included in Table 2.

Table 2. OSCALIT Network Primary Schools 2021

School	Address
Corpus Christi N.S.	Moyross
Gaelscoil Sheoirse Clancy	Roxboro Road
Le Chéile N.S.	Roxboro Road
Our Lady of Lourdes N.S.	Rosbrien
Our Lady Queen of Peace	Janesboro
Presentation Primary	Sexton Street
C.B.S. Primary	Sexton Street
St. John's Girls and Infant Boys'	Cathedral Place
St. John the Baptist B.N.S	Downey Street
St. Mary's N.S.	Bishop Street
St. Michael's Infant School	Sexton Street
Thomond Primary School	Ballynanty

Table 3. OSCALIT Network Post Primary Schools 2021

School	Address
Árdscoil Mhuire	Corbally
Coláiste Mhichíl	Sexton Street
Coláiste Nano Nagle	Sexton Street
Thomond College	Moylish

1.4. Rationale for the research

There is a significant gap in the research and literature in Ireland on school networks, arguably because the first consolidated attempt to introduce networking and collaboration came in 2017 under the SEF, but also because networks are few and far between in Ireland⁵. Numerous literature searches over the course of this study have only yielded one piece of research on a networked school alliance in Northern Ireland in the context of polycentric inspection (Brown et al. 2019).

Teacher professional learning (TPL) has also come to the fore nationally since the Teaching Council was established in 2006 and many key developments have focussed on formal teacher professional development e.g., the ‘Literacy and Numeracy Strategy’ in 2011⁶ and roll out of continuing professional development (CPD) by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) supported by the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) for teachers in the new Primary Language Curriculum, which was introduced on a phased basis from 2016 to 2019 from Junior Infants to Second class (DoE 2019c). As TPL will be referred to throughout the thesis, it is important to establish the definition adopted in this research. TPL is broader, more reflective and less focused on performance than professional development (PD) (O’Brien and Jones 2014). The OECD (Boeskens et al. 2020, p. 14) definition of TPL (termed continuing professional learning) was adopted in this research i.e., ‘formal and informal activities that aim to update, develop and broaden the skills, knowledge, expertise and other relevant characteristics of in-service teachers’. Professional learning is viewed therein as a non-linear process with varying degrees of ‘(dis)continuity’, and a more contextualised and active form of learning than PD in recognising teachers agency to define and achieve objectives for their students, school, community and for their profession (ibid). The OECD contend that TPL that is successful will also have an impact on ‘valued student outcomes’, (ibid) which is not just centred on achievement but also includes wellbeing of students and their holistic and diverse needs. TPL is understood by the OECD to be a continuum from highly formal, structured courses to informal learning grounded in teachers’ day to day activities, without pre-determined objectives and that is not always intentionally established as learning activity. These types of learning activities are described as ‘integral to teachers’ professional growth’ (Boeskens et al. 2020, p. 18).

⁵ Other DEIS school networks that the researcher is aware of include the Ballymun Principals’ Network and the North East Inner City (NEIC) Principals’ Network, both located in Dublin.

⁶ The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) is the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy standards among children and young people in the education system.

Teacher networks are situated on this continuum under ‘offsite’ and categorised as ‘informal’. Between either end of the continuum are a wide variety of intermediate, non-formal learning activities usually initiated by teachers that are not recognised by official learning requirements or entitlements e.g., self-directed study or meetings and meetings in PLCs. Similarly, Kennedy (2014) categorises models of teacher continuing professional development (CPD) as transmissive, malleable, and transformative arguing that capacity for professional autonomy and teacher agency increases along the spectrum. This thesis argues that that the networks contribute to the professional growth, development and learning of members because they operate as Communities of Practice (Wenger 1998). Therefore, they can be conceived of as TPL that is informal, professional, collaborative and external to school and, under Kennedy’s (2014) model, as a form of malleable CPD. Evans (2019) also distinguishes between teachers’ formal and informal learning, highlighting that much informal learning is founded on social interaction, such as through CoPs. She raises an important point for this research; under definitions that exclusively focus on professional learning and development for student outcomes, teachers’ ‘informal’ and ‘implicit’ (2019, p. 4) professional learning are at risk of not being recognised. Implicit learning is informal and comprises ‘unintended, opportunistic and unstructured’ learning (Eraut 2004, p. 250, cited in Evans 2019) and occurs without the learner’s conscious recognition at the time (Evans 2019). In contrast to those who focus on teacher learning for student outcomes, Evans conceives of teacher learning as ‘relating solely to the practitioner’ with students as ‘secondary beneficiaries’, and not ‘integral to conceptualisations of definitions of professional learning or growth or development’ (2019, p. 7). The ‘Cósán Framework for Teachers Learning’ (Teaching Council 2016), acknowledges the various dimensions of teachers learning, including formal and informal learning, and encourages teachers to engage in cycles of planning, gathering evidence, reflection and ongoing learning. An evaluation framework for formal TPL in Ireland is currently under development by the Educational Research Centre (ERC), with an initial focus on TPL for student wellbeing (Rawdon et al. 2020). This report (ibid) draws on the work of Guskey (2000) and evaluation frameworks previously developed in Ireland including work by Kennedy (2005; 2014) and King (2014). While the importance of informal TPL, such as PLCs⁷ and reflective practice, is recognised for ongoing

⁷ Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have emerged in many education systems across the world in the last two decades (Harris et al., 2018; Stoll and Seashore Louis 2007). It is widely held that effective PLCs have the potential to promote and sustain the learning of professionals in a school with the collective purpose of enhancing student learning (ibid).

professional learning of teachers, the report highlights the greater challenges in evaluating and assessing informal activities. This resonates with Evans (2019) assertion that a lacuna exists in the research and literature on informal and implicit TPL.

PLUS emerged over twenty years ago prior to policy driven TPL and in a very grass roots manner, to support designated ‘disadvantaged’ schools⁸ to respond to issues of concern. OSCAILT followed over ten years later in 2009 and, shortly after, other collaborative networking initiatives for DEIS schools began to emerge in response to the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, such as the Limerick DEIS Literacy Initiative (DoE et al. 2017). As such, PLUS and OSCAILT appear to be two of the longest serving networks of DEIS schools in the country, along with the Cur le Chéile⁹ network. A desire for greater understanding of the uniqueness of these networks, their origin and development and longevity fuelled the questions that drove this research and this is detailed under the research aims and objectives section.

PLUS and OSCAILT have long provided a space and forum for teachers, HSCLs and principals from DEIS schools to interact with peers in similar contexts about issues concerning their schools or pertinent to their roles. This research is timely and salient because of the insight that it provides on informal TPL specific to the DEIS school context with particular reference to the HSCL and principal role and the way in which networking can support DEIS schools. Extensive research has been conducted on the DEIS programme (Chapter Five details same - Weir and Archer 2011; Smyth et al. 2015; Weir et al. 2017) and the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (Ryan 1994; Ryan 1999; Archer and Weir 2003; Weir et al. 2018). However, there is a dearth of literature and research on networking and collaboration between DEIS schools. The interaction between network members, this thesis argues, contributes to the development of their bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) and professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) as they share experiences, advice, information, knowledge and learn from one another through dialogue, reflection and making their tacit knowledge more explicit (Stoll 2010; Pyrko et al. 2017 and 2019). Such interaction also has potential to support the

⁸ Schools in the Disadvantaged Area Scheme. This scheme was introduced in 1984 in disadvantaged areas and schools seeking disadvantaged status were assessed and prioritised as to need on the basis of socio-economic and educational indicators such as unemployment levels, housing, medical card holders and information on basic literacy and numeracy. In addition, in assessing the relative levels of disadvantage among applicant schools, account was taken of pupil teacher ratios.

⁹ Cur le Chéile is a network of principals of DEIS schools from Galway, Longford, Mayo, Sligo and Westmeath, which has also been facilitated by the TED Project since 1998.

occupational wellbeing (Viac and Fraser 2020) of individual members as they endeavour to deal with challenges they encounter in their role. Professional learning in supportive contexts that fosters engagement and interaction and builds professional support networks has been found to positively support teacher self-efficacy, resilience and wellbeing (Owen 2016; McCallum et al. 2017; Cann 2019).

At the collective level, the capacity of school networks to build connections laterally and vertically in the education system through bridging (Putnam 2000) and linking social capital (Gooeterart et al. 2004) can help DEIS schools to leverage support and resources and increase awareness about issues on the ground through ‘double-loop learning’ (Kools and Stoll 2016, p.21). This is important because of the greater challenges DEIS schools face as detailed in Chapter Five. Bridging social capital is also an important factor in the implementation of key educational policy for schools, such as the fostering of whole school wellbeing and working in partnership and collaboration with parents and other stakeholders, as it supports schools to build relationships with relevant stakeholders and support agencies, as directed by the Framework on Whole School Wellbeing (Government of Ireland 2019).

Essentially, this research contributes to an emerging body of knowledge on networking and collaboration between schools in Ireland and, in the case of research and literature specific to networks of schools, adds the greatest value as it appears to be the first comprehensive piece of research available nationally on the topic.

1.5. Research aims and objectives

The research sought both to describe and explain the processes of networking from the emic or insider perspective of members and to illustrate how the practice of networking has supported the DEIS schools involved over the years. The core research question was ‘How do school networks operate to support DEIS schools? A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks’.

There were a number of aims and objectives that informed the embedded research questions, which are outlined below. As this was qualitative exploratory research, it is important to state that the aims, objectives and embedded questions also evolved as the research progressed. The breadth and scope narrowed from the original proposal, which sought to understand other collaborations that the network schools are part of, in addition

to their participation in the networks. My perception and understanding of networks also evolved as part of the research process and issues of connectedness, for example, became more about understanding relationships between individuals and organisations than a structural analysis of connections between social actors. Knowledge creation and sharing became focused on how learning takes place within and beyond the networks. In order to understand the way in which the networks have supported the DEIS schools involved, the following aims guided the research:

1.5.1. Research Aim 1 – Understanding the development of PLUS and OSCAILT

Firstly, this research sought to analyse and understand how the networks developed and evolved since 1998, how they have been sustained and the ways in which they have supported the schools involved.

1.5.2. Research Aim 2 – Understanding how the PLUS and OSCAILT networks operate and function and connections between network members and other stakeholders

The second aim was to understand and describe how the networks operate and function and the connections between network members and other stakeholders.

1.5.3. Research Aim 3 – Understanding knowledge creation and sharing within and beyond the networks

The third aim of the research was to understand knowledge creation and sharing within and beyond the networks and the extent to which they have led to changes in thinking and practice, if any, for members.

These aims addressed the following objectives in order to answer the core research question:

- Developing a thorough understanding of how PLUS and OSCAILT evolved over time, how they have been sustained and how they built commitment to a shared sense of purpose.
- Identifying the models of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks with reference to the literature on school networks. The models encapsulate both the outcomes of the

networks for individual members and the collective impact for the DEIS schools involved. Detailed case study reports about each network facilitated this process (Chapters Eight and Nine).

- Developing a Conceptual Framework to understand the unique nature and contribution of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks. This Conceptual Framework (see10.3) involved exploration of the policy, practice and theoretical basis to the networks and discussion of the case study reports with reference to the same.

The following embedded research questions arose from the core questions and guided and informed the data collection and analysis in order to fully understand and document how the PLUS and OSCAILT networks have supported the DEIS schools involved.

1.5.4. Research questions

1. How have the networks evolved and grown over time? How have they built commitment to a shared purpose? What has helped to sustain them over time?
2. How can features or attributes of the networks be described? For example, what are the forms, function and role of the school networks? How do they operate? What are the structures and processes involved? What are the network dynamics?
3. What is the degree of attachment of network members to the networks? How connected are school representatives to each other and to their respective schools? How connected are the schools as organisations to the networks?
4. How does knowledge creation and sharing occur within and beyond the networks?
5. What enables knowledge creation and sharing to occur within and beyond the networks and what is the extent and nature of the same?
6. Have the networks contributed to changes in thinking and practice within and across schools, MIC and other stakeholders and, if so, in what ways?

1.6. Researcher positionality

As I have worked for the TED Project since 2004 and facilitated PLUS for much of this time, in this section I acknowledge my own position with regard to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks and outline my ‘personal biography’ and interpretive framework (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 11).

1.6.1. The ‘biographically situated researcher’

My perspective on PLUS and OSCAILT has been shaped by my identity as a middle class, white, Irish, married woman and mother of two daughters who completed this thesis in her early forties. My perspective on education was profoundly influenced by my own experience of attending a DEIS post-primary school, St. Enda’s, a Community School in Limerick which was a member of the OSCAILT network until closure in 2015. I attended school with children from a variety of different social, economic and cultural backgrounds. Many of the students were from a nearby estate, Southill, which was then and remains one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged Electoral Divisions in the city and country. From my early teens, I was keenly aware that some children benefit more from the education system than others for an extremely complex variety of reasons related to deeply entrenched societal inequality and not simply because of a meritocratic informed ideology (Drudy and Lynch 1993; Lynch 1999; Lynch 2019) that deems some to be more deserving of educational success simply because they work harder for it or their families place more value on education.

This research and my interest in networks emerged from observations in my own professional practice as both an educator and as a facilitator of networks of schools. On completion of my B.A. in 2000, I furthered my studies with a Masters in Adult Education in 2004 during the course of which I taught English as an Additional Language to asylum seekers and refugees along with adult literacy for the City of Limerick V.E.C. (now the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board). In 2002, my ‘personal biography’ brought me back to Southill when I took up the post of Adult Education Outreach Coordinator in a community centre where I coordinated adult education programmes to encourage adults in the locality to return to learning. In this role I also gained my first experience of education networks when I became a member of the Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN) and I conducted my Master’s research with adult learners from groups involved in the network thereby focusing on the experiences of learners from marginalised groups and communities in Limerick. The democratic nature of this network appealed to me, as did the community education principles rooted in the liberation education philosophy of Freire (1970; 1996) and founded on problem posing education, dialogue and praxis and emphasis on the social context within which learning occurs.

In 2004, I took up my current post with the TED Project and the focus of my work as an educator changed to supporting the work of school networks as well as different projects, developing educational resources and engaging in research. Shortly afterwards, I began to facilitate the two TED networks existing at the time, PLUS and Cur le Chéile. I continued my involvement in the LCEN until 2008, when I was seconded to coordinate an outreach centre for the Shannon Consortium¹⁰ in Ennis, Co. Clare. I returned to work with the TED project in 2011 and continued to facilitate PLUS and Cur le Chéile. Over the years, I have provided administrative support to OSCAILT and facilitated the network from January 2020 to submission of this thesis, right through the COVID-19 lockdown in spring 2020, reopening of schools in September 2020 and further lockdown in January 2021, during which time all facilitation of the TED networks moved online.

1.6.2. Personal observations of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks

My personal observations on how the networks have evolved and changed over time and how they have supported schools around particular issues of concern deepened my curiosity and desire to learn more about how they operate to support DEIS schools from the perspective of the network members. I have observed many changes in the networks and the educational landscape and often wondered how they managed to evolve as well as sustain involvement and commitment. From my perspective, it is clear that these networks are meeting a very real need on behalf of the DEIS schools involved and that there are tangible outcomes for the individuals and schools involved. Many changes have taken place within the schools in the PLUS and OSCAILT primary schools over the years, as detailed in Chapter Seven, and I have also observed how they have impacted on the networks.

In March 2020, our world was literally turned upside down with the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools in Ireland for almost four months, followed by the summer break in July and August and further closure from January to March 2021. After an initial hiatus as we all grappled to comprehend and respond to the unfolding crisis personally and professionally, both networks quickly resumed their business and moved online to offer a platform for the HSCLs and teachers in PLUS and the principals in OSCAILT to meet virtually, to share experiences and to offer each other

¹⁰ Shannon Consortium – A partnership between the University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College and Limerick Institute of Technology.

support as they tried to support their most vulnerable children and families during an unprecedented crisis. PLUS meetings discussed issues such as maintaining regular contact with parents via phone, supporting parents to engage with children's school work online and offline, sending and, in some cases, personally delivering educational packs and resources to families, ensuring that the most vulnerable families could access food and other essential items and linking with other agencies to provide support. Similarly, OSCAILT discussed all these issues as well as the logistics of safe reopening, whenever it would be, and members' profound concerns about the impact of COVID-19 school closures on the academic, social, emotional and physical wellbeing of very vulnerable children and fears that the unfolding pandemic would exacerbate inequity in our society. The networks adapted and evolved to this situation and are currently (spring 2021) as strong as ever. As we, hopefully, move to a post-COVID world in the coming months, there is much to learn from society's response to this crisis including the education sector. Although the data for this research was collected prior to this crisis, I believe there is much to learn from this research moving forward, particularly in relation to the way in which networks can support professional learning and occupational wellbeing of teachers and whole school wellbeing.

1.6.3. Perspective on the networks and members

My qualification and background in adult education and experience of community education have served me well as a facilitator of networks and heavily influenced my perspective of the networks and the members. My M.Ed. thesis explored the wider benefits of learning i.e., human capital, social capital and identity capital (Schuller et al. 2004), and the effects of adult learning at the individual and collective level. I believe that I adopt a holistic view of network members that looks beyond the parameters of their role e.g., teacher, HSCL or principal. Influenced by adult learning theory (Jarvis 2004; Knowles et al. 2005), I have always viewed network members as individual adults participating in activity that supports their professional learning and personal development as well as part of a collective of individuals and schools that come together in solidarity to actively share experiences, to learn from each other and, where possible, to problem solve around the myriad of common issues faced by DEIS schools. Over the years, I have observed how network activities have provided valuable opportunities for members to share expertise with colleagues working in similar contexts and also offered informal opportunities for continuous professional learning and personal development. I

have facilitated discussion and learned from network members as they shared their knowledge of success in their schools, of different strategies or programmes that they have adopted in their schools as well as problems and challenges they have encountered. I have also witnessed the networks as a platform for solidarity amongst DEIS schools when they have advocated strongly on key issues or for children who are most marginalised in society.

Through my PhD journey, my perspective on networks in education has broadened and deepened. In addition to a platform for professional learning and collective advocacy, I have learned that the democratic nature that initially appealed to me about the LCEN at the start of my career, can be very powerful as a vehicle to bring people together to collaborate via ‘flat power structures’ (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p.15), as can their potential for educational reform and linking different levels of the education system laterally, as well as vertically. The insight I have gleaned from this research has also expanded my understanding of the role that collaborative and supportive professional learning can play in enhancing teacher wellbeing.

1.6.4. Perspective as a researcher

I have worked with the TED project since 2004 and have built up a rapport with many of the individuals that participated in this research. Additionally, I have conducted this PhD research on my own practice as well as that of colleagues, studying in the institution for which I work. In the methodology chapter, under section 6.9.2, I outline issues related to insider research and under 6.11, I address the ethical concerns that have arisen as a result.

As well as facilitating both networks, my personal history with the network schools includes being a researcher with research and intervention projects delivered by the TED project in collaboration with network schools over the years e.g., Working Together Project and Family School Community Educational Partnership (see section 7.2). More recently, I have also conducted evaluation research with principals and staff in network schools, some of whom are involved in this research and have been interviewed by me in the past. See for example Kenny, Bourke and Ní Chondúin (2016) and Bourke and Higgins (2016).

My personal history with the TED project, PLUS, OSCAILT and network members precludes me from being an ‘objective’ researcher in this ‘back yard’ research and I am

cognisant of the bias inherent in my involvement in the networks. However, my practical and in-depth knowledge of them has been an advantage in this research as has the working relationship I have developed with the majority of the network representatives in terms of accessing the site and gaining consent. Despite my subjective experience of the networks, I have endeavored to adopt a balanced, analytical stance in this research. Strategies that were used to minimise the impact of my subjective position throughout the research are detailed in the methodology i.e., addressing my positionality, assumptions and issues around insider research, triangulation of sources, method and theory, maintaining detailed field notes, a process of respondent validation, debriefing with supervisors, and rich ‘thick’ description of the context (Merriam 1998; Denzin 2001; Mercer 2007; Creswell 2009; Robson 2011; Miles et al. 2014).

1.7. Overview of Thesis Chapters

In order to understand the development, operation and contribution of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks, this thesis required insight to the policy, practice and theoretical underpinnings of these school networks and the development of a tailored Conceptual Framework drawing on the same.

Chapter Two sets out **the international and national policy context** that informed networking and collaboration from the emergence of education networks at the start of the 21st century as a strategy for educational reform at different levels of the system and to support TPL against a backdrop of increasing demands on the skill levels of teachers to respond to the ever more complex learning needs of 21st century students. Developments in Irish education policy that have supported networking and collaboration between teachers, particularly for DEIS schools, are also detailed including Cosán, the DEIS Action Plans and School Self-Evaluation. The role that networking and collaboration play in supporting whole school wellbeing is discussed as this was an important finding that emerged in relation to PLUS and OSCAILT.

The **literature on school networks** is synthesised in **Chapter Three** to provide a deeper understanding of how school networks operate and to develop the **practice base** to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks. In addition to exploring the rationale for participating in a school network, the key elements in the analysis of school networks, drawn from the literature and that guided the initial development of the research question, data collection and analysis are delineated including network composition, structure, purpose, processes

and interactions, dynamics and effectiveness. The challenges to school networking are also discussed.

The **theoretical underpinnings** to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks are outlined in **Chapter Four**, which explores **Social Capital Theory** to understand the nature of connections and relationships in the networks and the resources that accrue at the individual and collective level arising from participation in the networks. Bonding, bridging and linking social capital are outlined, as are the way in which social capital works and the role it plays in TPL and collaboration. The relationship between social capital and trust is explored and how it can link the micro to the meso and macro levels of educational policy is outlined. Finally, the negative consequences of social capital are considered. The chapter then turns to discuss the Social Learning Theory of **Communities of Practice** to examine more specifically how learning, knowledge creation and sharing take place in PLUS and OSCAILT. A definition of CoPs is considered along with the key elements of domain, community and practice. Learning in CoPs through continuity and discontinuity, legitimate peripheral participation and ‘thinking together’ are discussed, and the chapter reflects on identity formation in CoPs, the concept of boundaries and Landscapes of Practice (LoPs). The benefits and critiques of CoPs are then considered prior to reflection on the way in which both Social Capital Theory and CoPs have informed the research. Finally, this chapter considers individual teacher wellbeing and the role that collaborative TPL can play in supporting the same.

Chapter Five explores inequality in education in Ireland and outlines the key features of the **DEIS School Support Programme** and research on same. The link between **inequality, ‘educational disadvantage’ and social class** is discussed drawing on the theory of Bourdieu and others on economic, cultural and social capital to explain how schools and the education system **perpetuate inequality through social reproduction and the ideology of meritocracy**. The chapter then considers what schools and teachers can do to challenge inequality in education as experienced by children and families in DEIS schools.

Chapter Six delineates the research problem, the philosophical assumptions, the **case study research approach and methodology** which included data collection through focus groups, individual interviews, surveys and document analysis. The six phases involved in the data collection and six steps in the data analysis strategy involving first and second cycle coding of interview data and are outlined. This chapter discusses the

research management including sampling, insider research, negotiating access and research design issues including internal validity, construct validity, reliability, and external validity. Finally the ethical issues encountered in the research are outlined.

Chapter Seven profiles the networks and research respondents based on a survey of the schools in autumn 2018, document analysis of minutes and agendas of meetings and participants' accounts.. A summary of qualitative feedback from focus groups and individual interviews about the network schools is provided. A profile of the individual PLUS and OSCAILT network representatives at the time is discussed. This chapter also includes a summary of network members' perceptions about their respective roles of the DEIS principal and HSCL.

Chapters Eight and Nine present the **case study reports about PLUS and OSCAILT**. Each chapter details the model of the respective network drawing on the key elements in the analysis of networks identified through the literature i.e., purpose, structure (membership, coordination, formal and informal), processes and interactions (management and leadership, participation, learning and interpersonal relationships and trust) and challenges. The features identified inductively through data collection i.e., network activity (PLUS only) and multiagency (OSCAILT only) are included. Based on participants' accounts, each chapter also outlines the outcomes of the network for the individual representatives and the DEIS schools involved.

Chapter Ten presents the **Conceptual Framework** developed from the policy, practice and theoretical bases and analyses the findings in relation to same. **Four propositions about the networks are presented and discussed in detail**. The first outlines how PLUS and OSCAILT enhance bonding, bridging and linking social capital to support members and schools through the process of networking. Proposition two examines how, as Communities of Practice, the networks enhance learning, professional growth and development and leadership skills of members. The third proposition asserts that PLUS and OSCAILT support key policy areas for DEIS schools including wellbeing, DEIS plans and School Self-Evaluation. Finally, the fourth proposition details the challenges and limitations of both networks. The limitations of the research are also considered.

Finally, **Chapter Eleven, the conclusion**, summarises the key findings from the research with reference to the research questions and draws conclusions regarding 1) the development and sustainability of the networks, 2) the features, attributes, form, function, operation and role of the networks, 3) the significance of connection in the networks, 4)

knowledge sharing and creation in the networks and 5) changes in thinking and practice for schools and other stakeholders. This chapter then reflects on the key contribution of the research to the knowledge base and outlines the implications and recommendations of the research for practice, policy and further research.

1.8. Conclusion

The PLUS and OSCAILT networks have been supporting DEIS schools in Limerick for more than twenty years. The rationale for undertaking this research was to understand why they have been in operation for so long coupled with a desire for greater understanding about the role they play in supporting individual members and schools, how they evolved and operate, the connections that have been created between members and other stakeholders and knowledge creation and sharing within and beyond the networks. In recent years literature and research on other forms of collaboration for TPL have begun to emerge here in Ireland. However, a gap has been identified regarding school networks, in addition to a dearth of literature on informal TPL relevant to DEIS school contexts, particularly regarding the HSCL and principal roles, and this research adds value to the knowledge base nationally and internationally about the same. My own professional background and role with the TED project and both networks has undoubtedly influenced my position and perspective on the same and I have outlined steps taken to reduce researcher bias. Having provided an overview of each of the remaining thesis chapters, let us now move on to discuss the policy base to the research.

Chapter 2 - International and national policy developments in networking and collaboration

2.1. Introduction

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks and the contribution that they make, it is necessary to explore the policy, practice and theoretical underpinnings of school networks that have informed the Conceptual Framework for this research. This first chapter of the literature review will discuss the emergence of networks and collaboration in educational discourse in recent years, key policy developments internationally and nationally that have impacted on networking and collaboration between schools, and reflect on the role of networks in promoting TPL. The chapter will then explore key policy measures in the Irish context such as School Self-Evaluation (DoE Inspectorate 2012 and 2016) and the ‘Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework 2018 -2023’ (Government of Ireland 2019) which are of particular salience to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks.

2.2. The emergence of networking and collaboration in education

Networking and collaboration have become increasingly prevalent in education in recent years as a strategy to promote improvement in student outcomes, knowledge exchange, collaboration, professional learning and innovation, and more equitable education systems in a context of increased international competitiveness and pervasive societal challenges that have impacted on the field of education (Muijs et al. 2011; Díaz-Gibson et al. 2016; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Hargreaves and O’ Connor 2018; Brown and Flood 2019; Chapman 2019; Fullan 2019; Azorín 2020; Azorín et al. 2020). Hargreaves and O’ Connor (2018, p. 3) contend that ‘collaboration is the new chorus line for innovation and improvement’ and that a rationale for teacher and school collaboration is no longer in dispute. Rather, the ‘big questions’ centre on ‘how well’ teachers and other educators collaborate (ibid).

Large scale international comparative studies of educational outcomes in developed economies, such as Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), have undoubtedly driven much recent reform and momentum from governments around networking and collaboration in

education systems. Key findings and policy recommendations from these studies indicate that that teacher professional development and collaboration are important factors in terms of student achievement and outcomes, particularly in schools with higher proportions of socio-economically disadvantaged students (OECD 2017; OEDC 2019). However, the drive for ‘competitive advantage’ in the ‘knowledge economy’ (King 2019, p. 169) as a result of these studies and subsequent educational policies focused on improving literacy and numeracy scores, King argues, merely pay ‘lip service’ (ibid) to issues of equity and inclusion. Furthermore, the pace at which networking and collaboration have been adopted at policy level in education systems globally as a strategy to improve student outcomes has overtaken the development of the evidence base to show which forms of networking and collaboration are most effective and sustainable (Azorín and Muijs 2017; Harris et al. 2018; Azorín 2020; Azorín et al. 2020; Brown and Flood 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020). Where networks are specifically focused on teaching and learning, serious consideration should be given to issues of impact on learning outcomes for students or whether they are purely of benefit for teacher professional learning and support (Azorín 2020). The school networks in this research, in contrast, are small scale and organic in nature. They focus on improving outcomes for children and promoting equity, cognisant of supporting families and communities in challenging contexts and promoting wellbeing, and responding to the impact of intractable social issues on children’s learning.

2.3. Networking, collaboration and educational reform

Internationally, government policies have been faced with the challenge of improving schools, particularly those serving disadvantaged communities. A range of approaches have emerged from additional funding for those schools, as evident in Ireland through the DEIS programme, as well as large scale state and national programmes aimed at directly influencing school policy and practice through networking and collaboration such as reform efforts in Canada, the Netherlands, the U.K., U.S.A., the Middle-east, and Hong-Kong (Chapman and Muijs 2014; Townsend 2015; Chapman et al. 2018; Hargreaves and O’ Connor 2018; Chapman 2019).

Many reform efforts have focused on the individual school or system level and as the limitations of these have become evident in terms of improvement in some but not all schools, a new school improvement paradigm has emerged focusing on collaboration

between schools (Chapman and Muijs 2014). Chapman (2019, p. 554) contends that traditional school improvement initiatives stemming from ‘top-down policies’, while demonstrating some impact, have not succeeded in addressing inequity and performance between ‘high and low socioeconomic schools’. This may in part be due to the fact that highly rigid, bureaucratic educational policy lacks the flexibility inherent in networks as an organisational structure to respond to rapidly changing and emerging social issues (Townsend 2015). Different approaches have therefore emerged in education policy internationally to reform through networking and collaboration as education systems strive to improve teaching and learning (Azorín 2020). Harris and Jones (2018) assert that ‘big data’ from comparative assessments, such as PISA, while illuminating in evaluating policies and interventions, has led to the prevalence of a ‘top down’ approach to improvement and change in education characterised by ‘accountability, standardization and competition’ (Harris et al. 2018, p. 2). Critics of this approach, labelled, GERM – Global Education Reform Movement, (Sahlberg 2011; Harris et al. 2018) claim that it is associated with a move to privatise education and exerts a ‘tight grip’ over education policy development in many countries. Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan (2016, p. 7) observe that neither top down nor bottom up reforms alone work and call for ‘blended top-down and bottom-up forces’. Many scholars on networks and collaboration in education (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Hargreaves and O’Connor 2018; Harris et al. 2018; Azorín 2020) advocate for more sustainable school and system level reform encapsulating professional learning based on peer learning and inquiry, collective action and agency, collaboration and partnership with multiple stakeholders and less hierarchical models of educational governance with lateral connections that link ‘upwards and downwards’ within the system, otherwise known as ‘leading from the middle’ (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p. 19). Stoll (2010) reminds us, however, that for systemic change, capacity building must take place at all levels of the system simultaneously from the individual level of teachers, to the level of schools and systems. As such, networks have emerged as instruments of reform and innovation both within schools themselves, at local government or district level and at whole systems level (Chapman and Aspin 2003; Hopkins 2003; Harris 2010; Muijs et al. 2011; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016).

Networks in education hold the potential to develop more organic forms of system level change, through collaboration and partnership, particularly by strengthening connections

in the middle tier (OECD 2015) in order to facilitate greater interaction between schools on the ground and policy makers and system leaders at national level. Networks hold capacity to support innovation and development in education through dissemination of ‘good practice’ between schools in a climate of reduced meso-level support for schools from local education authorities, school districts, local universities and other agencies (Hopkins 2003). As well as playing an important role at the outset of the ‘change process’, networks can provide support once the process is well established (ibid). Chapman and Aspin (2003, p. 654) observe that networks have the capacity to ‘strengthen interconnections and spread innovation across all levels- the micro, meso and macro-levels’. They also highlight the potential networks hold to assemble policy, resource and practical dimensions of educational reform. In essence, networks are an opportunity to change the environment in which policy makers work as well as for the educational environment and system to become ‘recultured’ to operate in a more collaborative, interconnected multi-agency fashion (ibid). Hargreaves (2003) proposes that networks offer a platform for an innovative system of education based on a mix of vertical-central and lateral-local reform strategies necessary for transformation. Such policies enable both the generation and transfer of knowledge ‘across institutional boundaries and the wider system’ (Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a, p.309). Writing about the essential features of effective networks, Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan (2016, p. 17) contend that effective networks can be powerful forces to change entire education systems, not just for improvements in teaching and learning, by enhancing partnerships between local networks and central leadership. This entails developing a mind-set of ‘system leadership’ and taking responsibility for the learning of other groups, serving as boundary spanners between groups, creating opportunities for cross-sectional collegial inquiry, discussion and decision making and becoming better partners laterally and vertically with system leaders (ibid). Chapman (2019) details how the involvement of middle-tier organisations in Regional Improvement Collaborations (RICs) in Scotland extends the traditional boundaries by including school staff, university researchers, local authorities and non-government agencies i.e., community groups, charities or commercial enterprises.

In tandem with debate in educational policy discourse on school and system reform, the devolution of central government structures in countries such as the U.S.A. and the U.K. has led to greater focus on collaboration and partnership in the delivery of services and greater joined up governance between public sector bodies (Muijs et al. 2011). The

restructuring of education systems has also led to a move away from more hierarchical and bureaucratic modes of operation. As governments in OECD countries recognised limitations of centralised policy to motivate school improvement, they looked for alternative models to coordinate education systems such as multi-level governance involving a move away from hierarchical relationships between schools and national government and enabling greater interaction between multiple actors at different levels of the system (Burns and Koster 2016; Ehren and Perryman 2018). Educational networks and network governance are thus perceived as ‘profoundly changing the structure of education systems and the role of governments in school improvement reform’ (Ehren and Perryman 2018, p. 3). At European level, we see the potential of education networks to develop positive interaction, effective relationships and communication between various stakeholders being recognised by the European Commission (European Commission 2018a, p. 3) with various case studies of networks across EU Member States highlighted (ibid) and guidelines for policy development on the principles and use of networks in education systems outlined (European Commission 2018b). This reflects the strong networking trend in European education systems and signals a significant investment in education networks in Europe (Azorín 2020).

2.4. Networking, collaboration and teacher professional learning

Much of the literature emphasises the potential of networks and other forms of collaboration to enhance TPL to support school and system reform in order to improve student outcomes. Recent literature highlights the significance and urgency of enhancing TPL globally to move beyond conventional schooling and equip teachers with the pedagogical knowledge and skills to respond to the demands of 21st century schooling and to prepare students for 21st century life. Drawing on learning from OECD research, Schleicher (2016, p. 11) observes that demands on student learning in the 21st century have ‘profound implications’ for both teachers and teaching. Not only do teachers have to continuously update their knowledge base, they also increasingly have to work in multicultural settings, integrate children with special needs, be ‘assessment literate’, take on leadership roles, work in teams and work in partnership with parents. Their ‘formal, measurable skills’ (human capital) alone will not be sufficient and must be complemented by ‘intangible qualities’ such as motivation and self-efficacy. These qualities can be enhanced as teachers improve performance and effectiveness through professional

development (ibid). Others reflect on the progressively more complex nature of society and the myriad of pervasive challenges faced including societal inequity, income poverty, health inequality, the climate crisis, migration, unemployment and the technological divide and the subsequent implications for the field of education and educational leaders (Stoll 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Fullan 2019; Brown and Flood 2020). Such challenges have also influenced the emergence of networks and collaboration in education as they are far too great for individual schools to tackle alone and a more ‘divergent’ (Stoll 2010, p. 472) approach to professional learning is required (Stoll 2010; Díaz-Gibson et al. 2016; Brown and Flood 2020).

Results from the aforementioned TALIS and PISA emphasise the importance of collaborative TPL activity in order to meet the needs of 21st century learners. TALIS 2018 highlighted the need for greater school and system level continuing professional development for teachers and principals, grounded in peer learning, enquiry and collaborative practice through networks, PLCs and CoPs (OECD 2019). PISA results indicate that high performing countries enhance the knowledge base and professional qualifications of teachers and involve them in teacher professional development, particularly teacher collaboration (OECD 2017).

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) provide some insight as to why collaborative professional learning activity may be significant in terms of student outcomes and innovative practice in their landmark text ‘Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School’. Professional capital comprises 1) *human capital* i.e., knowledge and skills, 2) *social capital* i.e., cultures and networks of communication, learning, trust and collaboration, and 3) *decisional capital* i.e., capacity to make professional judgements based on practice experience and reflection (ibid, p. 88-96). In order for teachers to increase their human capital and decisional capital, it is essential to build social capital within and across schools through team work, cultures and networks of communication, learning, trust and collaboration. Social capital enhances teachers’ knowledge through access to the human capital of others, expands teachers’ networks of influence and opportunity and helps to develop resilience in the form of advocates who they can turn to for advice (ibid, p. 90). It is also a key element in decisional capital which is fostered by ‘drawing on the insights and experiences’ (ibid, p. 93) of colleagues in making professional judgements. Similarly, Stoll (2010, p. 473) argues that in learning communities, dialogic processes assist members to articulate and explore tacit knowledge as assumptions are examined and

challenged. As new ideas and practices are created, existing knowledge is enhanced or transferred and collective intelligence is ‘harnessed’. In their research on PLNs in England, Brown and Flood (2020, p. 132), assert that capacity is built initially in the networks by helping members create and share knowledge about specific educational problems and to innovate or develop novel responses. Members then ‘broker’ this new knowledge or innovations to colleagues within their own schools.

The literature identifies many varied forms of collaborative professional learning activity in education including networks (Lieberman 1999; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Muijs et al. 2011; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2015), PLCs (Stoll 2010; Harris et al. 2018) and CoPs (Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). The particular allure of networks, Rincón-Gallardo (2020, p. 150) contends, lies in: 1) their capacity to leverage resources and knowledge to improve education practice and performance, 2) the power of social interaction and collaboration to impact team creativity and organisational performance and 3) their subsequent potential to develop ‘ground-breaking inventions and innovation’ in response to complex problems. While there is increasing clarity about what effective collaboration in networks in education looks like (ibid), Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018, p. 4) caution that not all forms of collaboration in education are ‘desirable or effective’, appropriate or suitable to the particular endeavour. They advocate for ‘collaborative professionalism’ in which people collaborate ‘more professionally’ and work as a profession in a more collaborative way (ibid). The gaze of recent international research and literature on networks in education (Azorín and Muijs 2017; Azorín 2020; Azorín et al. 2020; Brown and Flood 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020) has now shifted to address features of effective networks, as well as questions of leadership of school networks, and the role it plays in their development as effective vehicles for school improvement and innovation. Recent literature (Azorín and Muijs 2017; Azorín 2020; Azorín et al. 2020; Brown and Flood 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020) claims that the models, processes and interactions involved in school networks have been well documented. However, there is a gap in the research and literature on school networks in Ireland, and this thesis attempts to address the same.

Having discussed key international policy and debate in relation to networks and collaboration internationally, let us now turn to key developments in the Irish landscape that are pertinent to this research.

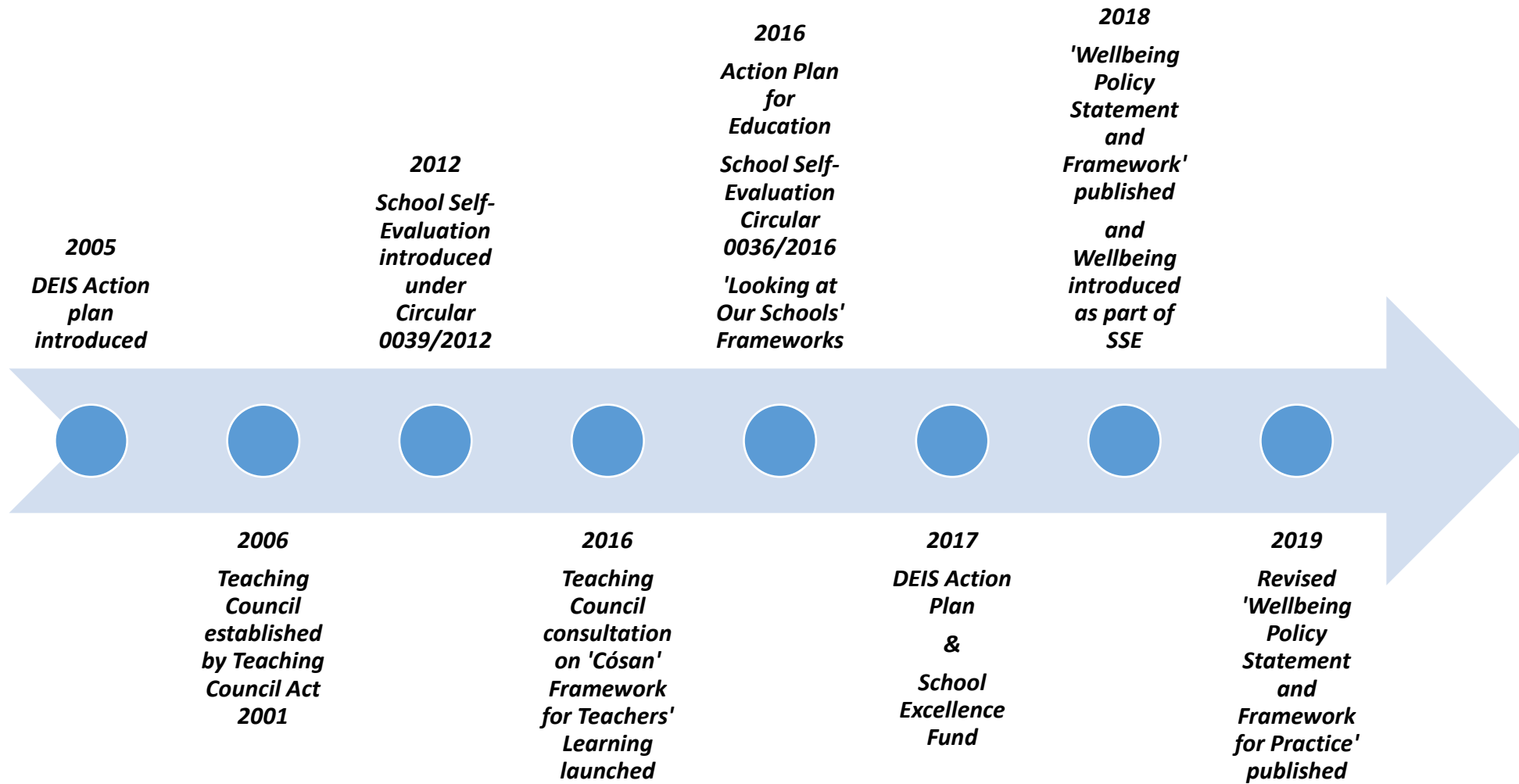
2.5. Developments in Irish educational policy and practice that have influenced networking and collaboration

In Ireland, we see the permeation of the concerns of international educational policy discourse in a number of key policy developments in recent years, with collaboration, networking and peer learning becoming embedded in policy and practice, particularly regarding TPL, equity in education, wellbeing in schools, school leadership, school self-evaluation and improving quality, excellence and innovation in schools. While the DoE have implemented various initiatives to address the needs of children experiencing disadvantage for over fifty years (Ryan and Lannin 2021), including the Home School Community Liaison Scheme introduced in 1990, the introduction of the DEIS programme in 2005 was significant as it consolidated existing provision and introduced a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage in schools. Substantial research has been conducted on the DEIS SSP and is discussed in Chapter Five.

Policy developments of particular importance for networking and collaboration since 2005 for the DEIS schools networks that are the subject of this research include: Cosán, the Teaching Council Framework for Teacher Professional Learning (2016); the DEIS Action Plan (2017) and Education Action plans (2018 & 2019); School Self-Evaluation (SSE) (2012 & 2016) and the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework (2019). Figure 1 below details the key policy developments since the introduction of the DEIS programme in 2005.

Not only are these policies important in terms of emphasising networking and collaboration for TPL, significantly, as analysis of the research findings reveals, they also include policies that the PLUS and OSCAILT networks have supported the DEIS schools involved to implement over the years. The discussion chapter will reflect on the manner in which the networks support the implementation of policies with a particular focus on TPL, SSE and wellbeing, which will also be discussed below.

Figure 1. Timeline of relevant policy developments in Ireland



2.5.1. Cosán: Framework for Teachers' Learning

The Teaching Council published 'Cosán: Framework for Teacher's Learning' (2016), following a lengthy consultation process with a view to producing professional standards in 2020. This is a significant policy document regarding teachers' learning of relevance to this research. Cosán recognises four different dimensions to teachers learning:

1. Formal / informal
2. Personal / professional
3. Collaborative / individual
4. School-based / external to the school or workplace.

A variety of different learning processes through which teachers learn are acknowledged, underpinned by the core concept of reflective practice, a central component of successful TPL for educational change and reform that is rooted in collaborative practice, and founded on inquiry, reflection and dialogue (Stoll 2010; Hargreaves and O' Connor 2018). Here we can see that in comparison to 'top down' approaches, the Teaching Council is promoting more collaborative forms of teacher learning. This approach is also evident in other relevant policies such as the SSE guidelines (2016), which will be discussed below.

The learning processes outlined in 'Cósan' include: 1) mentoring/coaching, 2) practice and collaboration, 3) research, reading and professional contributions, 4) immersive professional activities and 5) courses, programmes and other events (Teaching Council 2016, pp. 15-17). Networking, as envisaged in this research, would most likely fit under 2) practice and collaboration, as members are 'Sharing experiences with colleagues through making presentations or otherwise contributing to the knowledge base of teaching and learning' (2016, p. 17). In order to capture the breadth of teachers' learning Cosán identifies the following learning areas: 1) Leading learning, 2) Inclusion, 3) Wellbeing, 4) ICT, 5) Literacy and numeracy and 6) Supporting teachers learning (2016, pp. 18-19). Areas 1, 2, 3 and 6 are of particular salience to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks, as the findings indicate that the networks have supported network members' learning in these specific areas and the discussion chapter will explore this in greater detail.

2.5.2. Government Action Plans on Education and DEIS Action Plan

The most recent Irish government Action Plans on education (2016 - 2019) reference networks and clusters of schools. The 2016 plan heralded the new DEIS Action Plan in 2017, including a new School Support Programme and ‘improved support for school leadership, creating networks and clusters for teachers and schools, better integration between the work of schools and local community supports and greater use of the Home School Community Liaison programme’ (DES 2016 a, p. 29).

The School Excellence Fund (SEF) was identified as a specific action (Action 67) to ‘promote excellence and innovation in the context of available resources’ (ibid, p. 36). The SEF and networks and clusters, in the context of goals to improve outcomes for learners experiencing educational disadvantage, quality and innovation, continued to feature in the 2017-2019 plans. Action 37.1 (DoE 2017 a, p. 37) indicated that a ‘trial’ of SEF for DEIS schools would be introduced and subsequent plans highlight a second and third iteration of the initiative.

The DEIS Action Plan (DoE 2017 b, p. 32) also references networks and clusters of schools, with Action 22 indicating a SEF strand ‘designed to support new approaches to delivering improved learning outcomes in DEIS schools’ and Action 23 highlighting a trial of clusters or School Support Programme schools and external partners’ in ‘areas of greatest challenge’ (ibid). Additionally the DEIS Action Plan states that:

The establishment of networking initiatives has been shown to support schools in effecting improvement. Schools will be encouraged to use existing networks or to create new networks, with a particular focus on linking with schools with a track record of excellence, on establishing links between primary and post-primary schools, and where appropriate, including partnerships with third-level specialists in education and/or relevant industry or community groups’ (DoE 2017 b, p. 30).

This statement is of salience for this research as the PLUS and OSCAILT networks are existing networks with a twenty year track record in supporting DEIS schools that have established links between primary and post-primary via OSCAILT and have included a third level partner (MIC) as well as other educational stakeholders such as the DoE, which was a member of OSCAILT until 2019. Chapters Seven to Ten will discuss the impact of the same.

School Self-Evaluation, introduced in 2012, is another key policy area emphasising collaborative teacher practices in Irish schools. Circulars 0039/2012 (DoE 2012) and 0039/2016 (DoE 2016) set out the requirements of primary schools for phase one (2012-2015) and two (2016-2020) of self-evaluation of Teaching and Learning. SSE is envisaged as a ‘collaborative, reflective process of internal school review focused on school improvement’ (DoE 2016 b, p.2) with schools required to develop and implement plans for literacy, numeracy (following the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011 and new Primary Language Curriculum in 2016) and other areas of Teaching and Learning as identified by schools themselves. In tandem with the guidelines, schools are advised to refer to the Teaching and Learning section of ‘Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary & Post Primary Schools’ (LAOS document).

DEIS schools complete three year DEIS plans under the programme, which are considered school improvement plans for the purposes of SSE (DoE 2016 b, p. 4) i.e., they do not need to complete two separate plans. These plans relate to literacy, numeracy, attendance/retention, parent involvement and wellbeing. Drawing on a ‘wide body of research that suggests that excellence in teaching is the most powerful influence on pupil achievement’ (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b, p.16), the guidelines articulate a view of ‘schools as dynamic learning organisations’ where teachers should work ‘individually and collectively to build their professional capacity’ for improvement in teaching and learning. Schools are advised to collate qualitative and quantitative evidence from a variety of sources, including assessment data, teachers, parents and pupils. Additionally, ‘professional reflection’ between teachers is considered a valuable source of gathering evidence, as are collaborative practices among the teachers. This includes team teaching which involves collaborative planning and teaching and professional collaborative review through for example, teacher-to-teacher observation and mentoring. The accompanying LAOS framework aims to set out coherent standards for the domains of 1) Teaching and Learning and 2) Leadership and Management in Irish schools. The quality framework ‘seeks to assist schools to embed self-reflection, reflective practice and responsiveness to the needs of learners in their classroom and other learning settings’ (DoE Inspectorate 2016 c&d, p. 6). Professional development and collaboration between teachers are viewed as critical to this endeavour, as is the conception schools as ‘dynamic learning organisations’ (ibid, p. 7) in which teachers ‘are enabled to work individually and collaboratively to build their professional capacity in order to support continuous improvement in teaching and learning’ (ibid). Both domains contain a number of

dimensions and standards i.e., ‘stated behaviours and attributes characteristic of an effective, well-functioning school’ (ibid, p. 9). A key stated use of the framework is to support the professional development of teachers and school leaders throughout the system, involving a variety of stakeholders i.e., the DoE support agencies, third level institutions and professional associations. Under each domain there are specific dimensions and accompanying standards that emphasise teacher professional development and collaboration as evidenced in Tables 4 & 5. The SSE Guidelines (2016), DEIS plans and accompanying LAOS documents are of importance for PLUS and OSCAILT not only because they emphasise TPL and collaboration but also because a detailed analysis of the networks indicates that they have contributed to the remit of the schools involved in the areas of Teaching and Learning and Leadership and Management over the last twenty years and this will be explored fully in Chapter Ten.

Table 4. Teaching and Learning Domains and Standards

Domains	Standards
Learner outcomes	Pupils: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enjoy their learning, are motivated to learn, and expect to achieve as learners • have the necessary knowledge and skills to understand themselves and their relationships • demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the primary curriculum • achieve the stated learning objectives for the term and year
Learner experiences	Pupils: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities • grow as learners through respectful interactions and

	<p>experiences that are challenging and supportive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect on their progress as learners and develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning • experience opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning
Teachers' individual practice	<p>The teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has the requisite subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and classroom management skills • selects and uses planning, preparation and assessment practices that progress pupils' learning • selects and uses teaching approaches appropriate to the learning objectives and to pupils' learning needs • responds to individual learning needs and differentiates teaching and learning activities as necessary
Teachers' collective / collaborative practice	<p>Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • value and engage in professional development and professional collaboration • work together to devise learning opportunities for pupils across and beyond the curriculum

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collectively develop and implement consistent and dependable formative and summative assessment practices • contribute to building whole-staff capacity by sharing their expertise
--	---

(DoE Inspectorate 2016 a& b, p. 17)

Table 5. Leadership and Management Domains and Standards

Domains	Standards
Leading learning and teaching	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment • foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each pupil/student • manage the planning and implementation of the curriculum • foster teacher professional development that enriches teachers' and pupils'/students' learning
Managing the organisation	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish an orderly, secure and healthy learning environment, and maintain it through effective communication • manage the school's human, physical and financial resources

	<p>so as to create and maintain a learning organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manage challenging and complex situations in a manner that demonstrates equality, fairness and justice • develop and implement a system to promote professional responsibility and accountability
<p>Leading school development</p>	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicate the guiding vision for the school and lead its realisation • lead the school's engagement in a continuous process of self-evaluation • build and maintain relationships with parents, with other schools, and with the wider community • manage, lead and mediate change to respond to the evolving needs of the school and to changes in education
<p>Developing leadership capacity</p>	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critique their practice as leaders and develop their understanding of effective and sustainable leadership • empower staff to take on and carry out leadership roles • promote and facilitate the development of pupil/student

	<p>voice, pupil/student participation, and pupil/student leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build professional networks with other school leaders
--	---

(DoE Inspectorate 2016 b&c, p. 17)

2.5.3. Wellbeing in schools

In 2018, wellbeing was introduced as a key area of SSE and by 2023, all schools and education centres will be required to use the six-step SSE process with the ‘Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023’ (Government of Ireland 2019). This is reflective of the wider emphasis in educational policy and debate on wellbeing in schools in recent years both internationally (Viac and Fraser 2020) and nationally (Nohilly and Tynan 2019). In Ireland, the ERC is currently developing an evaluation framework for formal TPL (Rawdon et al. 2020) with specific reference to TPL in the area of student wellbeing as provided by the support services of the DoE.

Wellbeing is of particular salience to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks. Not only have the networks supported the schools involved to foster the broader wellbeing of the school community, the research findings reveal that the networks enhance individual wellbeing of members. Wellbeing is also identified by Cosán as a key learning area for teachers. As such, a more detailed discussion of wellbeing at whole school is warranted here and Chapter Four will explore individual teacher wellbeing.

2.5.4. What do we mean by wellbeing and why is it important?

Wellbeing is multidimensional and complex (O’Brien and O’Shea 2017; Cann 2019; Government of Ireland 2019; Nohilly and Tynan 2019; Viac and Fraser 2020) and a multitude of definitions abound in the literature reflecting different psychological, sociological and philosophical orientations on wellbeing and human flourishing across multiple disciplines and fields (O’ Brien and O’ Shea 2017). It is beyond the remit of this thesis to discuss these in detail. For the purposes of this research, definitions that that resonate most clearly with work of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks are included.

The ‘Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023’ (Government of Ireland 2019, p. 10), draws on the World Health Organisation (WHO 2001) definition

to emphasise the multidimensional nature of wellbeing which can change throughout a person's lifespan. This definition encompasses people reaching their potential, resilience, physical wellbeing, sense of purpose, connection and belonging.

Wellbeing is present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life (cited in Government of Ireland 2019, p. 10).

The NCCA (2017, p. 17) assert that wellbeing exists for students when they 'realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of purpose and belonging to a wider community'. The definition of the wellbeing in schools group, comprised of the Teaching Council and Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN), particularly resonated with this research:

In education, wellbeing is a state of mind and being that empowers all members of the school community to fully engage with, and create, opportunities for growth through all aspects of school life, including quality teaching and learning (cited in Tynan and Nohilly 2018, p. 4).

This group also emphasises the realisation of our potential, coping with day to day stresses, living, loving, working productively and fruitfully and helping our communities. They advise that wellbeing is best achieved through internal and external connection, by being active, learning and discovering, achieving a sense of purpose through giving and sharing and noticing the world around us (ibid). A broad perspective of wellbeing must also take ill being or lack of wellbeing into consideration and acknowledge the suffering, unhappiness, arrested development and illness that people may experience throughout their lives (O'Brien and O' Shea 2017). A view of wellbeing as a process of becoming well or state of being well recognises that both co-exist (ibid).

Wellbeing has become prevalent in educational discourse and policy in recent years in recognition of the significant role that schools and teachers play in fostering wellbeing of children, which in turn can impact on their educational achievement and success. Indeed, there have been numerous educational policy developments in Ireland from the early years to junior cycle which incorporate wellbeing, and these have been detailed elsewhere

(Government of Ireland 2019; Nohilly and Tynan 2019). In the context of DEIS schools, fostering wellbeing is arguably of particular importance because research indicates that they have higher concentrations of disadvantage and more complex needs than non DEIS schools, including higher percentages of children who are at a greater risk of not achieving their potential in the education system such as children from Traveller backgrounds, non English speaking backgrounds and children with SEN (Smyth et al. 2015). Notably, the DEIS Action Plan 2017 (Goal 3.5) and the Education Action Plan 2019 (Goal 1.5) prioritise wellbeing supports for DEIS schools and teacher training in the same.

The Wellbeing Framework and Junior Cycle Wellbeing guidelines adopt an ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979) which recognises that whilst wellbeing is experienced at the individual level, it is also experienced in relation to other factors in the wider community and society that can impact on wellbeing. Factors experienced at the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, and in the interactions between them will also have a bearing on individual wellbeing. Many of the factors that pose risks for child wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable children, are external to schools. However, the Framework recognises that schools can impact on the ‘academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development’ of children and their knowledge, skills and competence to cope with challenges in their lives (Government of Ireland 2019, p. 8). Children spend a significant portion of their lives at school and thus, schools can be sources of protective factors that can minimise risk to children’s wellbeing and promote positive mental health through: positive relationships with peers, a sense of belonging, community and connectedness, opportunities for social and emotional learning, opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and self-efficacy, opportunities for success, wellbeing of school personnel, support for children and families in difficulty, development of skills to cope with online technology and to manage stress related to school work (Government of Ireland 2019). The Framework recommends a whole school approach to wellbeing that should focus on ‘strengthening school-based protective factors’ and ‘reducing school-based risk factors’ (ibid, p. 13).

The Framework sets out four areas of wellbeing promotion in schools: 1) culture and environment, 2) curriculum (teaching and learning), 3) policy and planning and 4) relationships and partnerships. By 2023, all schools will be required to consider their existing provision for wellbeing with regards to these four areas and devise and implement a plan for improvement in one key area. As the Wellbeing Statements for Effective Practice (Government of Ireland 2019, p. 46) state the following, it is here that

PLUS and OSCAILT hold the most potential to contribute to wellbeing in schools through the development of bridging social capital (Putnam 2000) and developing partnerships with others, community partnerships and external supports:

- The school establishes the links with feeder schools and fosters strong working relationships to engage in sharing of best practice;
- The school promotes professional networks for principals and teachers;
- The school establishes good links with the Department support services, community-based statutory and voluntary support services and other external agencies.

Additionally, in relation to Wellbeing Statements for Effective Practice for Some and Few, the document also states (2019, p. 47) that:

- At times of transition schools link with other education settings, including early childhood care and education settings, crèches, other primary/post primary schools, Youthreach, Community Education Centres to ensure successful transfers;
- The school promotes teachers' engagement in networks for teacher collaboration;
- The school establishes good links with Department support services, community-based statutory and voluntary support services and other external agencies (for example, the HSE) to support the needs of students with additional and/or complex needs.

A more nuanced understanding of the networks suggests that PLUS and OSCAILT have also supported the Frameworks' conception of a whole school approach to wellbeing from the outset and this will be explored further in the discussion chapter. O'Brien and O'Shea (2017, p. 18) observe that wellbeing 'needs to be tackled in every particular instance where individuals and communities (including students and teachers) struggle to achieve greater levels of success, happiness, fulfilment, health, wholeness'. The aim here is not to infer that children, families and teachers in DEIS schools do not experience success, happiness, fulfilment, health and wholeness, but rather to recognise that DEIS schools are likely to serve more vulnerable children who are at a far greater risk of experiencing poverty, inequality and myriad of social issues. Promotion of whole school wellbeing is therefore particularly salient as a protective factor for students and staff and to further quote O'Brien and O'Shea (2017, p. 18), 'In such instances wellbeing is always "for me,

for you and for us”, taken together and not easily separated’. Indeed, this sentiment is deeply embedded in the ethos and purpose of both PLUS and OSCAILT networks.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the definition of networks adopted in the research and considered key policy developments internationally that have impacted on networking and collaboration, with particular reference to educational reform and change and TPL. Nationally, there have also been a number of important policy developments of relevance for this research. These include the Schools Self-Evaluation Guidelines (2012 and 2016) and DEIS Plans, Cosán (2016) and the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework (2019). Findings from the research indicate that the PLUS and OSCAILT networks have played an important role in supporting schools to implement these same policies. Thus, it was imperative to consider them in terms of the policy dimension of Conceptual Framework adopted in the research. The next chapter will draw more specifically on the literature on school networks to delineate the practice base to the Conceptual Framework.

Chapter 3 - School networks in practice

3.1. Introduction

This chapter draws on the literature on school networks to establish the practice base of the Conceptual Framework for the research. Having outlined the definition of school networks in Chapter One (see 1.2), the rationale for schools to participate in networks is discussed, the key elements in the analysis of networks are outlined and the challenges of school networking are considered. The key elements in the analysis of networks and challenges guided the data collection process, data analysis and write up of the findings in the form of the PLUS and OSCAILT case study reports as presented in Chapters Seven and Eight.

3.2. Rationale for participating in a school network

There are a diversity of reasons why schools become members of networks. Muijs et al. (2011) distinguish a continuum of Voluntary, Intermediate and Coercive networks where schools are coerced or compelled to collaborate by the government or Local Education Authority, or ‘contrived collegiality’ (Hargreaves 1994; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). The networks analysed in this research could be described as follows:

- 1) PLUS Network** – Voluntary. Schools were initially invited to form a network by the TED Project, MIC, to explore issues and identify needs around ‘educational disadvantage’ and to propose practical steps to address the same.
- 2) OSCAILT Network** – Started as Intermediate but evolved into a Voluntary network. Schools formed a network with the TED Project and the Department of Education to support roll out of a specific Dormant Accounts funded initiative to maximise the use of schools facilities for the community. When the funding ceased, the members involved voluntarily decided to stay together.

Whether schools collaborate in networks voluntarily or through some level of coercion or incentivisation (Hadfield and Chapman 2009), it is evident from the definitions above that school networks can offer a means of support to teachers and schools to decrease the sense of isolation experienced by teachers in classrooms, as well decreasing institutional isolation (Hopkins 2003; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010a; Lima 2010). They can also promote the sharing of knowledge, the dissemination of good practice and professional development of teachers (Hopkins 2003). They offer both moral

supports to teachers and schools and can be a means of progressing educational change and reform and can also support schools in responding to intractable social and educational issues that schools may struggle to deal with alone (Hadfield and Chapman 2009).

Schools may choose to become involved in networks because they share a common set of purposes regarding a particular educational improvement that will be most effectively addressed by working collaboratively as a network rather than as separate institutions (McLaughlin et al. 2004). In addition, school networks are perceived by many as an effective means of bringing about educational change or reform through decentralised systems as already seen in the discussion on networks and educational reform.

3.3. Key elements in the analysis of school networks that guided the research

The literature on school networks identifies a number of key areas or elements critical to the analysis and understanding of how the PLUS and OSCAILT networks operate. Drawing from a range of sources (Lieberman 1999; Church et al. 2002; Hopkins 2003; Kerr et al. 2003; McLaughlin et al. 2004; Lieberman and Grolnick 2005; Katz et al. 2008; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a & b; Lima 2010; Muijs et al. 2011; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín and Muijs 2017) the following elements have been identified and will be discussed: composition, structure, purpose, process, dynamics and effectiveness. These elements informed the draft Conceptual Framework (Appendix 1), the research design and analysis of data collected in this research and the structuring of the case study reports presented in Chapters Eight and Nine.

3.3.1. Composition

Composition refers to the membership of a school network which can be internal to a school or comprising of individual teachers, collective actor networks involving whole institutions (Lima 2010) or collective actor networks involving other institutions (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Díaz-Gibson et al. 2016; Azorín and Muijs 2017), as is the case with the TED Project networks which include MIC and in the case of the OSCAILT network, previously the DoE. Collaboration in a network can be vertical i.e., occurring within schools, or horizontal i.e., occurring between schools (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Muijs et al. 2011). External partners can include social and children services, Local

Education Authorities (LEAs), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and external consultants depending on their purpose (Muijs et al. 2011; Díaz-Gibson et al. 2016; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan (2016) argue that the most effective networks form partnerships with students, teachers, families and members of the wider community. External involvement can vary from an external agent acting as the main driver, or in a brokerage role at the outset of a relationship, to being an integral part of the relationship (Muijs et al. 2011). In the case of the OSCAILT and PLUS networks, external involvement can be described as high in that the TED Project established both networks, facilitates, coordinates and performs an administrative function. The DoE was also an external partner of the OSCAILT network until 2019.

There is a general assumption that networks are usually situated in local clusters or a particular local authority but this is not always the case (Muijs et al. 2011). While local networks, such as PLUS and OSCAILT have the advantage of being able to tackle local issues, they are often established for more practical purposes such as links with a specific agency. 'Cross-regional' networks, such as the third TED Project network, Cur le Chéile (not included in this study) tend to be formed based on shared values or belief systems and can be more coherent while lacking in support for local issues (ibid).

3.3.2. Structure

The structure distinguishes a network from other organisational forms (Church et al. 2002; Kerr et al. 2003; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a) and enables bringing people together to organise connections between them (Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a). School networks can be more or less formalised in the way that they manage relationships between members (Muijs et al. 2011). Formalised professional school networks involve hard and soft structures (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a). 'Soft' structures refer to trust, relationships and knowledge of each other which are supplemented by the shared purpose and aims of members. The 'hard' structures are more tangible aspects such as planning meetings and working groups which provide opportunities for joint working and collaboration. Less formalised collaborative networks rely heavily on relationships between individuals (Muijs et al. 2011) or the soft structures which can be highly effective in the sense that problems can be easily and flexibly resolved. However, issues can arise when things are not so easily resolved and it is unclear where responsibility lies or who is accountable. More formalised collaborations with

management structures and formal agreements can decrease such issues but have limited flexibility and can negatively affect the development of trusting relationships (Muijs et al. 2011).

Lima (2010) advocates for a more critical analysis of school networks that examines structural concerns including centralisation or the extent to which relationships and communication are centred on one or more prominent actors or subgroups within a network. Many highlight issues of centralisation/decentralisation as well as bottom-up or top-down development (Church et al. 2002; Muijs et al. 2011; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín 2020). Centralised networks have tighter structures and involve a coordination function whereas decentralised networks are looser federations of people who come together to support, discuss and learn (Liebermann and Grolnick 2005). While the PLUS network emerged in a more ‘bottom-up’ organic way in terms of focus and aims than the OSCAILT network, which was initiated by the DoE and TED for a specific function, both could be described as centralised in terms of coordination and communication.

Structure can influence member participation. More structured networks allow for greater size, communication and geographical spread while less structure can lead to stronger personal relationships (Church et al. 2002). Participation is also affected by top-down or bottom-up nature of the network. The more top-down, highly centralised networks trade off participation for efficiency, speed and leadership and vice-versa (ibid).

Centralisation is helpful for analysing power location and distribution in networks, a topic that Lima (2010) argues is often neglected in educational research. Muijs et al. (2011) note that external involvement and the voluntary or coercive nature of involvement highlight inherent power relation issues arising from the equality or domination of relationships between network partners.

The structural form a network adopts is not always strictly adhered to as this can reduce effectiveness with some networks evolving in style (Lieberman and Grolnik 2005). Effective networks must create ways to engage participants directly in governance and leadership whilst maintaining the flexibility to organise complex, far reaching operations. Mechanisms, roles and structures specifically designed to promote collaboration must be cognisant of achieving greater decentralisation (ibid). More recent research on school networks (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín 2020; Azorín et al. 2020; Brown and Flood 2020) has explored network leadership as a key aspect of their development and

impact on teaching and learning, advocating that the most effective networks have ‘flatter’ power structures involving ‘skilled facilitation’ (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p. 15) and distributed forms of leadership that enable leaders to work collaboratively across organisational levels and boundaries (Azorín et al. 2020).

3.3.3. Purpose

One of the key elements of school networks reflected in the literature is that of shared purpose. There are various reasons why schools and teachers become involved in networks ranging from social and psychological support, to sharing of best practice, capacity building and professional development, to improving academic and social outcomes for students, and for the collaborative pursuit of wider educational reform (Hopkins 2003; Lieberman and Grolnick 2005; Katz et al. 2008; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a&b; Muijs et al. 2011; Azorín and Muijs 2017; Azorín 2020; Azorín et al. 2020; Brown and Flood 2020). Professional networks generally have an explicit or implicit official collective aim or professional goal that members can articulate and a shared commitment to a degree of collective action regarding the same (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a&b). Such ‘networked agency’ (Hadfield and Chapman 2009, p. 6; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 b, p.768) prevents networks from becoming social networks, ‘talking shops’ or clubs of professionals in which a small number of ‘activists provide services for the passive majority’ (Chapman and Hadfield 2010 b).

Hopkins (2003) outlines a typology of innovation networks in education (Table 6) in which levels are differentiated on the basis of the purpose of the network. The basic level involves the sharing of good practice while the highest level conceives of networks ‘as agents of system renewal’ (ibid, p. 160).

Table 6. Purpose based Typology of Networks

Level 1	Groups of teachers coming together based on curricular area or for sharing of good practice.
Level 2	Groups of teachers and schools joining together for the purposes of school improvement with the explicit aim of not just sharing practice but of enhancing teaching and learning throughout a school or groups of schools.
Level 3	Over and above level two, networks could also not just serve the purpose of knowledge transfer and school improvement, but also involve groups of

	stakeholders joining together for the implementation of specific policies locally and possibly nationally.
Level 4	A further extension of this way of working is found when groups of networks (within and outside education) link together for system improvement in terms of social justice and inclusion.
Level 5	Finally, there is the possibility of groups of networks working together not just on a social justice agenda, but also to act explicitly as an agency for system renewal and transformation.

(Hopkins 2003, p. 160).

Members may be attracted to participate in a network on the basis of agreement with its stated purpose such as transforming classroom practices or networks involving educators from different groups or perspectives may collaborate to improve schools prior to developing an ‘all embracing philosophy’ (Lieberman and Grolnick 2005, p. 495). Some networks have a singular focus while others, as in levels four and five of Hopkin’s typology, have a more systemic mission (ibid). Muijs et al. (2011, p. 37) argue that a ‘pure school improvement orientation’ is a limited understanding of the goals of schools networks and they identify practice including school improvement, broadening of opportunities including networking with non-school agencies such as business and social services e.g., full school extend services model, and resource sharing. Azorín (2020) observes that much of the literature on school networks focuses on school improvements in challenging contexts and that studies have shown that they can provide efficient use of human and physical resources in a geographical area, as well as generate professional capital and stimulate innovation and change.

Network purpose can also be distinguished in terms of timescale of the activities undertaken (Muijs et al. 2011). Short-term ‘fixes’ may be aimed at issues of immediate concern with little or no potential for longer term impact. More fundamental changes in school culture or image may take several years to achieve or lead to any noticeable impact. Most strategies fall somewhere in between offering a combination of short and long term development and in many cases, Muijs et al. (2011) note a lack of clarity on the intended duration of the collaboration which can lead to myopic thinking across the network. Network purpose, goals and activities may also be classified on the basis of theoretical approach (ibid), which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Whatever their purpose professional networks in education have an important role to play in the professional identity of those involved (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a&b). Membership can bestow a sense of ‘recognition’, ‘validation’ and being ‘valued’ as well as the opportunity to engage in professional activities and leadership roles they may not have had access to in their respective schools and discussion on networks must recognise the role they can play in ‘creating, building and giving meaning’ to members’ professional identity (Hadfield and Chapman 2009, p. 7). Lima (2010, p.8) cautions against the assumption that educational networks embody a purpose shared by all members, noting the importance of determining, through empirical research, as this research has done, the level of consensus amongst members about their purpose.

3.3.4. Processes/Interactions

The processes and interactions that occur within networks in education are directly related to both the structure and purpose of the network. Kerr et al. (2003) maintain that networks are both a process and structure as they are simultaneously evolving and formal entities. The relationship between process and structure, the relational, determines how networks function in daily practice and create the ‘network dynamic’ (ibid, p. 12). A key challenge in defining the processes and dynamic involved in a network is confusion over and lack of separation between the network structure and networking as an activity (Church et al. 2002).

Chapman and Hadfield (2010 a) differentiate a professional network from a social network on the premise that there are a more limited set of interactions based on specifically designed processes to achieve a professional outcome. These range from shared learning experiences, joint professional development activities and joint working, such as planning together to undertaking collaborative change such as curriculum innovation and practitioner enquiry (ibid). Enquiry is a key mechanism by which some networks address their aims. For others it may be completely absent e.g., networks whose primary function is to exchange information and/or teaching and learning resources (McLaughlin et al. 2004). Leadership and management activities interlink with and coordinate the work of the network.

3.3.5. Internal network processes:

Lima's (2010) classification of the internal network processes of management and leadership, participation, learning and interpersonal relations and trust are helpful in analysis of network process and interaction.

3.3.5.1. Management and leadership

Management refers to the operational and coordination mechanisms in a network from coordination and facilitation of meetings, to the level of formality of meetings and financial issues (Lima 2010) and is vital in keeping participants up to date and engaged in linking them to other networks (Kerr et al. 2003). Management style is important for the development of the network and its participants (Lima 2010) and more recent literature highlights the significance of leadership of school networks to foster collaboration and improve student learning outcomes and calls for more distributed forms of leadership in school networks (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín et al. 2020; Brown and Flood 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020). Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan (2016, p.15) identify 'deliberate leadership' as an essential feature of effective networks, in tandem with 'flat' power structures which can help to find and sustain a common purpose over time and 'create alignment and coherence' (ibid, p. 17) necessary for networks to have impact as well as create the conditions for members to learn. Network leadership entails 'cross-cultural brokering' and brokering resources, including people, as well as creating structures and spaces for people to collaborate and learn together as the norm (Lieberman 1999). Azorín et al. (2020, p. 114) define network leadership as the 'coordination process' of many individuals with different roles, from different institutions which involves facilitating working together for 'common alliance purposes' and coordination of common activity. Drawing on Meehan and Reinhalt (2012) they outline leadership related strategies including building social capital, catalysing community engagement, changing hearts and minds, mobilising more people to the cause, stimulating creativity and innovation, bringing projects to scale and transforming systems and fostering greater equity. For cultural transformation at systemic level leadership in school networks can involve negotiating with local and regional educational authorities to reduce 'institutional constraints' to 'change what gets in the way' of 'culture-shifting work' (Rincón Gallardo 2020, p. 156). 'Skilled facilitation' is significant for effective networks to flourish and those who lead them should model and facilitate learning and leadership (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). In the early stages, an external facilitator can help develop and cultivate collaboration, and guide 'difficult conversations'. For networks more

systemic in nature the presence of ‘senior leaders’ can signal the level of importance of collaboration and participation of individuals ‘across layers of the system’ can help to embed collaboration in the ‘culture of the system’ (ibid, p. 15).

3.3.5.2. Participation

The nature of participation in networks distinguishes it from other organisational forms and ‘talking shops’ and ‘clubs’ that involve ‘networking’ (Hadfield and Chapman 2009, p. 6). Kerr et al. (2003, p. 8) identify three forms of network participation relevant to this research:

1. Contribution (action) in which participants provide inputs;
2. Organisation (process) in which people organise themselves to participate and attempt to exert influence;
3. Empowerment (values) in which people are empowered through the act of participation.

The key challenge lies in how to build and blend these types of participation and sustain them during the lifecycle of the network (ibid). Encouraging participation can be complex and will be affected by school leaders’ and teachers’ capacity (Azorín and Muijs 2017) and motivation (Hadfield and Chapman 2009) to engage, which can range from access to support, information and keeping abreast of new developments and professional opportunities to do things not otherwise available, to the more idealistic and abstract (ibid). Understanding participation in school networks requires knowledge of both network members and the organisations they represent (Lima 2010). For the most part, participants tend to be school managers or teachers with specific coordination responsibilities in their school, and this is evident in both PLUS and OSCAILT. A general assumption is that members serve as a bridge between the network and others in their organisation who are not directly involved in network activity. The level of ‘connectedness’ in network member schools will influence the impact of the network, particularly for networks aimed at educational change and innovative practice (Lima 2010).

3.3.5.3. Learning

Learning is generally a core component of school networks and they are viewed as having potential to supplement school based learning and learning via formal courses by creating opportunities to network, collaborate and learn with peers from other schools and to build social capital (Kools and Stoll 2016). Networks are critical to teacher professional development and capacity building for school improvement as they create a structure for teachers to come together and learn, share learning and collaborate in a rich professional learning environment that may not be available to them in small, isolated context of individual schools (Brown and Flood 2020). Learning in networks can occur on the basis of participants sharing of experience or the transmission of ‘decontextualised expert’ knowledge (Lima 2010, p. 13). For collaboration in networks to be effective, frequent focussed interaction and engagement are essential for members to share, consolidate and refine knowledge as well as explore new ideas and practices (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). Sharing, exchange, dialogue and collaboration can create ‘new and meaningful knowledge’ and help transform tacit into explicit knowledge (Kools and Stoll 2016, p. 51), which is a key feature of knowledge exchange in both Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice.

Encompassing multiple perspectives from across the school community and external stakeholders is important for learning in networks (McLaughlin et al. 2004). Maintaining outward connections helps to access expertise or new ideas and to avoid the ‘echo chamber’ phenomenon or constant circulation of outdated ideas or practices (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). Such ‘networked learning’ creates opportunities to share and create knowledge and innovation which is also important for collaboration and synergy ‘across school boundaries’ and enables ‘double-loop learning’ in which the knowledge base of other stakeholders, i.e., universities or other agencies, is also enhanced (Kools and Stoll 2016 p. 21).

3.3.5.4. Interpersonal relations and trust

Interpersonal relations and trust i.e., the ‘soft’ structures of a network (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a&b), are the informal ‘hidden’ relationships that are just as important as formal ones in a network and critical network success and understanding how they operate (McLaughlin et al. 2004; Kerr et al. 2003; Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). Frequent interaction is important for the development of effective networks as it ‘consolidates group norms and forms of

behaviour' (Rincón- Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p. 16), leading to high levels of trust and a strong sense of responsibility to the group or 'internal accountability'. Building trust takes time but it is vital for learning to take place as members need to have a high level of trust in the group to 'bring their guard down', acknowledge gaps in their own knowledge and to develop the openness required for learning to take place (ibid). In order for teachers to have open and honest conversations about what works or otherwise, they need to feel safe exposing their vulnerabilities (Bryk and Schneider 2003). Trust also strengthens the connections required for shared work and collaboration to take place (Kools and Stoll 2016; Herrera-Pastor et al. 2020). Hadfield and Chapman (2009, p. 26) advise that those who wish to establish networks with those in leadership will need to build up enough trust and mutual knowledge between leaders in order for them to feel comfortable 'being challenged and challenging others'. An external facilitator, respected by all involved can help to facilitate a process that leads to a long term process of building trust.

Trust is built initially through establishing quality relationships, by bringing people together based on shared values and a common understanding of the aims and purpose of the network and also on the premise that their voice and participation matters (Liebermann 1999; Kerr et al. 2003; McLaughlin et al. 2004). This type of activity is intentional and a key aspect of the structures and processes of the network. Effective communication between network members, particularly face-to-face, has been identified as vital for generation of trust (Kerr et al. 2003; Lima 2010; Herrera-Pastor et al. 2020). Collaboration is also essential to the development of interpersonal relations and trust as it encourages the development of communication, negotiation and accommodation skills (Lieberman 1999). Kools and Stoll (2016, p.56) observe that 'networked learning organisations' should not only pay attention to building and maintaining trusting relationships, but should also be flexible to changing needs amongst members and in the environment.

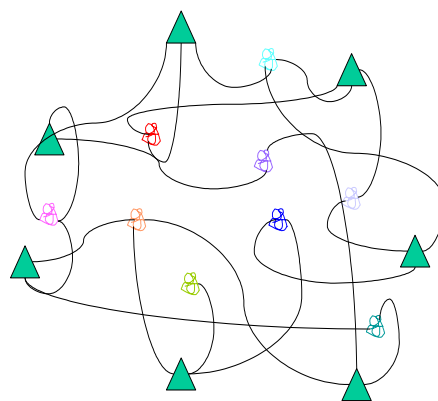
3.3.6. Dynamics

The network dynamic refers to how networks function in daily practice and is considered to be a product of the interplay between the different network components. Strong relationships, a shared agenda and high levels of trust are the foundation for the internal dynamics of effective networks and create the momentum required for the work of

networks to take place (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). However, the evidence base on causal connections between network dynamics, improved student outcomes, increased professional capital and enhanced educational systems is in the early stages (Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016).

Church et al.'s (2002) model and image of threads, knots and nets (Figure 2) is helpful for depicting the dynamics of PLUS and OSCAILT as it specifically reflects the interplay of relationships, trust, communication and network activity. The triangles represent network members, the threads represent the interpersonal relations, trust, and communication and the knots represent what network members do together – the joint activity based on shared purpose such as collaboration and learning. The interplay of these components gives the network structure and dynamism. The network coordinator or facilitator keeps the net in good order and notices which knots are best for what as well as fraying threads which they seek to renew. The net is the structure constructed through the interplay of the interpersonal relations and joint activity which is created by participants and provides solidarity without loss of identity. It is also expansive enough to include new participants without losing the common purpose. Therefore, the structure is light rather than inhibiting. The knots strengthen the threads, connecting members through shared activity, which in turn creates greater trust, community and relationship.

Figure 2. Nodes, threads, knots and nets



Church et al. (2002, p. 16).

Church et al. (2002) claim that this concept encapsulates and allows for diversity, coherence and capacity for growth without losing sight of the action of the network. Additionally, the model portrays the dynamic, responsive, evolving, ‘messy’ and complicated nature inherent in a network.

3.3.7. Effectiveness

Determining the effectiveness of school networks, particularly those specifically focused on improving teaching and learning, is problematic and the literature suggests that the recent proliferation of school networks as an educational policy in this domain has happened with greater speed than the development of the evidence base for same (Lima 2010; Azorín and Muijs 2017; Azorín et al. 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020).

While monitoring and evaluation should be a core element of the structure and process of school networks (Kerr et al. 2003; Hadfield and Chapman 2009), assessing the impact of network activity on a classroom, school or community is quite complex. Hadfield and Chapman (2009) and Chapman and Hadfield (2010 a) caution against such basic causal inference due to the infrastructural nature of networks as an organisational form which is based on connections between a disperse group of actors engaging in multiple interactions. Lima (2010) supports this assertion about causality, identifying a number of more specific questions in the analysis of network effectiveness. For example, how does the network affect the actions of its members and of those with whom they interact; how strong is the evidence of tangible outcomes in classrooms as a result of network activity; to what extent do networks have mechanisms in place to check if network activity cascades back to schools and classrooms? Chapman and Hadfield (2010 a, p. 314) and Hadfield and Chapman (2009, p. 9) identify a range of ‘proxy indicators’ which lend support to more the more general assumption that networks impact on pupils and classrooms such as change in teacher attitudes, knowledge and practice. In an effort to provide ‘clarity and precision’ on patterns of interaction that characterise effective networks, Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan (2016, p. 8) identify a framework of eight essential features to guide the development of networks at local and systematic level that they argue apply to multiple configurations and multiple contexts as well as networks that collaborate to tackle local problems or are aimed at whole system improvement. Some of these features have been cited already and include:

1. Focussing on ambitious student learning outcomes linked to effective pedagogy;
2. Developing strong relationships of trust and internal accountability;
3. Continuously improving practice and systems through cycles of collaborative inquiry;
4. Using deliberate leadership and skilled facilitation within flat power structures;
5. Frequently interacting and learning inwards;
6. Connecting outwards to learn from others;
7. Forming new partnership among students, teachers, families, and communities;
and
8. Securing adequate resources to sustain the work.

(Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p .10).

While the organic, small scale networks in this research do not specifically focus on student learning outcomes and effective pedagogy, and do not therefore involve ‘cycles of collaborative inquiry’ (ibid) to improve practice, the other characteristics resonate with the purpose and outcomes of the networks and will be reflected upon throughout the discussion.

3.4. Challenge of participating in a school network

While there are undoubtedly many benefits for schools from participating in networks, the literature tends to present participation rather indiscriminately bestowing an ‘uncontested legitimacy’ (McLaughlin et al. 2004, p. 44; O’Brien et al. 2006; Lima 2010) that detracts from a more rigorous analysis. Such an approach would encompass an analysis of the factors outlined above as well as emphasising ‘the dark side’ of networks (Lima 2010, p. 15), which will now be explored.

Chapman and Hadfield (2010 a) and Lieberman (1999) identify network membership and constitution as problematic. Liebermann (1999), Chapman and Hadfield (2010 a) and Azorín and Muijs (2017) highlight issues of inclusivity and exclusivity and giving new members and other stakeholders the opportunity to experience and learn from being part of networks. Lima (2010) and O’Brien et al. (2006) highlight issues of dysfunctionality in patterns of behaviour from the original network purpose e.g., the development of cliques. Networks can also develop ‘opportunistic’ behaviour potentially monopolising funding sources (Lima 2010). Tightly knit networks with high levels of density and

connectedness run the risk of insularity, group-think and excessive dependence on effective leaders resulting in lower levels of overall network effectiveness (Lima 2010). Chapman and Hadfield (2010 a) highlight the inherent tension between volunteerism and conscription noting that the most successful networks involve volunteers who chose to join or set up the network and those in which members are coerced have little chance of sustainability beyond incentives or inducement.

Issues of representation and network members' connectedness to their own school have already been referred to above. Networks comprised of solely middle or senior level school leaders as opposed to classroom teachers can lead to primacy of a managerial perspective on teaching and learning issues which in turn can lead to the 'bureaucratization of pedagogy' (Lima 2010, p. 16).

Finally, a critical issue regarding the challenges of networks is the lack of research and analysis on poor or weak networks and the structural features and process management patterns that lead to network failure (McLaughlin et al. 2004; Lima 2010).

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter articulates the practice base to the school networks underpinning this research and explores in detail the key elements in the analysis of school networks in the literature that guided and informed the data collection and early stages of analysis. Much of the literature is specifically related to networks of schools established with the remit of improving teaching and learning in order to raise achievement outcomes for students. The PLUS and OSCAILT networks developed more organically and are broader in focus, albeit with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for students. Analysing the TED networks in the same way as school networks focused on improvements in student achievement outcomes in standardised tests would not be appropriate. Nonetheless, the key elements of school networks are quite relevant in illuminating how the networks evolved and developed over time, how they operate in practice, can best be described and how they contribute to learning and knowledge creation. Although the aim of the research is not to evaluate the effectiveness of the networks, it will contribute to the evidence base on the practice of networking between schools in challenging circumstances.

Chapter 4 - Understanding the role of Social Capital in Teacher Professional Learning and the Social Learning Theory of Communities of Practice

4.1. Introduction

This chapter details the theoretical background to the research. In developing the Conceptual Framework (see section 10.3), it became evident that a variety of theoretical approaches would need to be considered. Once the data collection commenced, it was very clear that relationships and connections were critical to the development and success of the networks. This was confirmed by the different stages of analysis and, as such, the lens of social capital theory was adopted to illuminate how the process of networking creates opportunities for the development of individual and collective social capital through interaction with those in similar roles and the advantages that accrue from the same at both the individual and collective level for the network as a group. The lens of Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger 2010; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger- Trayner 2015; Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015) offers a more nuanced understanding of the way in which learning takes place through social interaction within the PLUS and OSCALIT networks and was applied to understand how sustained mutual engagement and peer interaction as well as sharing of practice lead to learning, the creation of knowledge and a shared sense of identity relevant to network members' roles.

This chapter provides an overview of social capital reflecting on the importance of the same for TPL, collaboration, innovation and school reform. The role of trust in building social capital and the value of the concept for linking the micro level of members' individual experiences to the meso and macro levels are explained. Finally, the 'dark side' or negative consequences of the concept are considered. Subsequently, Communities of Practice and Wenger's social learning theory are outlined, and a definition of CoPs and the key elements of domain, community and practice are detailed. Identity and boundary are central concepts to CoPs and are considered, as are the challenges of CoPs. The chapter then outlines how these two theoretical areas informed the research. Drawing on literature on teacher wellbeing, an area that is becoming more established in recognition of its importance for whole school wellbeing, the role that supportive and collaborative

TPL, founded on bonding social capital within the ‘safe space’ (Wenger 1998, p. 37) of CoPs, can play in enhancing teacher wellbeing is then explored, with particular reference to job resources (Viac and Fraser 2020) that they provide and building self-efficacy for participants.

4.2. Social capital theory

Social capital has become increasingly influential in educational research in recent years and widely applied to explain the persistence of inequality in educational outcomes most notably by Bourdieu (1997) (see Chapter Five) and Coleman (1997). Research and literature pertinent to this study draws on social capital theory to examine teacher and school leader social or professional networks and the diffusion of knowledge and innovative practice in school reform and educational change initiatives (Leana and Pil 2006; Coburn and Russell 2008; Jones and Harris 2014; Moolenaar et al. 2014 Bridwell – Mitchell and Cooc 2016; Slegers et al. 2019), TPL and professional learning communities (Mulford 2010; Stoll 2010; Johnson et al. 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Johnson 2012; Coburn et al. 2013; Nolan and Molla 2018), collaboration between teachers (Moolenaar 2012) and collaboration and networking between schools (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Muijs et al. 2011).

Social capital theory helps to understand how PLUS and OSCAILT operate at the individual level by fore fronting resources available to teachers through social interaction with colleagues (Coburn and Russell 2008), illuminating the development of trusting relationships and peer support between members. At the collective level the advantages that accrue from these resources (Slegers et al. 2019) are highlighted such as how trusting relationships enable collective action and the pursuit of shared goals and support collaborative professional learning.

4.2.1. Definition of social capital and important aspects

Despite various well known conceptualisations (Burt 1992; Bourdieu 1997; Coleman 1997; Portes 1998; Lin 1999; Putnam 2000) there is general consensus that social capital refers to resources residing in social networks (Li 2015) and investment in embedded resources or assets in social networks with expected returns (Lin 1999).

Putnam's (2000) work resonates most clearly with this research. In his landmark book, 'Bowling Alone', he demonstrates how civic engagement through formal associations can influence social integration and individual well-being (Lee 2014). Social capital is defined as:

... connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam 2000, p. 19).

For Putnam, trust and reciprocity are key elements that arise from social networks, with networks and norms being the primary ingredients of social capital (Field 2003, p. 32). Putnam distinguishes between two forms of social capital – bridging, which brings people together across diverse social divisions and bonding, which reinforces exclusive identities and maintains homogeneity. Bonding social capital is beneficial for 'mobilising solidarity' while serving as a 'sociological superglue' in maintaining in-group loyalty and reinforcing specific identities (Field 2003, p. 32). Bridging social capital provides a 'sociological WD-40' that can 'generate broader identities and reciprocity' (Putnam 2000, p. 22-3). These two forms of social capital are of particular relevance to this research which views the main effects of social capital as the information, influence and solidarity which accrue to members of a 'collectivity' (bonding social capital) and to individuals and collectives in their relations to other actors (bridging social capital) (Kwon and Adler 2014, p. 412).

Grootaert et al. (2004, p.4) identify a third form of social capital, 'linking' social capital, which refers to one's ties to those in positions of authority and connects people across 'power differentials' to key political and other resources and economic institutions. Whereas bridging social capital is conceptualised as horizontal in nature connecting people with 'equal social standing' (ibid), linking social capital is vertical. Grootaert et al. (2004) maintain it is central to wellbeing, especially for poorer communities, and local leaders and intermediaries can facilitate connections between these communities and external assistance e.g., government programmes. In TPL linking social capital can connect schools and learning communities to the wider educational landscape including district, regional and national bodies, training bodies or HEIs (Mulford 2010; Stoll 2010).

There are a number of dimensions and aspects of social capital. It is relational and reciprocal (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Baron et al. 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002) and can be attributed to both individual and collective actors (Baron et al. 2001; Adler and Kwon 2002). The source from which social capital is derived i.e., social networks and social relationships, is differentiated from the resource itself (Portes 1998; Kwon and Adler 2014; Lee 2014). Social capital consists of intangible assets (Slegers et al. 2019) or potential resources, the ‘mobilization’ of which is dependent on the ‘ability, aptitude or motivation’ (Lee 2010, p. 784) to obtain and activate the same or the ‘formation’ of social capital (ibid, p. 785). A further distinction is drawn between having and using social capital (Kwon and Adler 2014).

The literature identifies structural, cognitive and relational dimensions (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Adler and Kwon 2002; Grootaert et al. 2004; Leana and Pil 2006; Lee 2014). The structural dimension encompasses the connections or ties between social actors in their social networks (Lee 2014) which present opportunities for the exchange of resources and can be viewed as sources of social capital (Adler and Kwon 2002; Coburn and Russell 2008). Teachers may have multiple social networks, including PLCs, from which they access resources in the form of advice around instruction, instructional materials, new ideas or social support (Moolenaar et al. 2012; Bridwell-Mitchell and Cooc 2016). The cognitive dimension incorporates the norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, narratives, expectations, rules, values and motivations (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Lee 2014; Moolenaar et al. 2014) of individuals, which are negotiated during social interaction and believed to affect the formation of social relationships. The relational aspect includes relationships people have, such as respect and friendship, that affect their behaviour and can be conceived of as assets created and leveraged through relationships (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998, p.243). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) include trust, trustworthiness, norms, sanctions, obligations and expectations as well as identity and identification in these dimensions.

4.2.2. How social capital works

Social ties are an effective source of useful information and can facilitate communication (Lin 1999; Leana and Pil 2006; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Kwon and Adler 2014). They can be also be a source of influence (Lin 1999; Kwon and Adler 2014) and social credentials or ‘kudos’ (Lin 1999) and may enhance an individual’s capacity to access

resources (Lin 1999; Leana and Pil 2006). Social capital can enhance ‘intellectual capital’ (Leana and Pil 2006, p.353) and professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) as the ‘quality and quantity’ (ibid, p. 90) of interactions and social relationships can impact on access to information and knowledge. At the collective level, social capital can lead to more efficient collective action (Leana and Pil 2006).

Adler and Kwon (2002) and Leana and Pil (2006) distinguish between an external and internal view of social capital. The internal view stresses bonding social capital in relationships between individuals or groups in a collective and the linkages between them, specifically features that foster cohesion, shared vision and facilitate the pursuit of collective goals. Information sharing can enhance internal social capital in organisations in the form of situated learning via storytelling, reflective practice and collaborative discussion (Leana and Pil 2006). It also plays a key role in diffusion of innovation.

The external view foregrounds bridging social capital and social capital as a resource that can be leveraged from ties between individuals or collectives and those external to the social network (Adler and Kwon 2002). Access to external information and resources are crucial to enhance organisational performance as internal social capital alone may be insufficient (Leana and Pil 2006). External ties play an important role in managing and influencing sources of uncertainty by increasing predictability of interactions (ibid). Leana and Pil (2006, p. 356) stress the importance of ‘boundary management’ for schools to enhance school performance by bringing new resources into the school and to effectively represent the schools with community groups, potential funders, parents and other stakeholders.

Social capital requires maintenance (Adler and Kwon 2002), with social bonds needing renewal periodically to remain efficacious, and generally increases with use as trust shown today, will be normally be ‘reciprocated and amplified tomorrow’ (ibid, p. 22). Social capital resides in the relations between individuals in contrast to other forms of capital e.g., human capital, which is located in individuals themselves (Adler and Kwon 2002; Chapman et al. 2016). It is also founded on reciprocity, requiring ‘mutual commitment and cooperation’ (Adler and Kwon 2002, p. 22). Should one party withdraw from the relationship, or a connection end, the social capital existing in the connection dissipates (Burt 1992).

Social ties and social capital are temporal (Baron et al. 2000; Kwon and Adler 2014). Ties that individuals or organisations form to access resources for the purposes of short term

projects may be short lived (Kwon and Adler 2014). Equally, it can take lengthy periods of time to cultivate social capital which can instantly be destroyed due to lack of trustworthiness (Baron et al. 2000).

4.2.3. Social capital, teachers' professional learning, collaboration and innovation

Through the lens of social capital, collaborative practices and interactions amongst teachers and schools (e.g., school networks, PLCs and CoPs) are viewed as opportunities for exchange of resources or assets in the form of information, advice and support, access to expertise, dissemination, negotiation, adoption and adaptation of pedagogical knowledge and instructional materials. Building teacher social capital in 'disadvantaged' schools is particularly important according to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, p. 102) who state:

It's not enough for teachers of the disadvantaged and the poor to have a heart of gold. They need to have a treasure chest of knowledge and expertise too. They need to know how to make brilliant connections between the capital children need to get upward access and the existing cultures of these children's families and their communities. To do this well, teachers need considerable human and social capital of their own.

Teachers need to develop their professional capital because they will 'fall short' if they work in isolation, without feedback and support from colleagues and in the absence of connections with teachers in other schools (ibid). The role of school leaders is to create a climate that supports the development of social capital of students and teachers alike to ensure that students progress educationally and that 'poverty need not mean destiny' (Ainscow 2016, p. 7).

Teachers' bonding social capital can be enhanced through collaborative professional learning, peer interaction and sharing of resources i.e., information, advice and support (Johnson et al. 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Bridwell-Mitchell and Cooc 2016). Bridwell-Mitchell and Cooc (2016) classify such resources as cognitive (information and expertise), social (trust, esteem or sentiment of collective efficacy) and material (instructional supplies, curriculum materials or use of technology).

The content and depth of teachers' interactions is a key consideration for change in practice through TPL (Coburn and Russell 2008; Stoll 2010) and varies from exchanging

materials to more substantive conversations about the nature of student learning (Coburn and Russell 2008). Stoll (2010, p. 473) advocates for ‘dialogic processes’, the examination and challenging of presuppositions and ‘learning conversations’ that harness collective intelligence with new ideas and practice created as existing knowledge is enhanced or transferred. Similarly, Mulford (2010) emphasises collaboration and reflective dialogue.

Bridging social capital and the opportunity to participate in professional learning activity with teachers outside of their immediate environment is essential for knowledge exchange, learning and change in practice because homophily can limit opportunities to access new knowledge and develop innovative practice. Due to the ‘propinquity effect’ of social interaction, people are more likely to interact and develop close ties with those with whom they are in close physical proximity and have face to face interaction (Kwon and Adler 2014, p.415). Such strong ties are beneficial for transmission of tacit, sensitive or complex knowledge (Coburn 2008) but can lead to exclusion and reinforce homogeneity (Bridwell-Mitchell and Cooc 2016). Weak ties (Granovetter 1973) or indirect contacts are important for diffusion of ideas, leveraging information or opportunities and structural holes (Burt 1992) or disconnections between ties are vital as boundary spanning aids the efficient diffusion of new information. Muijs et al. (2011) assert that the significance of networking for schools lies in the capacity of school networks to enable individuals to span structural holes to access knowledge, information and skills they need to become more effective. Bridging social capital and involving teachers from different schools can enhance learning through co-construction of new knowledge via sharing of experiences and practices with peers (Stoll 2010). This is crucial to build individual and collective capacity that allows teachers to learn, apply learning to new situations and bring about systemic change and school reform as in a complex, diverse and changing world, more ‘divergent knowledge bases’ (ibid, p. 472) are required to meet the needs of all students. This requires ‘systemic extension’ (ibid) and a broader group of multiple stakeholders. Learning networks can enhance schools’ ‘repertoire of choices’ by circulating ideas and good practice ‘around the system’ (ibid) of schools in order to effect change or lateral capacity building (Fullan 2006). Stoll (2010, p. 479) stresses the importance of a ‘climate of trust and respect’ necessary to foster social capital and for learning communities to develop and flourish through collaboration, dialogue, exchange and development of ideas and risk taking, particularly if a ‘climate of competition’ is prevalent between schools. For social capital to assist in diffusion of

innovation, ‘bottom up’ networks can more readily link schools to innovators and are more likely as a source of innovation than ‘top down’ strategies which may be less open to change, challenge or innovation (Hargreaves 2004) or perceived as ‘contrived collegiality’ (Hargreaves 1994; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012).

4.2.4. Social capital at the individual and collective level

Social capital operates at the level of the individual and the collective (Lin 1999; Adler and Kwon 2002; Field 2003; Muijs et al. 2011; Jones and Harris 2014; Kwon and Adler 2014; Slegers et al. 2019). The central thesis of social capital can be summed up in two words ‘relationships matter’ Field (2003, p.1). People make connections with one another that are maintained over time and are a valuable asset providing a basis for social cohesion and enabling people to cooperate with one another for mutual advantage (ibid). Social capital theory emphasises the ‘collective nature’ of social systems (such as a school or school networks) and the advantages for individuals and the group through the collective and collaborative aspect rather than an ‘individualistic view’ of individual advantages gleaned from social interaction (Slegers et al. 2019). Social capital is, therefore, both an individual and collective good. By investing in external relations (bridging social capital), individuals and collectives can enhance their social capital and gain benefits in terms of access to information, power and solidarity and by investing in internal relations collective actors can ‘strengthen and augment their capacity for collective action’ (bonding social capital) (Adler and Kwon 2002, p. 21).

The advantages of collective school networking lie in the increased flow of information (Muijs et al. 2011, p. 21) and the greater influence or ‘collective pressure’ (Jones and Harris 2014, p. 476) that can be exerted on the social and political landscape than when individuals act in isolation (Lin 1999; Muijs et al. 2011; Jones and Harris 2014). Whether these advantages are experienced at the level of the individual school or collective level is another issue. Where benefits are experienced entirely at the network or collective level, motivation of individual schools may be limited and where benefits are ‘purely individual’, trust may be limited which may cause the demise of the network (Muijs et al. 2011, p. 22). The analysis of members’ perceptions of the networks in this research indicates that benefits are experienced at both individual school and network level, which may explain the high levels of trust in the networks that was reported and their longevity.

4.2.5. Social capital and trust

Sleegers et al. (2019) maintain that trust and social interaction are ‘interrelated dimensions’ with trust being embedded in relationships and often linked to cooperation and group cohesiveness. From the perspective of this research, it is clear that trust is essential for reciprocal relationships to develop between network members, for the flow of information and to enable collective action.

There is a substantial body of literature demonstrating that where relationships are high in trust, individuals are more likely to engage in social exchange in general and cooperation in particular (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Trusting relationships allow for diffusion of richer and more valuable information, with individuals who trust each other being more likely to relay sensitive information that would not be available to those beyond the ‘circle of trust’ (Leana and Pil 2006, p. 354). Where trust has been built through personal relationships, individuals are also less likely to worry about ‘opportunistic behaviour’ of colleagues which can foster collaboration and exchange beneficial to both individuals and organisations (ibid). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) cite Misztal (1996) who contends that trust indicates a willingness of individuals to be vulnerable to others based on confidence drawn from belief in the following aspects: the good intentions of the other party, their competence and capability, their reliability, and their perceived openness. The relationship between trust and cooperation is reciprocal and ‘trust lubricates cooperation, and cooperation itself breeds trust’ (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998, p. 255). Over time, ‘generalized norms of cooperation’, increase individuals’ willingness to cooperate and trust is ‘buttressed’ by sustained contact and regular dialogue (ibid, p.258). Sleegers et al. (2019) assert that prior positive experiences of social interaction can foster trust, reduce uncertainty about engaging with other parties and decrease vulnerability between individuals. In school networks, successful reciprocal interactions can gradually develop over time into trusting relationships but original interaction and exchange are facilitated when an ‘initial stock of trust exists’ from previous relationships and exchanges, with networks being extended through personal recommendations and third-party relationships (Muijs et al. 2011, p. 22). In terms of teacher collaboration and professional learning, positive social interaction has been found to influence teachers’ practice by creating opportunities for them to engage in innovative practice and experimentation in a safe environment (Tschannen-Moran 2001; Bryk & Schneider 2003; Moolenaar et al. 2011; Sleegers et al. 2019). Accordingly, positive social

interactions based on trust can provide a ‘blueprint for future interactions’ (Sleegers et al. 2019).

4.2.6. Social capital linking the micro, meso and macro levels

Field (2003, p.6) purports that social capital highlights the links between the micro level of individual experience and the meso level of institutions, associations and community and broadly illuminates the links from micro to meso to macro level through the definition of connections as a form of capital or assets. Indeed, the analysis of connections and interactions established as a result of the school networks in this research and conceptualisation of these links as a form of social capital, helps to understand how they operate and the impact they have had i.e., from the sharing of everyday experience with peers in DEIS schools (micro), to the establishment of relationships and awareness raising of topical issues with individuals in key institutions such as the regional office of the DoE and MIC (meso), to the advocacy on behalf of DEIS schools in the city at the national level (macro).

4.2.7. The ‘dark side’ of social capital

Social capital is often portrayed benevolently as a self-evident ‘good’, yet this may not always be the case. There can also be a ‘dark side’ (Field 2003, p.19) or ‘negative consequences’ (Borgatti and Foster 2003, p. 994) such as the exclusion of outsiders (Baron et al. 2000; Brown and Lauder 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002; Kwon and Adler 2014). Exclusion can be destructive for a variety of reasons. It deprives outsiders of the opportunities to be involved in a particular set of relations and from experiencing the multiple individual collective benefits associated with social capital as described above i.e., support, trust, solidarity, information, access to resources, influence, power and collective action. It also highlights potential power imbalances when more powerful groups dominate and exclude subordinate groups from benefits of social capital (Adler and Kwon 2002). Related to school networks, this raises questions about who is included as a member, who is not and who makes decisions about same.

For TPL, Bridwell-Mitchell and Cooc (2016 p. 15) caution that there can also be ‘trade-offs’ to the development of teacher social capital for the school as a whole, particularly regarding ‘cohesive community ties’. ‘Closure’ (Coleman 1998) in a social network i.e.,

the extent to which all individuals in a network are connected, and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), which can help to build trust and maintain norms between members and strengthen social capital, can effectively reinforce homogeneity leading to exclusion. This can limit diffusion of new knowledge or ideas due to the similarity amongst teachers, overlapping relationships, and reinforcement of the same knowledge which could result in ‘an unproductive status quo’ (Bridwell-Mitchell and Cooc 2016, p. 15).

Organisational rigidity (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998) is a further limitation due to lack of ‘diverse sources of ideas and information’ (ibid, p. 260). Restriction of individual autonomy, and ‘self-perpetuating opposition to the social mainstream’ (Baron et al. 2000 p. 23) and the capacity of social capital to ‘fragment broader collectives in the name of local particularistic identities’ or parochialism (Adler and Kwon 2014, p.418) are further negative aspects. Additionally, there can be high levels of trust in very efficient social networks which would generally be deemed socially undesirable such as racist organisations (Baron et al. 2000). Brown and Lauder (2000, p. 260) illustrate the negative, albeit unintentional consequences of social capital in public policy which can ‘consolidate social divisions rather than healing them’, illustrating their point with the example of community regeneration strategies that intensify separation of ‘disadvantaged neighbourhoods’ as opposed to ‘building bridging ties that allow access to externally-controlled resources’ (ibid).

4.3. Communities of Practice and Social Learning Theory

Communities of Practice (CoPs) (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002; Wenger 2010 and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner 2015) are rooted in sociocultural learning theory (Bruner 1960; Bandurra 1977; Vygotsky 1978). In contrast to these social constructivist approaches, situated learning, legitimate peripheral participation and Communities of Practice, introduced first by Lave and Wenger (1991), emphasise social participation, nurturing relationships and a shared purpose of activity (Aubrey and Riley 2016). Situated learning created a ‘paradigm shift’ by challenging assumptions that learning is an individual process (Hughes et al. 2007, p. 26; Farnsworth et al. 2016). Alternatively, learning is considered to be a collective process embedded in the social interaction and negotiation of meaning that takes place between learners in a given context.

CoPs are the main locus of a conceptualisation of learning that is collective, relational and social (Omidvar and Kislov 2014). Further developed by Wenger (1998), CoPs have gained currency in a variety of fields including business, community and education (Cox 2005; Hughes et al. 2007; McDonald and Cater-Steel 2016). His study on learning in contexts other than the formal education system, such as that of claims processors in the insurance industry, has been described as challenging those who work in education ‘to think differently about learning in schools’ (Farnsworth et al. 2016, p. 140). CoPs have been applied to a wide variety of topics in education including: teacher’s online learning communities (Tseng and Kou 2014), communities of musical practice (Kenny 2016), professional development of P.E. teachers (Parker 2012), teacher professional development (Printy 2008; Patton 2015), social learning in HEIs (McDonald and Cater-Steel 2016), professional development of teacher educators (McPhail et al. 2014; Patton and Parker 2017), self-study in teacher education (O’Dwyer et al. 2020) and vocational education (Boersma et al. 2010).

Such ‘interpretive flexibility’ (Omidvar and Kislov 2014, p. 267) has undoubtedly contributed to its popularity but can make it difficult to apply the concept meaningfully (Cox 2005; Hughes et al. 2007; Boylan 2010; Patton and Parker 2017). Nonetheless, CoPs resonate with this research because of the insight they provide to professional development and learning of members through emphasis on their practice, the sharing of valuable ‘local’ knowledge, learning together and acknowledgement of the extensive personal contact and trust required for the same (Cox and McDonald 2019).

Fundamental to Wenger’s social learning theory (1998) are the core concepts of meaning (learning as experience), practice (learning as doing), community (learning as belonging) and identity (how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming) (ibid p.5).

Let us now consider a definition of Communities of Practice, the three key elements, how learning takes place and explore concepts from this social learning theory that are also pertinent to this research i.e., identity, boundaries and Landscapes of Practice.

4.3.1. Definition of a Communities of Practice

The CoP definitions most closely aligned with this research are those of Wenger (1998), Wenger et al. (2002) and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) who assert that:

Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 4).

Communities of Practice are 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 (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p. 1).

As with networks of schools, CoPs have basic structural properties, the interplay and development of which fosters or ‘cultivates’ their development. CoPs are distinguished from other social configurations such as networks, teams or groups (Fuller 2007; Jewson 2007; Farnsworth et al. 2016) but can include a network aspect in that members connect with each other to form a community. However, not all networks are categorised as CoPs because they do not all involve ‘identification with a mutually negotiated competence around a domain of practice’ (Farnsworth et al. 2016, p. 143). In contrast to social networks, CoPs are formed, negotiated and sustained around the original activity that brought members together (Fuller 2007). There are a range of indicators that provide evidence of CoPs including: sustained mutual relationships; shared ways of doing things together; rapid information flow; quick set up of problems to be discussed; mutually defining identities; local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter; specific tools, representations and other artefacts and, a shared discourse and perspective on the world (Wenger 1998, p. 124-5).

Wenger (1998), Wenger et al. (2002) and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) identify three key elements of CoP in various forms: mutual engagement (domain), joint enterprise (community) and shared repertoire (practice). Let us now consider each element in turn.

4.3.2. Key elements of Communities of Practice

4.3.2.1. Domain.

The domain refers to the shared area of interest that gives the CoP its identity. For PLUS and OSCAILT, the domain would be supporting DEIS schools.

For Wenger, membership of a CoP is a matter of mutual engagement involving not only the competence of members but also their ability to ‘connect meaningfully’ (1998, p. 75) to the knowledge of others. Membership indicates a ‘commitment’ to the particular

domain and a ‘shared competence’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.2) and requires mutuality in that members contribute to and benefit from the resources of practice (Printy 2008).

The domain fosters a ‘sense of accountability to a body of knowledge’ (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 30) and development of particular practice. It is the ‘raison d’etre’ (ibid, p. 30) that brings people together, motivates participation, guides learning and gives meaning to members’ actions.

The domain can evolve over time (Wenger et al. 2002) and ‘mutual engagement’ does not equate to homogeneity amongst members but creates connections among people that can become tight nodes of interpersonal relationships (Wenger 1998, p. 75). Pyrko et al. (2019) emphasise the multi-layered nature of membership of CoPs and variance in members’ need, ability and willingness to invest their efforts in negotiation of practice with other members. Core membership of CoPs is likely to be formed of ‘old timers’ and more regular members with various types of members at the periphery, i.e., those who wish to be full members (newcomers) or those for whom less involved participation is sufficient (ibid).

CoPs are not always oases of ‘peaceful coexistence, mutual support or interpersonal allegiance’ and can involve ‘tensions and conflicts’ (Wenger 1998, p. 77). However, ‘disagreement, challenges and competition can all be forms of participation’ that can indicate ‘greater commitment than passive conformity’ (ibid).

4.3.2.2. Community

In order to pursue their interest in the shared domain, members need opportunities to engage in joint activities such as discussion, helping each other and information sharing, through which they build relationships which enable them to learn from each other. This is critical for ‘an effective knowledge structure’ to develop (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 34) as it is the interaction between members that creates the CoP, not that they have similar roles, and the joint enterprise of the CoP is ‘communally negotiated’ by members (Wenger 1998, p 78).

CoPs emerge in particular ‘historical, social, cultural and institutional’ contexts which have ‘specific resources and constraints’ (ibid, p. 79). Even when a CoP develops in response to an external mandate, the practice that emerges is that communities ‘own

response' (ibid, p. 80). Wenger et al. (2002, p. 28) advise that 'a strong community fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust'. Over time CoPs 'build a sense of common history and identity' (ibid, p. 35).

Reciprocity is a significant feature of CoPs as members recognise that making the community more valuable is of benefit to all and understand that such mutual value extends over time (ibid, p. 37). Such reciprocity is similar to that of social capital.

Effective CoPs are 'safe' spaces for members to engage in discussion and collective inquiry in an atmosphere of openness and trust (ibid). Resilient CoPs are built on 'strong bonds' that can 'withstand disagreement' (ibid).

4.3.2.3. Practice

Through the CoP members develop a 'shared repertoire of resources' such as experiences, stories, tools, ways of doing things, ways of addressing recurring problems, discourses, gestures, symbols, styles, actions or concepts (Wenger 1998, p. 72; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p. 2). In essence this is their 'shared practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p. 2), built over time through sustained interaction which can be intentional, but not necessarily. Members share a common foundation of basic knowledge about the domain enabling them to work together effectively and the CoP explores both the existing body of knowledge and advances in the field (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 38).

Practice embodies a 'set of socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain' (ibid) or common approaches and shared standards that create a platform for 'action, communication, problem solving, performance and accountability' (ibid). The 'communal' or shared repertoire of resources include both tacit and explicit aspects of the community's knowledge, and can consist of books, articles, knowledge bases, as well as certain ways of behaving, a particular perspective on problems, a thinking style or an ethical stance. This is the 'mini-culture that binds the community together' (ibid, p. 39). The manner of communicating and capturing the knowledge of the CoP and making it visible is dependent on what is useful for that community. A balance between joint activities in which ideas are explored and the production of documents or tools is required for successful practice to develop (ibid).

Each of the three elements of a CoP is dynamic and balance is required in their interplay for it to flourish. If all three elements are in a state of flux simultaneously, then the CoP is at risk. However, stability in one element can facilitate transition in another. For example, when the domain is clear and practice well established, membership can fluctuate without detrimental effect to the CoP on the whole (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 46).

4.3.3. Learning in Communities of Practice

Learning in CoPs is characterised by: 1) continuity and discontinuity, 2) learning in practice and 3) practice as an emergent structure.

Continuity and discontinuity coexist as different generations of CoP participants move on or change direction and practices change or transform. New members create changes in relationships and ‘generational discontinuities’ (Wenger 1998, p. 88) over time becoming ‘relative old timers’ and forging ‘new identities from their new perspective’. Such change and discontinuity are integral to every day ‘engagement in practice’ and rarely lead to a breakdown of practice as those invested in the CoP are also invested in its continuity which helps to sustain it. As membership changes and newcomers become integrated into a CoP, they continually engage in practice and perpetuate it (Wenger 1998). To illustrate how this happens, Wenger draws on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) a process whereby apprentices are gradually initiated into a practice by those more experienced. The learner or apprentice gradually moves from peripheral to ‘more intensive’ participation, and towards full participation, moving from newcomer to old timer (Benzie et al. 2005). As practice evolves, it is sustained as newcomers learn from ‘old timers’ and competence is shared with new generations (Wenger 1998). The evolving nature of learning within CoPs gives them ‘life cycles’ and an ‘emergent structure’ which is a continual process of ‘negotiation of meaning’ that makes practice ‘highly resilient’ (ibid, p. 96). Continuity involves stabilising and destabilising events, with stability requiring work for the structure to self-sustain and as much effort as it would to transform the structure.

CoPs can be a space for the acquisition and creation of knowledge (Wenger 1998, p. 214) as they give newcomers ‘access to competence’ through personal engagement and offer opportunity to ‘incorporate that competence into an identity of participation’ (ibid). CoP members can explore ‘new insights’ because having a shared history of mutual

engagement about the domain is ‘an ideal context for this kind of leading-edge learning’ (ibid) based on strong communal bonds and respect for each other’s experience.

Learning in CoPs is transformative as it is an ‘an experience of identity’ and a ‘process of becoming’ and not solely due to the skills and information accumulated (Wenger 1998, p. 215). Supporting learning involves supporting the process of knowledge acquisition as well offering a space ‘where new ways of knowing can be realized’ (ibid). Hence, learning is more meaningful.

Wenger et al. (2002, p. 4-5) assert that CoP members share information, insight and advice, help each other solve problems, discuss their situations, aspirations and needs and ‘ponder common issues, explore ideas and act as sounding boards’. Participation not only enhances their work, but offers personal satisfaction from interaction with others who understand what they do and through a sense of belonging to the group (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 4). Boersma et al. (2010, p. 6) observe that:

Community members build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. They help each other to solve problems and discuss their situations, aspirations and needs. They think about common issues, explore new ideas and serve as a sounding board.

Pyrko et al. (2017, p. 389 and 2019, p. 484) refer to this learning as ‘thinking together’ or the process by which practitioners share real life issues and ‘hot topics’. Drawing on the work of Polyani (1962 and 1969) on tacit and explicit knowledge and the concept of ‘indwelling’, Pyrko et al. (2017 and 2019) assert that one’s personal knowledge is deeply rooted in the ‘tacit dimension’ and therefore not easily learned by others by through verbal expression. Through the process of ‘thinking together’, (ibid) CoP members can ‘guide each other through their understanding of a mutually recognised real-life problem’, thereby indirectly sharing tacit knowledge (Pyrko et al. 2017, p. 389). Such learning helps to develop and sustain innovative social practice (ibid).

CoPs can also facilitate ‘less intensive’ knowledge exchange or ‘knowledge deployment’ in the form of exchanging stories or facts (Pyrko et al. 2019, p. 489). Printy (2008) asserts that teachers are more likely to incorporate learning into their practice when it occurs in the CoP that they are strongly affiliated with but that learning as a result less frequent interaction with those from other CoPs, or through ‘boundary encounters’ (Wenger 1998), is more dramatic.

4.3.4. Identity and Communities of Practice

Identity is an integral element of Wenger's social theory of learning as it is inseparable from practice, community and meaning (ibid, p. 145) and he stresses the 'profound connection' between practice and identity. Identity in CoPs is defined by the negotiation of experience, through community membership, our learning trajectory, our nexus of multi membership and the relation of the local and the global or how we negotiate belonging to broader constellations (Wenger 2010, p. 133). Members develop practice through engagement in which they acknowledge each other as participants and thus practice involves 'negotiation of ways of being a person in that context' (ibid, p. 149). CoPs therefore involve 'negotiation of identities' (ibid) and learning is an act of 'becoming' and 'the shaping of an identity', the implication of which, Wenger-Trayner argues, is that 'you cannot give people knowledge without inviting them into an identity for which this knowledge represents a meaningful way of being' (Farnsworth et al. 2016, p. 145). Pyrko et al. (2017, p. 391) describe this learning as the 'social formation' of a person involving a change in one's identity rather than merely acquisition of knowledge. The process of identity formation in CoPs occurs as participants engage with each other and relationships are strengthened among members on the basis of shared experience (Printy 2008). Wenger (2010, p. 134) conceives of identity formation as a complex process that is 'temporal' and 'ongoing' rather than linear, and taking place in CoPs through multiple and divergent trajectories including: peripheral (not full membership); inbound (newcomers); insider (full membership); boundary (spanning boundaries and linking CoPs) and outbound (leading out of a CoP). Each trajectory involves varied access to the community and its practice as well as opportunities to contribute to, sustain or renegotiate one's identity.

4.3.5. Boundaries and Landscapes of Practice

The boundaries of CoPs are important because they 1) connect communities and 2) offer learning opportunities in their own right as the competence and experience of different communities tend to diverge (Wenger 2010). Boundaries can offer new opportunities as well as tensions and difficulties. While they are 'lines of distinction' (ibid, p. 131), they can be complementary as communities can become 'hostage to their own experience' and insular (ibid, p. 126). Boundaries create spaces for 'unusual learning', the sharing of different perspectives, new insights, new possibilities and innovation. Wenger (1998 and

2010) identifies boundary processes or ‘bridges’ that can contribute to learning across the boundaries of learning communities: brokering, boundary objects and boundary interactions.

Brokers enable coordination, make new connections across CoPs and introduce elements of one practice to another. The role requires sufficient legitimacy within CoPs to be listened to as well as distance to introduce new practice. Brokers must therefore be able to establish a climate of trust and draw together different types of information and provide a shared focus to guide discussion and align and interpret experiences (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015).

Boundary interactions include boundary encounters that provide direct exposure to practice i.e., visits and discussions that lead to negotiation of meaning among members of each practice as well as across the boundary. Boundary practices occur when boundary interactions are sustained to such an extent around a topic that it becomes an established practice in its own right (Wenger 1998, p. 111-113). Boundary peripheries occur when CoPs create experiences to connect the wider world to the practice, such as the involvement of ‘outsiders’ to provide a service or facility or involving those who may be interested in becoming members (Wenger 2010 and 1998). Peripheries, in contrast to boundaries, are the overlaps and connections between communities, and peripherality can be a position from which to access membership of a CoP but it can also be where outsiders are prevented from ‘moving inward’ (Wenger 2010, p. 132).

Boundaries and peripheries are woven together into a ‘landscape of practice’ (Wenger 1998 & 2010; Wenger et al. 2015) or the social landscape of the multiple communities that many professionals participate in, each with their own history, shared practice and identity, and boundaries.

4.3.6. Benefits of Communities of Practice

There are a number of benefits from CoPs relevant to this research including professional growth and development, improved teacher quality, the development of relationships, creation of ‘safe’ but challenging spaces, shared commitment, decreased sense of isolation and opportunity for collaboration (Wenger et al. 2002; Benzie et al. 2005; Printy 2008; Hadar and Brody 2010; Omidvar and Kislov 2014; Bryk 2015; Wenger -Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015; Merceica 2016; Patton and Parker 2017).

The non formal ‘naturally occurring learning’ (Printy 2008, p. 189) for teachers that takes place in CoPs can enhance the quality of their professional learning as social learning is reciprocal and embedded in interaction with colleagues which can create a link between learning and performance in practice that can facilitate members to address tacit and explicit aspects of knowledge creation and sharing (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). This can shape their practice, leading to improved teacher quality, educational change and exposure to new ideas and possibilities from interaction with those outside their usual colleagues (Printy 2008). The interaction and sense of community in CoPs can create a platform for transformative professional development that is meaningful and relevant to the context and capacities of teachers (Merceica 2016; Patton and Parker 2017). The development of relationships between members is fundamental to their maturation and success and trust established over time can enhance professional relationships and lead to the creation of ‘emotionally safe but challenging spaces’ in which contentious issues can be explored (Patton and Parker 2017, p. 356). CoPs can also help to combat isolation amongst educators and school leaders (Hadar and Brody 2010; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015; Parker and Patton 2017), and serve to ‘break down the walls of solo practice’ (Byrk 2015, p. 469). Participation can lead to collaboration amongst members as well as advocacy on topics which they care strongly about, as they identify a common focus, develop personal and professional relationships and shared commitment to the domain (Patton and Parker 2017).

As they are not limited by formal organisational structures CoPs can create connections across organisational and geographic boundaries for the sharing of knowledge (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). The emphasis on relationships with those outside the CoP (Benzie et al. 2005) can also inform our understanding of multiagency or multidisciplinary collaboration as well as non-participation or resistance to change and innovation (Omdivar and Kislov 2014). From an organisational perspective, CoPs create both short and long term value as well as tangible and intangible value (Wenger et al. 2002). In the short term, they can contribute to problem solving, reduced time retrieving information and gathering feedback and coordination of activity across boundaries. Professional development of members in the long term develops practice, keeps members abreast of knowledge and builds the knowledge base in that field (ibid). Tangible outcomes include improved skills or reduced costs due to more efficient access to information. Less tangible benefits are perhaps the greatest such as the development of relationships, creating a sense of belonging and generation of a ‘spirit of inquiry’,

‘professional confidence’ and sense of identity among members (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 15). CoPs can also provide stability when there is flux and change in formal organisations with changeover in staff by creating a ‘domain of knowledge’ that endures beyond specific projects or jobs (ibid, p. 20).

4.3.7. Critique of Communities of Practice

A review of the literature also reveals that there have been many critiques of CoPs that need to be considered (Cox 2005; Hughes et al. 2007; Jewson 2007; Printy 2008; Omidvar and Kisolv 2014; May and Keay 2017). Lack of ‘rigorous empirical grounding’ of the theory has been emphasised (Omidvar and Kisolv 2014, p. 267). CoPs can reproduce the status quo of negative stereotypes, prejudice or destructive practices, particularly in tightly bonded communities (Printy 2008), an assertion that Wenger (1998), Wenger et al. (2002) and Wenger-Trayner (2015) acknowledge in their writing. This highlights a lack of discussion on power differentials and struggles within and between CoPs in the literature (Jewson 2007; Pyrko et al. 2019) and a benevolent portrayal of CoPs as ‘rather large, helpful and friendly, bounded group’ (Cox 2005, p. 532). Power structures can evolve and change over time (Pyrko et al. 2019) and struggles can take place between ‘old timers’ and newer members of CoPs that can interfere with learning (Fuller et al. 2005; Pyrko et al. 2019). Tension can also exist between different professional groups which can result in distrust between different groups regarding their competence (Pyrko et al. 2019).

A concerning change is noted in the conceptualisation of and discourse that has popularised, commodified and simplified CoPs (Cox 2005; Hughes et al. 2007). Presenting a harmonious and conflict free conception potentially supports an ‘oppressive’ ideology within organisations that suppresses challenge and disagreement under the guise of ‘informalisation’ (Cox 2005, p. 536). Hughes et al. (2007) argue that this commercialisation of learning through CoPs for business needs is at odds with the original conceptualisation as expressed in Lave and Wenger (1991). This has led to unease in the literature about their nature as ‘organic’ and naturally forming or a top down strategy for organisational learning (Hughes et al. 2007) or ‘management tool’ that may be detrimental to learning (May and Keay 2017). Other criticisms include a concern about the potential of CoPs to lead to innovative practice as opposed to the transmission of

existing practice (Jewson 2007) and the lack of attention given to a broader range of learning trajectories as the main focus tends to be on newcomers (ibid).

4.4. How Social Capital Theory and Communities of Practice have informed this research

Having presented social capital theory and Communities of Practice as pertinent to this research, this section will contrast and synthesise key elements that have informed this research.

Obvious parallels can be drawn between the two theoretical areas. It is evident from both that connections and the 'relational' are significant factors in the exchange of resources such as information, advice and support for meaningful TPL (Johnson et al. 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Bridwell-Mitchell and Cooc 2016). An internal view of social capital (Adler and Kwon 2002; Leana and Pil 2006) illuminates bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) and the benefits that can accrue for educators from social interaction with peers which corresponds with the emphasis in CoPs on 'community' and 'identity' (Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Opportunities to interact with peers, develop relationships founded on 'mutual engagement', reciprocity, trust and respect can enhance teacher professional learning by creating a 'safe space' where teachers can let their guard down and engage in dialogue or 'learning conversations' (Stoll 2010, p. 473) where contentious issues can be discussed and assumptions can be challenged. CoPs and social capital also emphasise that opportunities to engage with peers can help to keep abreast of new ideas (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015), tap into explicit and tacit knowledge of peers (Stoll 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) or 'thinking together' (Pyrko et al. 2017 and 2019) as well as their professional and intellectual capital of others (Leana and Pil 2006; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) and ultimately develop the knowledge base in their field (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Teaching is a traditionally insular profession in which teachers spend most of their working day behind closed doors with the children in their classroom. Social capital theory and CoPs highlight that positive peer interaction can help teachers to move out of silos of 'solo practice' (Bryk 2015, p.469) in order for teachers to engage with and learn from those within and beyond the school walls.

The internal view of social capital (Adler and Kwon 2002; Leana and Pil 2006) also accentuates the manner in which relationships developed between individuals or groups in a collective create solidarity, cohesion, shared vision and pursuit of collective goals (Adler and Kwon 2002; Muijs et al. 2011; Slegers et al. 2019), echoing the collaborative emphasis of CoPs as evident in the shared commitment to the domain, ‘communally negotiated’ joint enterprise of the community and ‘shared practice’ and shared repertoire of resources (Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Cognitive elements of social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Lee 2014; Moolenaar et al. 2014) such as shared values, attitudes, beliefs, expectations and motivations can also be correlated with the accountability to a body of knowledge, purpose, motivation evident in the ‘domain’ of interest in CoPs.

The emphasis on the relational and connectivity extends beyond the internal locus and illuminates external relationships (Adler and Kwon 2002; Leana and Pil 2006) or bridging social capital (Putnam 2000), and parallels boundary spanning, boundary interactions and peripheries as expressed in CoPs (Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002). These are significant in TPL because they create space for sharing of resources in the form of information with those external to the group and the transfer and diffusion of knowledge across communities or organisations (Benzie et al. 2005; Stoll 2010; Muijs et al. 2011). The literature emphasises the significance of the same for teachers to access a more diverse knowledge base and develop the skills and knowledge required to meet the varied and complex needs of their students in the 21st century (Stoll 2010; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015; Schleicer 2016). Bridging social capital and boundary spanning across communities in the Landscape of Practice can also help schools to connect to a variety of external stakeholders, engage in multiagency collaboration and access or leverage resources to enhance outcomes for students at the meso level (Leana and Pil 2006; Muijs et al. 2010).

The challenges identified for TPL, networking and collaboration from social capital theory and CoPs resonate well, with the literature cautioning against a benign and indiscriminate presentation of both (Baron et al. 2000; Field 2003; Cox 2005; Hughes et al. 2007). The potential for exclusion (Baron et al. 2000; Brown and Lauder 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002; Printy 2008), the capacity to reinforce the status quo (Printy 2008) and become too rigid due to lack of new ideas (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998) and for power imbalances and domination of the more powerful group members are quite apparent (Adler and Kwon 2002; Fuller et al. 2005; Jewson et al. 2007; Pyrko et al. 2019).

Naturally, these theories diverge in focus and this is where they supplement each other. Social capital theory illuminates links between the micro, meso and macro (Bronfenbrenner 1979; OECD 2015) levels of teacher's daily practice as explored in CoPs to the wider policy arena that is relevant to this research as well as the concept of linking social capital (Grootaert et al. 2004; Mulford 2010; Stoll 2010) and horizontal connections and their role in leveraging political support for the benefit of group. While social capital literature acknowledges the importance of depth of content of teachers interactions for professional learning (Coburn and Russell 2008; Stoll 2010), CoPs offer a more nuanced understanding of the same with the focus on the core component of practice, the 'shared repertoire of resources' and the 'mini-culture' of the CoP (Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Additionally, CoPs help to understand the multidimensional nature of learning from peers, beyond a one-dimensional explanation of transfer of information and knowledge between ties, and the greater intricacy and complexity of the process of social learning in the PLUS and OSCAILT networks. The concepts of 'mutual engagement', 'legitimate peripheral participation', and conceptualisation of learning as the 'creation of an identity' (Wenger 1998; Wenger 2010) and a process of 'social formation' (Pyrko et al. 2017, p. 391) encapsulates the nature of learning grounded in practice that not only enhances skills and knowledge but also the professional capital of members and how learning in this way contributes to their individual wellbeing and capacity to effectively engage in their professional roles, which, due to the significance of the same for the research findings, will now be explored in more detail.

4.5. Individual teacher wellbeing

Viewing PLUS and OSCAILT as sources of bonding social capital and a supportive 'safe space' (Wenger 1998, p. 37) for members to interact with peers to learn and share experience, highlights the potential of these networks to promote the wellbeing of individual members and indeed this is a key proposition made about the networks in the discussion in Chapter Ten.

It is well recognised that teachers play an important role in their students' wellbeing and contribute significantly to student success, satisfaction and achievement (McCallum et al. 2017; OECD 2017; Cann 2019; Government of Ireland 2019; O' Sullivan et al. 2019; Viac and Fraser 2020). Accordingly, teacher wellbeing is becoming more prominent and

the importance of teachers nurturing their own wellbeing within the context of school wide wellbeing is highlighted in the literature (McCallum et al. 2017; Nohilly and Tynan 2018; Cann 2019; O' Sullivan et al. 2019), in addition to the need for teacher professional development to support students' wellbeing (Teaching Council 2016; Nohilly and Tynan 2018; Rawdon et al. 2020).

For teachers, wellbeing can be defined as 'feeling good and functioning well' (Cann 2019, p.1) and encompasses their perceptions of job satisfaction, experiencing more positive than negative emotions and functioning well both professionally and personally, which includes supportive professional relationships, professional growth and feelings of self-efficacy (Cann 2019). McCallum et al.'s (2017, p. 9) definition encompasses the 'extremely personal' nature of wellbeing, the proactive and changeable nature of the term acknowledging contextual factors that can influence wellbeing:

Wellbeing is diverse and fluid respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change. It is something we all aim for, underpinned by positive notions, yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected (McCallum & Price 2016, p. 17).

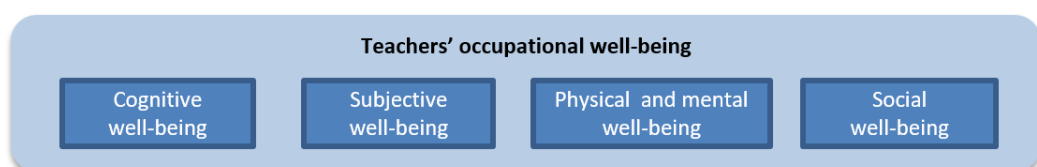
Despite greater awareness of teacher wellbeing and recognition in the literature that teachers experience greater stress than many other professions, there is a recognised lack of empirical research on the topic (McCallum et al. 2017; Viac and Fraser 2020) and measures to promote the same, with much of the literature focusing on the impact of student teacher relationships on student development or teacher ill health, stress and burnout (McCallum et al. 2017; Cann 2019; Viac and Fraser 2020). Low teacher wellbeing can impact on teacher performance, efficiency, and stress and burnout (ibid), which in turn can negatively impact their motivation, self-efficacy, resilience and emotional intelligence (ibid). Conversely, teachers with high levels of wellbeing are more likely to have higher levels of self-efficacy, greater job satisfaction, stronger work motivation, implement more effective practices and participate in more effective professional development and peer collaboration (Cann 2019; Viac and Fraser 2020).

In 2020, the OECD drafted a framework for the analysis of teacher wellbeing (Viac and Fraser 2020) which is helpful for both understanding the phenomenon and framing the discussion on the manner in which the PLUS and OSCAILT network can contribute to

teacher wellbeing. The OECD framework defines teacher occupational wellbeing as ‘teachers’ responses to the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to their work and their profession’ (Viac and Fraser 2020, p. 18). It does not include personal elements i.e., those related to their life outside work affecting wellbeing, as McCallum et al. (2017) and Cann (2019) do. The framework takes account of four core components of cognitive, subjective, physical and mental and social wellbeing, as well as the working conditions that shape and expected outcomes of teacher occupational wellbeing (Viac and Fraser 2020). Figure 3 depicts these components.

The ***cognitive dimension*** refers to the set of skills and abilities that teachers need to work effectively. It encompasses the formation of knowledge, judgement and evaluation, problem solving and decision making as well as the degree to which teachers are able to take up new information and concentrate on their work, and their sense of self-efficacy. The ***subjective dimension*** encompasses a teacher’s life evaluation, affect or feelings and emotional states, and Eudemonia or sense of meaning and purpose in life. The ***physical and mental dimensions*** are related to good health and the benefits of the same including enhanced access to education and job opportunities, increased productivity and wealth, reduced health care costs, good social relations and longer life. Finally, the ***social dimension*** refers to the quality and depth of social interactions that teachers experience with children and young people, parents, their colleagues i.e., peers, principals, and support staff, other professionals and specialised staff and the community in which the school is located. Viac and Fraser (2020) contend that teacher relationships with colleagues, support staff and school leaders have a positive association with wellbeing, and enhance their social capital. The social capital section above demonstrates that teacher social capital plays an important role in student performance and it is also an important factor in teacher professional development.

Figure 3. The core components of teachers' occupational wellbeing



(Viac and Fraser 2020, p. 23)

Viac and Fraser (2020) identify the types of conditions at both system and school level associated with teacher occupational wellbeing in the form of job resources and job demands. *Job resources* include: work autonomy, training and professional opportunities, feedback and appraisal and social support. *Job demands* incorporate physical learning environments, workloads, multiple roles, classroom composition, disciplinary climate and performance evaluation. While job demands are beyond the remit of the school networks in question, the literature review has already established that teacher interaction and collaboration in schools networks, such as PLUS and OSCALIT, are sources of social capital development, peer support and opportunities for professional learning. This will be discussed with regards to the role that the networks play in enhancing teacher wellbeing in the discussion chapter.

Discussing research in New Zealand, Cann (2019) identifies factors found to support teacher wellbeing including teacher self-efficacy and a positive sense of identity, with teacher learning being cited as a source of promoting both. Positive, supportive and trusting relationships within schools are also cited as promoting teacher wellbeing and strategies to support teachers in promoting their own wellbeing include teachers being active in building professional support networks, and being proactive in their professional development and seeking out those from whom they can learn. Similarly, McCallum et al.'s (2017) literature review discusses enabling wellbeing initiatives across individual, relational and external spheres that contribute to sustained quality teaching and life experiences. PLCs are highlighted as being effective in supporting changes in teacher beliefs and practices (2017, p. 38). Drawing on the work of Owen (2016), the report contends that 'it is through professional learning in a supportive context, and genuinely engaging and connecting with peers beyond team work that professional reinvigoration and teacher wellbeing can be enhanced' (McCallum et al. 2017, p. 38). Owen (2016) explores teacher wellbeing from a positive psychology perspective (Seligman et al. 2009) and the parallels between the characteristics of mature PLCs (i.e., shared vision, collaboration, engagement in practical activities, distributed leadership/leadership support and professional growth and collegial learning) and the five key elements of positive psychology (positive emotion, engagement, constructive relationships and social connections, clarity of meaning/purpose and sense of accomplishment). Owen (2016, p. 416) contends that as an effective teacher learning practice, mature PLCs support and nourish 'flourishing' and teacher wellbeing as when they 'operate at an optimal level'

they hold the potential for ‘significant’ teacher learning, improved wellbeing, and change in classroom practices through enhanced and insightful understanding.

4.6. Conclusion

Drawing on social capital theory and the social learning theory of Communities of Practice, the chapter contributes to the theoretical basis of the Conceptual Framework to understand the PLUS and OSCAILT networks. The chapter synthesised the main areas of overlap between these two theoretical areas that are fundamental to the analysis and discussion of the networks. Finally, the role that collaborative and supportive structures for TPL play in promoting the wellbeing of individual members was discussed.

Chapter 5 - Inequality and social reproduction in education

5.1. Introduction

The schools in the PLUS and OSCAILT networks are DEIS schools and are therefore allocated additional resources within this scheme. This chapter explores the endemic nature of educational disadvantage, inequality and social class drawing on key literature on the social reproduction of inequality in education and outlines key features and learning about the DEIS programme and schools involved based on national research. Finally, this chapter will consider what schools and teachers can do to address inequality in education.

5.2. Inequality in education in Ireland

There has been much focus in educational policy and discourse on educational inequality in Ireland since the *Investment in Education Report* in 1965 (Drudy and Lynch 1993; Kellaghan et al. 1995; Frawley 2014; Smyth 2018 a; Scanlan et al. 2019). While government investment in education has increased significantly since then, research shows the persistent nature of ‘educational disadvantage’ in terms of socio-economic, class and ethnic differentials in educational outcomes for students (Drudy and Lynch 1993; Smyth and McCoy 2009; Smyth 2018 a; Smyth 2018 b), and disparities in outcomes between those attending DEIS and non DEIS schools (DoE 2017c; Gilleece et al. 2020). In 2009, research by Smyth and McCoy highlighted the impact of higher levels of parental education on children’s literacy scores in 5th and 6th class and social class differentials in young people’s educational outcomes in terms of higher Junior Certificate grades, greater completion of Leaving Certificate or equivalent and progression to higher education for those from professional backgrounds. Data from the Growing up In Ireland (GUI) study found a substantial gap in the Junior Certificate achievement of 17-18 year olds (’98 cohort) between more advantaged and less advantaged young people in terms of social class, education or family income (McNamara et al. 2020). Additionally, young people from more advantaged backgrounds in terms of social class, income and parental education and those who had higher reading and maths test scores aged 9 scored more highly on cognitive tests and those who disengaged from school at an early age and who had poorer relationships with teachers did less well in terms of Junior Certificate results (ibid). Males

and those from ‘disadvantaged backgrounds’ were more likely to have early negative experiences of school (ibid, p. 21). Data on the ’08 cohort found a widening of the social gradient between children aged 3 and 9 with an increase over time in the gap in cognitive skills between children from professional and lower skilled families and those with a history of little or no employment. Those from highly educated families who had lower vocabulary scores at age 3 achieved higher scores at age 9 than children from less educated families who initially scored highly aged 3 (McNamara et al. 2021). A 2017 report by the DoE revealed that although the gap narrowed between the 2001 and 2010 entry cohorts, the retention rate to senior cycle for DEIS schools was 84.41% and 92.9% for non-DEIS schools (DoE 2017c). Research has also consistently highlighted the under-representation of students from ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds in higher education (Clancy 2001; O’Connell et al. 2006; McCoy et al. 2010; McCoy and Byrne 2011). In 2015, the HEA National Access Plan highlighted unequal distribution in access to higher education across different socio-economic groups in Ireland with 0.1% of Irish Travellers as new entrants, 25% from unskilled workers and almost full uptake from higher professional groups (HEA 2015). In 2016/2017, only 13.5% of new entrants to HE were from DEIS schools (HEA 2018).

Such evidence indicates that certain cohorts continue to be at a far greater risk than others in Ireland of not achieving their potential (Smyth and McCoy 2009; Frawley 2014; Fleming and Hartford 2021) as well as the need for early intervention (McNamara et al. 2020). However, the invisibility of social class in Irish educational policy, the use of deficit language and euphemisms of ‘disadvantage’ or social inclusion, is disempowering and serves to other, objectify and vilify the working class and ultimately reproduce inequality by removing class issues from issues of power and economic context (Lynch and Lodge 2002; Cahill 2015). This lack of recognition and discussion of differential class based outcomes in policy also serves to obfuscate the neo-liberal and market force ideology inherent in Irish educational policy and strategies applied within the system that serve the interests of more affluent middle class parents and students. From a critical policy analysis perspective, the lack of class based discussion also highlights the role of Irish government policy in contributing to and perpetuating educational disadvantage and inequality (Cahill 2015; Fleming and Hartford 2021). This raises the matter of broader societal and systemic issues and questions that need to be addressed about why some children achieve better educational outcomes than others and these will be explored in the remainder of this chapter. First, let us now examine the DEIS programme.

5.3. Overview of DEIS programme

The DEIS programme is the Irish government national strategy to address educational disadvantage and was introduced by the Department of Education in 2005-2006, subsuming and consolidating previous initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage i.e., Giving Children an Even Break (2001-2005), Breaking the Cycle (1996-2001) and the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (1980s and 1990s) (Weir et al. 2017; Ryan and Lannin 2021).

A revised DEIS programme was introduced in 2017 and Chapter Two highlights the relevant sections of the DEIS Action Plan 2017 with regards to TPL and networking (Section 2.6.2). This section outlines the DEIS programme and key findings from national research about same. The approach taken in both iterations is described as ‘positive discrimination intended to reduce the risk of educational failure among children from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes’ and targets resources to schools serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as targeting of resources within schools to students most in need (Weir et al. 2017, p. 2). Schools are categorised at primary level as DEIS urban Band 1, Band 2 or rural based on the levels of disadvantage, with urban band 1 schools allocated the most resources. However, at post-primary level, there is no such distinction with all schools being categorised as DEIS post-primary. Funding in the region of €125 million is made available by the DoE through the DEIS programme with €16.2 million allocated directly to schools in the form of a grant. Supports provided are detailed in Table 7.

Table 7 Support provided for DEIS schools

DEIS primary schools	DEIS post primary schools
<p>All DEIS primary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEIS grant based on the level of disadvantage and enrolment • School meals programme funded by the Department of Social Protection • School Books Grant Scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEIS grant based on levels of disadvantage and enrolment • HSCL and SCP • Junior Certificate Schools Programme

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School planning support • Professional development supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving Certificate Applied programme • Planning supports • Professional development supports • School Books Grant Scheme
<p>Band 1 & Band 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy and numeracy programmes • HSCL scheme and SCP • Band 2 Administrative principal on enrolment of 142 pupils • Band 1 Administrative principal on enrolment of 115 pupils 	
<p>Band 1 only</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) pupils • Additional teaching resources under the Special Education Needs General Allocation Model 	

The initial design of the DEIS SSP was informed by work by Kellaghan et al. (1995) and a subsequent review by Weir et al. (2005) of literature and research on strategies identified as effective in addressing educational disadvantage, which was updated in 2017 to inform the revised programme. Schools were originally identified for inclusion on the basis of principal reports of the socio-economic profile of the student population. A standardised system of identification drawing on data from Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS)¹¹ from the Central Statistics Office and from the Department of Education from Primary Online Database (POD) and Post Primary Online Database (P-POD) was introduced in 2017. Applied to all schools nationally, the model identified schools that were not previously included in DEIS but had levels of disadvantage significantly higher than many schools already included. Some Band 2 primary schools were also moved to Band

¹¹ SAPS include social-economic data such as gender, age, marital status, ethnicity, disability, social class and socio-economic group, education, and occupation as well as data on families, housing, the community, and digital access.

1. A considerable flaw in this approach is that the focus of provision is on the areas of greatest concentration of ‘disadvantage’ while there is no provision for ‘disadvantaged’ students, particularly in rural areas, who do not attend DEIS schools.

The DEIS programme is informed by the definition of educational disadvantage under Section 32 of the Education Act 1998 as ‘the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools’ (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 32). This definition also encompasses that of Kellaghan et al. (1995) (Weir et al. 2017). The definitions and language adopted to discuss ‘educational disadvantage’ are contentious and will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Evaluation research has been conducted on the DEIS programme since inception by the ERC (Weir and Archer 2011; Weir and McAvinue 2012; Kavanagh et al. 2017; Kelleher and Weir 2017; Weir et al. 2017) and the DoE Inspectorate (DoE 2009; DoE 2011). However, discerning which elements of the DEIS programme work best in terms of student outcomes is difficult due to the number of additional supports and resources in schools (Smyth et al. 2015; Smyth 2017). The 2015 report, ‘Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS (Smyth et al. 2015), states that large scale studies such as GUI indicate that DEIS schools differ ‘markedly’ from non-DEIS schools in terms of the social class background, parental education, household income and family structure of students. DEIS Band 1 urban schools have higher concentrations of disadvantage, and students with more complex needs, including a greater prevalence of students from Traveller backgrounds, non-English speaking students and students with special educational needs. While there was a significant improvement over time in literacy and numeracy scores of students in DEIS schools, Smyth et al. (2015) maintain that this likely reflects gains by all primary schools due to the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011). Indeed, National Assessment data in 2014 revealed that the achievement gap between urban DEIS schools and non-DEIS schools did not show a ‘marked improvement’ (Smyth et al. 2015 p. vii). At post primary level there was a narrowing of the gap in average Junior Certificate grades in English between DEIS and non-DEIS schools from 2003-2011 but no improvement in maths grades. Gaps in retention at post primary to Junior and Senior cycle narrowed significantly over time, but DEIS schools still have ‘much lower rates’ of completion than non-DEIS schools (Smyth et al. 2015).

Kavanagh, Weir and Moran (2017) reported on the monitoring of achievement and attitudes of urban primary pupils in the SSP from 2007-2016 and found that there were modest increases in average achievement scores in maths and English from 2013-2016 in all four grades where tests were administered with average scores higher for Band 2 schools in 2016. Average scores for Band 1 schools were found to be considerably lower than national norms whereas Band 2 schools either approached or surpassed the national averages. Since the SSP was introduced, they conclude that average reading and maths scores have increased at each round of testing and that pupils educational experiences and attitudes have also increased. However, they observe a scope for further raising of expectations as a ‘substantial gap’ (ibid, p. 64) exists between those in SSP schools and those of pupils nationally.

Gilleece et al. (2020) draw on results from PISA 2018 to examine achievements of students in DEIS and non-DEIS post primary schools. While Ireland scored significantly higher than the average OECD score in reading, mathematics and science, and scores in literacy were amongst the highest in OECD and EU countries, Gilleece et al. (2020) highlight the disparity between outcomes for DEIS and non-DEIS schools nationally in the 2018 cycle as well as over the various PISA cycles. Students in DEIS schools consistently scored significantly lower averages than non-DEIS counterparts across all cycles of PISA and while the gap has narrowed significantly in reading over time, it has not changed significantly for science and mathematics.

It is evident then, despite gains being made, that the DEIS programme has not thus far succeeded at closing the achievement gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools which raises questions, as observed by Smyth et al. (2015), about the adequacy of the scale of funding available under DEIS to bridge the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged. GUI data reveals that over two thirds of children from semi-skilled or unskilled manual or non-employed backgrounds attend non-DEIS primary schools, with patterns similar at post-primary level (Smyth 2017), and therefore do not have access to the additional supports available in DEIS schools. Cahill (2015, p. 302) observes that Irish educational policy interventions such as DEIS and its predecessors ‘view educational disadvantage in isolation’ rather than ‘intrinsically linked to material poverty and wider economic inequalities in Irish society’. The capacity of these ‘piecemeal solutions’ (Jeffers and Lillis 2021, p. 2) to reduce inequality is therefore problematic as they neither acknowledge nor address ‘how dimensions of inequality are interwoven’ (ibid). Fleming and Hartford (2021, p.8) assert that rather than focusing on a whole government approach

to social exclusion involving a wide range of departments and agencies and a more 'radical and comprehensive approach' is required. This was advocated by the Educational Disadvantage Committee (EDC), an expert independent group set up in 2002 and subsequently disbanded. DEIS however, has a more narrow focus on 'the role schools and the DES can fill' (ibid, p. 5) and educational disadvantage continues to be seen as a 'school-based issue' with a lack of recognition and response at policy level of the 'deep seated relationship with wider economic inequalities' (ibid, p. 15) in society.

5.4. Inequality, educational disadvantage and social class

In attempting to more fully comprehend the unequal outcomes apparent in education in Ireland, definitions of and understandings of the root cause of 'educational disadvantage' and inequality in education have been the source of much debate and contention for many years (Tormey 1999; Kellaghan et al. 2001; O'Sullivan 2005). What is evident from the literature is that inequality in education is multi-faceted, complex, related to deep-seated social, economic and educational issues and endemic (Drudy and Lynch 1993; Kellaghan 2001; Frawley 2014; Doyle and Keane 2019; Scanlan 2020). Understanding inequality, therefore, involves analysis of a diverse range of factors that lead to unequal outcomes in education in terms of students' socio-economic background, race, ethnicity, gender and ability, not just a review of outcomes in terms of student achievement (Lynch and Baker 2005). These factors are well documented in the literature and include those at the macro level of society, social structures and education policy that impact on children and young peoples' experiences of and outcomes in education e.g., fiscal policy and expenditure, poverty and income inequality, health and housing policy, educational policy and resourcing of schools, national curriculum design and modes of assessment adopted in state exams (Drudy and Lynch 1993; Kellaghan 2001; Lynch and Baker 2005; Frawley 2014). Those at the micro level of school include: school admission policies, streaming, social mix in schools, class size, teacher perceptions and student engagement in education (Drudy and Lynch 1993; Kellaghan 2001; Lynch and Baker 2005; O'Sullivan 2005; Frawley 2014; Smyth 2018 b). At the micro level of family and community they encompass: family income and financial resources, parental levels and experiences of education, educational and cultural resources in the home, housing policy, resources and supports available in the community, local levels of unemployment, early school leaving, drug use and crime (Drudy and Lynch 1993; Kellaghan 2001; Lynch and Baker 2005; O'Sullivan 2005; Frawley 2014; Doyle and Keane 2019). The synopsis of intractable

social issues experienced by families and communities in the DEIS schools in this study, as cited by research participants in section 7.5, echoes with many of the factors outlined here. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore these factors in detail, the next section will focus more broadly on explanations of the social reproduction of inequality in education (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Bourdieu 1997; Drudy and Lynch 1993; Kellaghan 2001; Lynch and Baker 2005; Lareau 2015; Lynch and Crean 2018; Lynch 2019).

5.5. Social reproduction of inequality in education

Kellaghan (2001) draws on Bourdieu to identify the three types of capital that affect children's educational outcomes i.e., economic, social and cultural capital, which although separate are related. An understanding of each is essential to understanding educational inequality, particularly the role of cultural and social capital in explaining class based and other differentials.

Economic capital refers to the economic resources of families and their power to purchase educational advantages for their children e.g., resources, additional tuition and supporting their children financially in higher education (ibid). This type of capital is convertible into money and can be institutionalised into property rights (Bourdieu 1997).

Cultural capital comprises three forms: 1) embodied in the form of dispositions, styles, social graces; 2) objectified in the form of cultural goods i.e., pictures, books, dictionaries and instruments; and 3) institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications (Harker 1984; Bourdieu 1997). Cultural capital can help to explain the unequal achievement in education of children from different social classes (Bourdieu 1997). It is embodied in the individual through the inculcation and cultivation of 'habitus', a concept that describes the socialisation, internalisation, transmission and reproduction of the system of cultural dispositions and outlooks of families, groups and institutions. Bourdieu defines 'habitus' as 'a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices' (Bourdieu 1979, vii). Habitus operates at the unconscious level, underlying, conditioning and orienting practices and giving people a sense of how to act and respond in their daily lives (Mills 2008) or as Bourdieu stated 'without consciously obeying rules explicitly posed as such' (1990, p. 76). Because the transmission of embodied cultural capital is unconscious, it is disguised and therefore

functions as ‘symbolic capital’ which is unrecognized as capital but rather as ‘legitimate competence’ (Bourdieu 1997, p. 47). In its objectified state, cultural capital takes the form of cultural goods and can be appropriated materially through economic capital i.e., money, and symbolically in its embodied form. In its institutionalised form Bourdieu argues that cultural capital can be compared and exchanged, such as when one educational qualification is substituted for another in succession (ibid).

Cultural capital plays a significant role in reproducing inequality between different social classes and groups because society and its institutions, such as schools which are middle class institutions predominantly run by middle class teachers, place greater value on the cultural capital of the dominant classes or groups (ibid) thus leading to ‘culturally discordant schooling’ (O’ Sullivan 2005, p. 314). This can result in alienation of students from school, absenteeism, early school leaving and apathy due to the dissonance and discontinuity students experience between what schools and teachers value and expect versus their home experience (Kellaghan et al. 2001). As the cultural capital of those from subordinate groups is considered less valuable, they are not on an equal playing field within the education system and schools from the outset and, therefore, not aware of the ‘rules of the game’ (Lareau 2015) and positioned to underachieve in comparison to students whose families have a higher social status. Furthermore, through symbolic violence, the cultural capital and habitus of dominant groups, and their subsequent success in education is misrecognised and legitimised as the natural order and as a result of their ‘individual giftedness’ (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979, p. 22), competence, and merit rather than due to class based differentials (Mills 2008). Conversely, the lack of success of subordinate groups is attributed to their lack of merit, competency, skills and abilities. Both schools and the education system (Pedagogic Authorities), serve the interests of more powerful and privileged dominant groups and ‘objectively and indirectly collaborate in the dominance of the dominant classes’ (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, p. 7), by prioritising their ‘knowledge and styles’ the value of which is ‘defined by the dominant PA’, (ibid) and perpetuate the social reproduction of ‘power relations’ and educational inequality from generation to generation. As Lynch and Baker (2005) assert, in cultural terms, schools are middle class institutions and this is reflected in their organisational procedures and values. Ultimately, students are expected to have class specific skills that are not taught by schools (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

Similarly, Lareau (2015) advocates for theoretical models to explain the transmission of inequality that draw on cultural rather than merely economic factors and highlights the influence of knowledge, expertise and cultural skills on young peoples' navigation of institutions and life paths. Her research (2003) on 10 year old children in the US argued that social class influenced a 'cultural logic' of childrearing strategies of middle-class families in ways that were more aligned with the standards of dominant institutions than those of working class and poor families, whose strategies were not in keeping with the expectations of educators. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, she surmised that the issue was not the 'intrinsic nature of parenting itself' (2015, p. 1) but rather that the dominant institutions rewarded the strategies of different classes differently. A follow up ethnographic study in 2011, when the original participants were 20 years old, explored how social class continued to influence opportunities. Rather than focusing on academic knowledge, Lareau focused on 'cultural knowledge (i.e., facts, information, skills and familiarity with social processes)' (Lareau 2015, p. 2), in particular their formal and informal knowledge of how institutions work and how this is important in the reproduction of inequality. These included knowledge of 'rules of the game' or how institutions work, seeking help from teachers, coaches and mentors and drawing on prior experience to deal with a problem related to an institution. For all three, she found that middle-class young adults displayed greater cultural knowledge than working class and poor youth and appeared to have greater success in gaining individualised accommodation. Lareau emphasises the significance of 'little moments' (2015, p. 4) that influence young people's educational journeys and outcomes, ones that are difficult to capture in surveys, such as knowing how to ask someone for help, and how they negotiate same. She concludes that the types of cultural knowledge learned at home are 'unequally valuable in a specific context' (2015, p.22).

5.6. School processes that perpetuate inequality

As organisational entities, schools and colleges play a role in promoting social class inequalities such as selection and admission procedures controlling school entry, group procedures to track and stream students and the systems of syllabus design and assessment (Drudy and Lynch 1993; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Lynch and Baker 2005). In market-driven systems, schools endeavour to enrol the most educationally attractive students with parents who will invest time and resources in their children and boost the performance and subsequent status of schools (Lynch and Baker 2005). With professional parents

possessing greater resources and more likely to be ‘active consumers in the education market’, (ibid, p. 136), less well-resourced working class students are viewed as a riskier by schools. Lynch and Baker (2005) assert that the practice of systematically discouraging ‘educationally disadvantaged’ students from schools with high levels of attainment obscures the ideology of school choice and educational markets, and ultimately fosters ghettos within the school system.

Courtois (2015 and 2018) and Kennedy and Power (2010) illuminate the role of economic and cultural capital in the reproduction of privilege in elite Irish private schools. Their greater economic capital allows the middle and upper middle classes to pay for and reap the benefits of factors known to be positively related to student outcomes i.e., privileged learning conditions, better facilities, higher expectations, smaller class size, access to private tuition and access to educational resources (Lynch and Lodge 2002; Kennedy and Power 2010; Courtois 2018). In addition to economic capital, students also need ‘access to a valued cultural capital’ to ‘fully exploit the limited resources which are available in the education system’ (Kennedy and Power 2010, p. 236). This is illustrated by the case of scholarship students who are unable to benefit fully from the opportunity to attend an elite school as they struggle to ‘fit in’ with peers. While these fee paying schools are also funded by the Irish government, non-fee paying schools have to supplement their income with voluntary contributions from parents. Data from the GUI ’08 cohort (McNamara et al. 2021) indicates that DEIS primary schools were responsive to family capacity to pay voluntary contributions with 59% of those in DEIS Band 1 primary schools not asked for a contribution and those with higher income levels more likely to be asked to pay higher contributions. This has implications for the capacity of schools to raise funding which can impact on their capacity to offer diverse extracurricular opportunities (McCoy 2021). McCoy et al’s. (2012) analysis of GUI data indicated that the recreation patterns of children may widen socio-economic gaps in achievement and highlighted the importance of resources and infrastructure being available to all schools to offer a range of extracurricular activities such as drama, arts and crafts, organised sports, debating and ICT. Lynch and Crean (2018, p.7) contend that the policy of voluntary contributions is ‘deeply inequitable’ due to differences in parents’ economic resources, with schools with the least affluent parents that are most in need of these contributions having the least capacity to raise same.

5.7. The myth of meritocracy, equality of opportunity and equality of condition

The more privileged groups in Irish society use education to ‘ensure optimum benefit for their children’ thereby perpetuating social class stratifications (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p. 40). This is achieved through the ‘smokescreen’ of the ideology of meritocracy (Kennedy and Power 2010), a ‘logical and social fallacy’ (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p. 33) espousing that anyone with talent who makes the effort can attain merit and meritorious positions. Lynch (2019) and Lynch and Crean (2018) attribute the sustained nature of inequality in education to the ‘moral justification’ of equality of opportunity, a policy which is encoded in EU countries through legally binding directives, and operationalised in education through ‘meritocratic selection’ i.e., those who achieve highly are rewarded with high grades and those who are least meritorious are awarded lower grades. However, given the relationship between educational success, economic, social and cultural capital, as discussed above, meritocratic selection is simply unattainable in an economically unequal society and meritocratic policies therefore, unrealisable (Kennedy and Power 2010; Lynch and Crean 2018; Lynch 2019). Meritocracy as a principle is ultimately ‘an ideology that justifies inequality not a means of overcoming it’ (Lynch and Crean, 2018 p. 13). Additionally, Kennedy and Power (2010) highlight that the Irish government’s continued funding of fee-paying schools reveals the extent to which they legitimate inequality in our education system.

Despite advances in the quality of teaching and learning and assessment to significantly enhance educational outcomes schools cannot overcome ‘economic injustices’ as the education system is not the source of same and challenging economic and class inequality is not achievable by schools alone (Lynch and Crean 2018; Lynch 2019). Rather, equality of condition is necessary in order to make society and education more equitable (Lynch and Baker 2005; Lynch and Crean 2018; Lynch 2019). This principle holds that people should be as equal as possible regarding the conditions of their lives, particularly material conditions and in the exercise of power (ibid). Equality of condition is not about ‘equality of outcome’; it is about ensuring people have ‘roughly equal prospects for a good and decent life’ (Lynch and Crean, 2018 p. 16) and equalising people’s ‘real options’, involving the ‘equal enabling and empowerment of individuals’ (Lynch and Baker 2005, p. 131). As such, it involves five dimensions of equality:

- 1) Resources – economic, cultural and social capital;

- 2) Respect and recognition – appreciating and accepting difference and engaging in critical dialogue with others;
- 3) Love, care and solidarity – organising society in ways that make being cared for more likely and to promote human development, mental and emotional wellbeing;
- 4) Power – reducing power inequalities, more egalitarian, participatory politics and extension of democratic principles to all areas of society;
- 5) Working and learning – everyone has a right to some form of potentially satisfying work, limits to inequality in the burden of work and compensation for unequal burdens, including paid and unpaid work to sustain relations of love, care and solidarity.

On the basis of these five principles, Lynch and Baker (2005) argue for significant changes in how the formal education system is run, identifying several ways in which education could be more egalitarian from selection and admission policies, to the greater education of students and staff about subjects of equality, human rights and social justice, to the democratisation of pedagogical and organisational relations of schooling and involvement of ‘oppressed groups’ in the design, planning and development processes of educational programmes to decrease the danger of privileged experts ‘colonizing the experience of subordinate groups’ (Lynch and O’Neill 1994, cited in Lynch and Baker 2005). In order to achieve equality of education, equality in the economic, cultural, political and affective systems must be advanced (Lynch and Baker 2005).

5.8. The emancipatory power of education - What schools and teachers can do

While Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) reject the emancipatory power of education to subvert power relations, others emphasise its transformative and liberatory potential (Freire 1970; Apple 2013; Lynch 2019). Apple (2013 and 2015) and Lynch (2019) contend that schools are not neutral sites and can play a significant role in reconstituting class, gender, race and ability hierarchies, in building both positive and negative identity formation, in determining what is ‘legitimate knowledge’ and participate in a process through which certain groups remain recognized or minimized (Apple 2013). Alternatively, they can play an instrumental role in the creation of justice movements, for example, the larger scale mobilisation within communities of colour in the U.S. Apple

(2013) contends that that in order for education to change society, one must look at society from the position of oppressed groups and actively engage with and overtly challenge both class and capitalism, and that an understanding of class relations and economic dynamics and structures is fundamental to understanding how society works (Apple 2013; Apple 2015). Drawing on the liberatory education and 'educational/political praxis' (2013, p. 27) of Paulo Freire, he advocates for critical scholars/activists to engage in nine critical tasks in education (2013, p. 41-43). Apple (2013 and 2015) recognises that answering the question of whether education can change society is not easy and involves moving beyond a view of schools that is defined solely on the basis of their roles in reproducing economic inequality. It also involves 'interrupting' the politics of recognition and redistribution (2013, p. 165) and 'challenging economic, social, cultural/ideological and affective structures and relations' (ibid, p. 166). Such work involves many roles i.e., working directly with students in critical ways, building and defending collective mobilisations around the labour processes of those who work in schools or working with communities and educating and preparing future teachers. Similarly, Lynch (2019) emphasises the potential of liberatory education that involves 'dialogue and humility' (hooks, 1984, cited in Lynch 2019), enabling people to trust in their abilities and come to know and frame the world in their own terms, as well as abandoning what Freire (1970, p. 53) termed 'banking education'. Furthermore, schools and colleges can resist injustice when the opportunity arises and as sites of economic activity they are a potential source for cultural organisation that enable and protect 'political dissent' and the cultural production of ideas and practices to promote social justice. For teachers to operate as dialogical, liberatory educators, they must be provided with opportunities to study the theory and practice of emancipatory practice in teacher education programmes. Additionally, those who work and learn within the education system have educational and political agency and can 'challenge the doxas of their own educational trade' by 'calling out, through emancipatory pedagogical practice, contradictions of the educational system, particularly its classed, raced, dis-ability and gendered contradictions' (Lynch 2019, p. 530). They can also enable their students to 'read the power encoded within educational knowledge' in order that they can critically analyse and challenge same. Lynch concludes that 'in order for education to be truly emancipatory, it must address the deep structures of gender class, race, disability and other oppressions within education. It is in the silences that injustices are perpetuated as much as in the misrecognition and misrepresentations' (ibid, p. 532).

5.9. Conclusion

Schools and teachers alone cannot possibly be expected to change deep seated societal and structural inequalities that lead to social class, gender, racial and ability stratifications and differentials in educational outcomes. However, teachers can become critical active agents in challenging the ‘doxa’ and dominant hegemony of their profession (Lynch 2019), they can engage in critical work with students and develop more critical pedagogy. Schools and colleges can challenge and change biased policies and critically engage with the wider educational community to address issues of recognition and redistribution (Apple 2013; Lynch 2019). This chapter has presented findings from research on the DEIS programme to date and outlined how social reproduction in education is strongly linked to economic inequalities and leads to differentials in outcomes between more and less affluent students and families. This thesis argues that the networks of DEIS schools were set up to support schools and staff to address concerns arising from educational inequality but equally acknowledges that they cannot do this alone. The findings indicate that what they have been doing is supporting schools and staff, through dialogue and discussion, to advocate on behalf of their school community and draw the attention of those in powerful positions to the inequities in the lived experiences of the children and families in DEIS schools and to ‘interrupt’ the politics of recognition and redistribution (Apple 2013) and this will be discussed in Chapters Ten and Eleven.

Chapter 6 – Methodology

6.1. Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the research problem and the subsequent epistemological and ontological positions adopted in order to best explore the research questions. The research approach and rationale for the same are discussed in detail and the methodology is clearly delineated focusing on the strengths and limitations of the methods adopted. Data was collected and analysed on a phased basis and an account of the same is provided. The data analysis procedures are detailed and any issues that arose during the analysis phase are reflected upon. Research design issues are explored, as well as ethical considerations encountered and steps taken in the research process to address both.

6.2. Research focus and the challenge of delineating the approach

The main concern of the research was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of how the PLUS and OSCAILT networks evolved, how they function from the perspective of the members, in what way they contribute to knowledge creation and sharing and to gain insight from these two unique networks about how DEIS schools can be supported through the process of networking. From an early stage, it was apparent that a qualitative research design was necessary to explore the research problem and case study research was deemed the most appropriate methodology to address the research question and embedded questions. While grounded theory and phenomenology were other possibilities considered in the early stages due to their focus on the lived experience and perspectives of participants, case study research resonated with the objectives of an in-depth analysis of each network.

Defining the unit of analysis as a school or individual network member and the type of case study research posed a challenge which reflected a tension as to whether the research should be categorised as intrinsic or instrumental case study (Stake 1995). As the research progressed it was clear that it was more aligned with instrumental case study design because the emphasis was ‘a need for general understanding’ (Stake 1995, p. 3) on how networks can support DEIS schools, through which insight was sought by studying the particular cases of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks. Once this was clarified, ethical

clearance was sought and granted in July 2014 (see Appendix 2). Developing a framework to cater for analysis and illumination of the uniqueness and complexity of the evolution of the two networks from members' perspectives, as well as illustrating how DEIS schools can be supported by the practice of networking, posed a further challenge. It was imperative the framework acknowledge the difference in the nature of the networks from large scale, policy-led collaborative initiatives that have developed in other countries to support schools in challenging circumstances. The Conceptual Framework (see 10.3) developed in an iterative fashion and my 'current version' of the map evolved as the study progressed (Miles et al. 2014). There is some debate as to whether the literature review and Conceptual Framework should be developed prior to or after data collection and analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1999; Charmaz 2006). The interpretive approach adopted here falls between a 'tight pre-structured' and 'loose' qualitative design' (Miles et al. 2014, p. 20) corresponding with Merriam's (1998, p. 34) iteration of interpretive case study which contains rich thick description and where 'data are used to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering' (ibid).

A qualitative research design was employed, utilising an exploratory, instrumental case study (Stake 1995) aimed at developing a thorough description and analysis of the networks, leading to an in-depth understanding of members' participation in their respective network. The unit of analysis was, therefore, network members i.e., those who represent their school on the networks and have experience of same, rather than children, parents or other school staff who participate in projects and initiatives delivered through the networks, but do not have experience of representing their school on the networks. Whilst this constitutes gap regarding their knowledge, understanding, experience and perspectives on the networks, it does not infer that they are not considered important stakeholders by the TED Project, by the researcher or by network members. The research sought both to describe and explain the processes of the networks from members' perspectives and illustrate how they have supported DEIS schools. Description can be more restricted but is often a first step towards explanation, which is more powerful and leads to more substantive theory (Punch 2009).

6.3. Research paradigm and philosophical assumptions

The research sought to gain a holistic overview of the context of each network, to understand the emic perspective of participants and describe the ways in which they have come to ‘understand, account for, take action and otherwise manage their day to day situations’ (Miles et al. 2014, p. 8-9). The epistemological position of this research is interpretivist and predicated on the view that in order to critically understand the school networks, an understanding of the subjective meaning of social action within these specific contexts is imperative. The research is positioned ontologically as social constructivism thereby recognising that the reality of individual network members is socially constructed as they constantly negotiate their world, that there can be multiple subjective and conflicting understandings of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks and that the researcher’s role is to examine the complexity of these multiple subjective realities or views rather than a mere ‘narrowing of meanings into a few categories or ideas’ (Creswell 2014, p. 8).

The approach adopted embodies a number of key characteristics of qualitative research as outlined in the literature (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Stake 1995; Merriam 1998; Bryman 2008; Punch 2009; Mertens 2010; Robson 2011; Creswell 2014; Miles et al. 2014). This includes recognition of the interpretive nature of constructivism (Bryman 2008; Mertens 2010), the role of the researcher as research instrument (Miles et al. 2014) and researcher positionality (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). An inductive and emergent approach was adopted to capture the complexity participants ascribe to their experience (Creswell 2014; Merriam 1998). A flexible research design (Robson 2011) enabled adaptation as the research progressed e.g., refining and modifying the research questions, strengthening confidence that the researcher can really understand what is happening in the research site from participants’ perspectives (Miles et al. 2014). The research sought rich accounts and ‘thick descriptions’ of the networks that acknowledge the complexity and particularity of participants’ emic perspectives (Stake 1995). As ‘bricoleur’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p. 2), I interpreted and weaved together a tapestry of multiple voices, experience and perspectives adopting a rigorous approach to the collection and analysis of the data (Robson 2011). The ‘bricolage’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p.2) involved multiple techniques to elicit and triangulate different understandings and experiences of the networks. A longer period of time in the field helped to gain as comprehensive an understanding as possible about the research topic (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Stake 1995; Miles et al. 2014). Data collection over sustained time periods is more powerful for

studying processes as the researcher can ‘go far beyond snapshots of “what” or “how many” to just how and why things happen as they do’ (Miles et al 2014, p. 11). Sampling in qualitative research tends to be purposive or theoretical as opposed to random sampling (Robson 2011; Miles et al. 2014).

Critiques generally centre on subjectivity, bias and capacity to generalise beyond the specific research site (Punch 2009; Stake 1995). Qualitative research is highly interpretive and subjective because the primary research instrument is human with every observation and analysis filtered through the lens of the ‘biographically situated researcher’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p. 11). Strategies such as triangulation, audit trails and member checking (section 6.10) were incorporated to reduce bias, strengthen the analytic generalisations and lend overall credibility to the research. Generalisability is a particular limitation of case study and will be discussed in section 6.4 below.

6.4. Research approach – Case Study Research

Case study research is employed to gain detailed and nuanced understanding of complex phenomena in their ‘real-life’ context or natural setting cognisant of the meaning that those involved ascribe to the same (Stake 1995; Merriam 1998; Yin 2009). The focus is a holistic understanding and depiction of a case or cases that recognises the wholeness and integrity of each case.

The approach adopted in this study resonates most with Stake who defines case study as follows:

Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances (1995, p. xi).

Stake’s conception draws from ‘naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and biographic research methods’ (ibid) and he advocates a construction of case study in which qualitative researchers place emphasis on ‘episodes of nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, the wholeness of the individual’ (p. xii). This research corresponds to instrumental case study as a more general understanding is sought about networking and collaboration between DEIS schools through insight from the particular cases of PLUS and OSCAILT, with the cases selected on the basis they will help to learn most about the research problem. However, the work of Yin (2009) and Thomas (2011) also

informed the case study approach as it is subject to criticism of lacking rigour and systematic procedures (Yin 2009) and being 'loose' (Punch 2009; Thomas 2011). This may be due to the variation in application (Yin 2009) or inexperienced researchers failing to define the object of the study (Thomas 2011). The case may be simple or complex, but Stake (1995, p. 1) maintains whatever the phenomenon under scrutiny is a case of, 'We are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality. We seek to understand them. We would like to hear their voices'.

Defining the case as well as the unit of analysis can be problematic (Merriam 1998; Yin 2009) which may fuel criticism that the approach lacks rigour. The challenge of identifying the unit of analysis in this research has been outlined in section 6.2 above. There is also variance in the literature on what comprises a case. Miles et al. (2014, p. 29) provide a useful list for qualitative case study which includes an individual, a role, a small group, an organisation, space and environment, a community or settlement, episodes or encounters, an event, a period of time, a process, a culture or subculture or a nation.

Case study research differs from other qualitative research in that a key feature is the 'bounded' nature of the approach (Stake 1995; Punch 2009; Yin 2009; Robson 2011; Miles et al. 2014). Case studies are 'intensive description and analyses of a single unit or bounded system' (Merriam 1998, p. 18). Discerning the often blurred boundary between the phenomenon or case and the context can be a difficult task (Punch 2009) and researchers must identify the boundaries of the case as clearly as possible as well as define the case and unit of analysis as early as possible (Miles et al. 2014; Punch 2009). Merriam (1998, p. 27) suggests a helpful technique for assessing the 'boundedness' of the topic: if there are no limits to those who could be interviewed or observations that could be conducted then the 'phenomenon is not bounded enough to qualify as a case'. In order to create a boundary to this study and to answer the research questions, the number of people that could be interviewed or surveyed was limited to those who had represented their school on the PLUS or OSCAILT network between 1998 and the end of the data collection in 2018 as they had direct experience of the networks and the number of meetings documented within the same period was limited.

Critiques of case study research highlight the potential for researcher bias (Merriam 1998; Yin 2009) and the limitation of external validity or generalisation. As Bassey observes (1999, p. 29), "How do you generalize from n=1?" However, there is some agreement in the literature (Stake 1995; Punch 2009; Yin 2009; Robson 2011) that case study can

produce ‘potentially generalizable results’ (Punch 2009, p. 121) although in different ways from positivist understandings of the term. Stake (1995) distinguishes between two types of assertions that are made as part of the interpretive process. ‘*Petite generalizations*’ (1995, p.8) are particular to a case or a few cases. They are a refinement of understanding and happen ‘along the way’. ‘*Grand generalizations*’ are statements about issues that refer to a larger population of cases and can be modified by case study. ‘*Naturalistic generalization*’, refers to the assertions that readers make through a combination of the ‘vicarious experience’ provided in the researcher’s narrative account and from their own experiential learning. Yin (2009, p. 15) holds that case study is ‘generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes’. Reflecting his more positivist orientation, he advocates for ‘*analytic generalization*’ in case study research (ibid) arguing that scientific facts are rarely based on a single experiment but usually on multiple experiments replicated on the same phenomena under different conditions. Case studies, like experiments, are generalisable to theoretical propositions not populations and the goal of case study is to expand and generalise theory through analytic generalisation, as opposed to statistical generalisation (Yin 2009). Previously developed theory is used as the basis for analysis and comparison of the case study results. Replication may be claimed if two or more cases are shown to support the theory (ibid). Strategies to enhance the external validity of this research will be discussed under design issues (section 6.10.4).

As the research design was neither comparative nor experimental, data collection was limited to the cases that are the focus of the research i.e., PLUS and OSCAILT, and to the defined unit of analysis i.e., network members, rather than including comparator data from DEIS schools that do not participate in school networks. Case study design does not aim to establish causal relationships in the manner of experiments (Yin 2009; Thomas 2016). Arguably, other types of initiatives for DEIS schools could have similar effects, particularly those that involve bringing children and families on campus with the aim of developing positive experiences of and attitudes towards third level, or TPL activity for teachers in DEIS schools. However, the focus of this research was on understanding members’ perspectives on the processes, interactions and outcomes of these particular networks.

The case study approach was deemed the most suitable to investigate the research problem because the study was exploratory, seeking a greater understanding and

explanation of the processes involved and members' rationale for participation in the networks. The study sought 'insight, discovery and interpretation, rather than hypothesis testing' (Merriam 1998, p. 27). The types of questions were primarily 'how' and 'why' in nature (Punch 2009, p. 9). While the descriptive element featured in the initial research questions and draft conceptual framework, the main focus of the study was explanatory. By focusing on the networks in this way, the research aimed to observe 'the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon' (Merriam 1998, p. 28).

6.5. Research methodology

The case study approach adopted involved gathering primary data through a combination of methods including: focus groups, in-depth individual interviews and a survey. Secondary data analysed included: documentary analysis of agendas and minutes of meetings and other reports relevant to the case units. Multiple methods and sources of data generation facilitated triangulation of sources of evidence in this case study research (Stake 1995; Merriam 1998; Yin 2009; Robson 2011; Creswell 2014). The following sections provide an overview of each method and account of the administration of the same including any issues encountered.

6.6. Research methods

The data collection methods used include:

1. Three focus groups with PLUS and OSCAILT network representatives about members' perceptions of how the networks evolved, built shared commitment and the features/attributes of the networks (see Appendix 3 for the focus group schedule).
2. Twenty six semi-structured individual interviews with network members about their opinions and experiences of participating in the networks. These interviews explored issues that emerged from analysis of focus groups, as well individual and school level outcomes, knowledge creation, sharing of practice and collaboration, and the relevance of networking as a practice to support DEIS schools as educational policy (see Appendix 4 for interview schedules).
3. A survey with research participants to collect: A. School profiles (principals only) and B. Personal profiles (see Appendix 5 for surveys).

4. Documentary analysis such as agendas and minutes of meetings and relevant reports.

Table 7 provides an overview of primary sources of data and Table 8 provides an overview of the secondary data collected and analysed to inform Chapter Seven and the case study reports presented in Chapters Eight and Nine. While there was nearly twice the amount of documents available regarding PLUS, there was double the number of focus groups conducted about OSCAILT (N=2) and individual representative profiles (N=16), as well as seven more individual interviews than PLUS. This reflects the greater number of schools and representative in OSCAILT and some PLUS members represent more than once school.

Table 8. Primary sources of data

Method	PLUS	OSCAILT
Focus Groups	1 x 4 primary representatives	1 x 6 primary principals 1 x 3 OSCAILT facilitators
Individual Interviews	9 x PLUS representatives	14 x OSCAILT representatives 2 x DoE facilitators 1 x MIC facilitator
Individual representative surveys	8 x PLUS representatives	16 x OSCAILT representatives
School profile surveys	12 x PLUS schools	16 x OSCAILT schools (overlap of 12 with PLUS)

Table 9. Secondary sources of data

Source	Details
PLUS Network	Minutes & Agendas December 1998 – September 2017
OSCAILT Network	Minutes & Agendas February 2009 – January 2018

6.6.1. Focus Groups

The first step in the data collection process was focus groups with network members, the purpose of which was to gain insight into the ways in which members make sense of the networks collectively (Cohen et al. 2007; Bryman 2008). They provided an opportunity for participants to interact with each other and discuss their understanding of the networks, reflecting the ‘naturalistic’ and social constructivist orientation of the research (Bryman 2008, p. 476). A flexible, semi-structured approach was adopted with guiding questions under main topics (see Appendix 3). Participants’ views on how the networks evolved, built shared commitment and how they have supported DEIS schools over the years were explored. The insights gleaned helped to identify topics to be explored in further rounds of data collection in the individual interviews (Cohen et al. 2007) e.g., the principal leadership role or HSCL role. They also enabled gathering data from several participants simultaneously, helped to elicit different views on the networks, and gave participants the opportunity to hear other people’s opinions which they could voice agreement or disagreement with (Bryman 2008). The limitation of the approach was that there were some ‘no-shows’ on the day of each focus group. Resultantly, the perspectives of post primary school principals from the OSCAILT network were not voiced in this first phase of data collection. The amount of ‘latitude’ given to participants in focus groups can be problematic in that free rein can make it easier to access what people see as relevant or interesting. However, this can produce a large amount of irrelevant discussion (Bryman 2008). In respect of the limited time available to conduct the focus groups, the fore mentioned semi-structured schedule helped to overcome this difficulty. Table 10 details the codes that are used when quoting from focus group participants in Chapters Seven to Eleven.

6.6.2. Individual Interviews

This research involved semi-structured individual interviews following focus groups with each network. The purpose was a ‘guided conversation’ (Yin 2009, p. 106) to explore issues raised in the focus group as well as to delve more deeply into respondents’ personal opinions and experiences of the networks. Interviews are a crucial strategy in discovering and depicting multiple realities (Stake 1995) and necessary when behaviour cannot be directly observed or when a respondent’s feelings or interpretations about a phenomena are to the forefront of the line of enquiry (Merriam 1998). Individual interviews were the main source of data about participants’ experiences, attitudes and beliefs about the networks and an important source of members’ reported behaviour outside of meetings such as face to face, phone or email contact with other network members.

Good practice in conducting qualitative interviews was observed i.e., clarity of purpose of interview, establish a rapport, open ended questions, avoiding leading questions or displaying personal bias (Merriam 1998; Yin 2009; Robson 2011). Interviews ranged in length from approximately half an hour to an hour and a quarter and were audio recorded with permission. Field notes were taken during and shortly after each interview.

The advantages of semi-structured interviews include flexibility in sequence and wording of questions as the interview unfolds, the capacity to prompt respondents about topics of interest and to be responsive to their ‘emerging world view’ (Merriam 1998, p. 74) and to probe new or interesting ideas (Merriam 1998; Yin 2009; Robson 2011).

I was very conscious of being respectful, non-judgemental and non-threatening towards the interviewees, many of whom I had an established working relationship with.

While time consuming and subject to interviewee bias (Merriam 1999; Yin 2000; Robson 2011) interviews were deemed, as part of a multiple method strategy, to be the most effective way of exploring network members’ perceptions about their participation. Table 9 details the participant codes used when quoting from individual interviews in Chapters Seven to Eleven. These were generated using a random code generator¹². OSCAILT facilitators use FL i.e., OSCFL00 and principals are assigned PT (for participant) i.e., OSCPT00. PLUS interviewees are all also assigned PT i.e., PLUSPT00. For focus groups, FG is used in the code before the FL/PT number i.e., PLUSFGPT00.

¹² <https://www.randomizer.org/> A range of 10 – 100 was specified for a set of 35 potential interview participants.

Table 10. Individual interview participant codes

OSCAILT Individual Interviews	PLUS Individual Interviews
OSCFL10	PLUSPT13
OSCPT15	PLUSPT25
OSCPT20	PLUSPT27
OSCPT23	PLUSPT30
OSCPT35	PLUSPT49
OSCPT36	PLUSPT65
OSCFL44	PLUSPT78
OSCPT51	PLUSPT79
OSCPT55	PLUSPT81
OSCPT56	
OSCPT59	
OSCFL64	
OSCPT74	
OSCPT76	
OSCPT92	
OSCPT100	

Table 11. Focus group participant codes

OSCAILT Principal	OSCAILT Facilitator	PLUS
OSCFGPT36	OSCFGFL10	PLUSFGPT24
OSCFGPT51	OSCFGFL44	PLUSFGPT78
OSCFGPT55	OSCFGFL64	PLUSFGPT79
OSCFGPT56		PLUSFGPT81
OSCFGPT59		
OSCFGPT74		

6.6.3. Self-completion surveys

In October – November 2018, current PLUS and OSCAILT representatives were invited to fill in and return a short self-completion questionnaire via post or email. The purpose was: 1) to collect permission for documentary analysis from all network members and supplementary information to triangulate interview data including, 2) basic demographic information about schools and representatives to build a profile of network members and schools, 3) to ascertain whether representatives participated in other types of professional development and 4) whether they had received an input in their Initial Teacher Education or professional development on working in partnerships with parents and working in collaboration with other stakeholders (see Appendix 5 for full details). Emerging findings

from the focus groups and individual interviews indicated that the networks were an important source of professional development for representatives due to their context specific nature i.e., DEIS schools, and that partnership and collaboration with parents and other stakeholders are a key aspect of the role of the DEIS principal and HSCL.

Using a self-completion survey can be quicker, more convenient for respondents, less resource intensive than individual interviews and can reduce socially desirable bias experienced in interviews (Bryman 2008; Creswell 2014). However, they need to be easy to complete, with clear unambiguous questions as the researcher cannot prompt or probe and short to reduce ‘respondent fatigue’ (Bryman 2008). They are subject to greater risk of missing data and some respondents need multiple reminders, as experienced in this research (ibid).

Questions for individual representatives were predominantly forced choice and demographic in nature i.e., gender, role, qualifications, with some questions requesting more specific details. The survey also asked about professional learning they had completed in the previous year and whether they avail of other supports pertinent to their role. Principals were asked to complete demographic questions about schools i.e., enrolment, number of teachers. Clear instructions were provided in the cover letter which also detailed the purpose of the survey (Bryman 2008; Creswell 2014). The survey was piloted (Bryman 2008; Creswell 2014) with three colleagues for feedback prior to sending it out and minor edits were made. There are a total of twenty schools across the two networks, with an overlap of twelve primary schools between the two networks. To retain anonymity of the two smaller special schools involved in the PLUS network, information about these schools was not collated. Additionally, two PLUS schools did not return the survey so data is provided only on twelve of the sixteen PLUS schools.

6.6.4. Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis was adopted to ‘corroborate and augment’ (Yin 2009, p. 103) data collected in the interviews and focus groups (Merriam 1998; Bryman 2008; Yin 2009). Permission was sought and received from the TED Steering Committee in May 2018 and each individual network member in October 2019 for access to minutes and agendas of PLUS and OSCAILT meetings which were subsequently redacted by a third party in MIC and made available for the purposes of the research. Table 2 provides details of the

documents that were analysed for descriptive information about the meetings e.g., agenda items, levels of attendance, views of attendees and actions agreed.

As minutes of meetings are official documents they are likely to be authentic and meaningful (Bryman 2008). A key issue for researchers is whether they are credible and representative (ibid). Caution is advised regarding interpretation of seemingly ‘transparent representations’ of the social reality of an organisation from analysis of documentary sources (ibid , p. 527) and viewing of their contents as ‘unmitigated truth’ (Yin 2009, p. 105). Having personally recorded the minutes for many of the PLUS meetings in question, I was aware that the minutes of the meetings were originally created with a specific audience in mind e.g., network members, and in anticipation of being edited and checked for accuracy (Bryman 2008). While issues raised, discussion, views of those at the meeting and any actions arising were recorded, Bryman reminds us that we must bear in mind that any disagreements may have been ‘suppressed’ (ibid, p. 527). Hence the advice that documents be used in conjunction with other sources of evidence. One of the advantages of the approach is that documents are ‘non-reactive’ to influence of the researcher (Merriam 1998; Bryman 2008). While minutes of some meetings were missing, particularly from the early years of PLUS, they were nonetheless an invaluable source of historical and contextual information about the networks as well as information about changes and developments over the years (Merriam 1998).

6.7. Data Collection Phases

The data collection involved six phases with each stage informing the next in an iterative process of data collection, analysis and further data collection. Each phase is detailed in Table 11.

Phase one (June 2017) commenced with focus group interviews with the PLUS and OSCAILT networks and interviews with retiring principals from the OSCAILT network.

The **second phase** (September 2017 to June 2018) was a continuation of individual interviews and included a focus group and individual interviews with OSCAILT facilitators. There were a few changes in OSCAILT representatives from June – December 2017 with four retirements and four new representatives joined the network in 2017-2018. There was one change in PLUS representative. I waited until later in the school year to invite them to participate in an interview to give them the opportunity to experience the network.

The **third phase** (September to October 2018) was a continuation of individual interviews with PLUS network representatives.

Phase four (October - November 2018) consisted of a short survey to collect demographic information on all network representatives at that time as well as school profiles (principals only). At this point each network member was asked for permission to conduct documentary analysis, as per the guidance of the TED Steering Committee.

The **fifth phase** (January - March 2019) was when redacted PLUS and OSCAILT network agendas and minutes of meetings from 2009 – 2018 were made available for the research.

The **sixth and final phase** involved a member check process that included focus groups with all those who participated in the research (May – July 2019) and a review of relevant thesis chapter by those who participated in the research (January 2021).

Table 12. Data collection phases and data collected

Phase 1 – Focus Groups and individual interviews

June 2017 Focus groups	Data collected 1 x Focus group with 4 PLUS representatives 1 x Focus group with 6 OSCAILT representatives
----------------------------------	--

June 2017 Individual interviews with retirees	Data collected 2 x retiring/retired principals OSCAILT
---	--

Phase 2 – Individual interviews and focus groups

September 2017- June 2018 Individual interviews	Data collected 7 x individual interviews PLUS representatives 11 x individual interviews OSCAILT representatives (2 x retiring/retirees, 2 x new principals)
---	---

September 2017- June 2018 Focus group and individual interviews OSCAILT network facilitators.	Data collected 1 x Focus group OSCAILT facilitators 3 x individual interviews OSCAILT facilitators
---	---

Phase 3 – Individual interviews

September – October 2018 Individual interviews PLUS network representatives	Data collected 2 x individual PLUS interviews
---	---

Phase 4 – Surveys and school profiles

October – November 2018 Survey for individual network representatives Demographic profile of PLUS and OSCAILT schools Permission for documentary analysis	Data collected Individual PLUS surveys x 10 Individual OSCAILT surveys x 16 School profiles x 16
---	--

Phase 5 – Documents for analysis

January – March 2019	Data collected
-----------------------------	-----------------------

PLUS agendas and minutes 1998-2017 OSCAILT agendas and minutes 2009 - 2018	PLUS documents January 2019 OSCAILT documents March 2019
---	---

Phase 6 – Member checking process

May 2019 – January 2020	Data collected
Member checks with PLUS and OSCAILT members who participated in the research	OSCAILT focus group May 2019 PLUS focus group June 2019 OSCAILT facilitator focus group July 2019
Review of relevant sections of draft thesis by PLUS and OSCAILT members who participated in the research	PLUS and OSCAILT members opportunity to review draft thesis chapters January 2021

6.8. Data Analysis

As Stake (1995, p.71) so eloquently advises, data analysis in qualitative case study research is nonlinear, without a specific starting point.

Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations. Analysis essentially means taking something apart. We take our impressions, our observations, apart ... We need to take the new impression apart, giving meaning to the parts. Not beginning, middle, and end, not those parts but the parts that are important to us.

Additionally, there is no ‘universally accepted set of conventions for analysis’ as per quantitative research and data analysis (Robson 2011, p. 466). Stake’s assertion that qualitative researchers focus on instances, which they pull apart and ‘put back together again more meaningfully - analysis and synthesis in direct interpretation’ (1995, p. 75) resonates with the approach to analysis in this research. He distinguishes between direct interpretation of individual instances within the case and categorical aggregation ‘through aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class’ (1995, p.74).

The analytic strategy adopted in the research drew on a variety of proponents of qualitative and case study research, including Stake (Stake 1995; Merriam 1998; Yin 2009; Robson 2011; Creswell 2014; Miles et al. 2014) to establish a systematic, thorough and comprehensive strategy for analysis and interpretation of the data. Data analysis was conducted in an iterative fashion in tandem with the data collection phases of the research. Creswell (2014, pp. 197-201) advocates a six step general process for qualitative data analysis that was followed. The following section outlines this process and also details the more specific steps that were taken in respect of this research, such as the coding strategy and analytic strategies and techniques.

6.8.1. Step one

First, the data was organised and prepared for analysis. After phase one of data collection, focus groups were initially synopsised to inform data collection in the individual interviews in phase two. In December 2017, the focus groups and individual interviews completed were transcribed and uploaded to QSR Nvivo which was used to aid data analysis, the advantage of which is that it helps to keep data manageable (Robson 2011). Data was arranged by source and type i.e., focus group and interview. Field notes, which were kept throughout data collection and analysis, were retained in hand written notebooks and consulted as required during analysis. All subsequent interviews and focus groups were prepared in the same way. Redacted documents for analysis were uploaded at a later stage in 2019 once all relevant permissions were secured.

6.8.2. Step two

Audio files, transcripts and field notes were reviewed for familiarisation and to get a 'general sense' of overall meaning (Creswell 2014, p. 196) from the data. As each phase of data collection was completed, the same process was applied and each batch of audio files, transcripts and field notes were reviewed in advance of coding.

6.8.3. Step three

The third stage in the data analysis involved coding of the data. An initial pre coding of the focus group and interview data was conducted in January – February 2018 for familiarisation, to organise the data and make it more navigable. The seventy five nodes (categories or codes in Nvivo) created mainly consisted of descriptive categories related

to the topics discussed in the semi-structure interviews i.e., what are the benefits of networking, what are the challenges, what motivates people to continue their involvement. See Appendix 6 for the initial pre code list. Following this, the coding strategy for analysis was adapted from Miles et al. (2014, pp. 71-93) and involved first and second cycle coding.

6.8.3.1. First cycle coding

First cycle coding commenced in February 2018 and involved assigning thematic codes to segments of interview and focus group transcription through the creation of 407 nodes in Nvivo. These codes were developed deductively based on the research questions and key variables identified in the literature i.e., key elements in the analysis of school networks, and inductively, with codes emerging during the data collection and analysis (Miles et al. 2014). As the data analysis was an iterative process, I commenced writing up key emerging findings in March 2018 in the form of detailed analytic memos i.e., members' descriptions of the networks and motivations for participating, and benefits, impact and challenges of the networks. These helped to guide further rounds of data collection and analysis. During this process, the codes were refined and some of them were collapsed. Meeting agendas, minutes and associated documents were only analysed through one cycle of coding in August 2019, as the documents were incorporated specifically for contextual and historical information and to triangulate participants' accounts.

6.8.4. Step four

The fourth step in the analysis of the data involved using the coding process to generate a description of the setting and people in addition to categories or themes for analysis. Creswell (2014) advises developing a smaller number of themes or categories i.e., 5-7, for the research. The second cycle coding process facilitated this aspect in the data analysis.

6.8.4.1. Second cycle coding

The second cycle of coding of focus groups and interviews began in January 2019 and involved pattern coding, which groups together first cycle codes into emerging themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people and theoretical constructs (Miles et al. 2014, pp. 86-87). Using Nvivo, a node hierarchy (or node tree) was created for each

network and nodes which were related to each other conceptually were grouped together under key emergent themes as identified through pattern coding. Please see Appendices 7 and 8 for the ‘node tree’ for PLUS and OSCAILT. These themes/categories formed the major findings of the research as presented in the case study reports and encompassed multiple perspectives from research participants supported by quotation and specific evidence (Creswell 2014). Development of the themes in this manner facilitated the creation of additional layers of complex analysis e.g., interconnecting themes into a narrative. Themes were analysed for each case and then across cases (Creswell 2014).

6.8.5. Step five

The fifth step in the data analysis involved the drafting of the research findings in narrative form i.e., case study reports, which took place from February to August 2019, with a detailed description of each case, the key emergent themes and sub-themes and discussion with inter-connecting themes. At this stage strategies for case study analysis and analytic techniques were employed.

Yin (2009, pp. 130 – 163) outlines strategies and analytic techniques for case study analysis applied in this research. General strategies include developing a case description, as presented in the case study reports (Chapters Eight and Nine). Although primarily qualitative, this research also involved quantitative data as advised by Yin (ibid), which was analysed using SPSS after the case study reports were drafted and presented in the profile of networks and respondents in October 2019 (Chapter Seven). A code book was developed for survey responses and once the data was anonymised and entered, it was analysed using basic frequency and cross-tabulations measures which formed the basis of the findings presented in Chapter Six (Pallant 2016).

Yin (ibid) further advises drawing on the theoretical propositions that guided the research questions and literature search. Early in the research, while preparing the literature review, a draft conceptual framework was devised for this study which was linked to the research questions and broader theoretical lenses from which the school networks could be understood. This conceptual framework encapsulates the early theoretical propositions of this research (see Appendix 1).

Additionally, Yin (2009) advocates for the use of explanation building and cross case synthesis. Explanation building involved constructing an explanation about the case through the analysis of the case study data. This iterative process involved examining the

case study evidence, revising the theoretical stance and re-examination of evidence from a 'new perspective'. A draft grid of emerging propositions based on this process is included in Appendix 9, which formed the basis of the discussion chapter where four overarching propositions about the research are presented and discussed and also served as a cross case synthesis of the PLUS and OSCAILT findings with reference to the literature and theory. In light of the findings and discussion chapter, the Conceptual Framework was then revised in November 2020 as presented in section 10.3.

6.8.6. Step six

The final step in the analysis involved making an interpretation of the findings or results i.e., what are the lessons learned? These are the researcher's personal interpretation, 'couched in the understanding that the inquirer brings to the study from a personal culture, history and experiences' (Creswell 2014, p. 200). This is presented in the conclusion and recommendations chapter which were drafted in December 2020.

6.9. Research Management

6.9.1. Sampling

Sampling in qualitative research generally tends to be purposive or theoretical, involving small samples of people nested in context (Merriam 1998; Robson 2011; Miles et al. 2104). The boundaries were set initially regarding which participants, settings, events and processes would be examined (Miles et al. 2014) but as observations were not possible, 'refocusing and redrawing' (ibid, p. 30) was necessary and only participants and documents could be researched in the study. These were purposefully selected to help best understand the research problem and questions and maximise what could be learned (Stake 1995; Creswell 2014). All PLUS and OSCAILT network members, including OSCAILT facilitators, involved at the time data collection commenced were invited to participate and everyone who volunteered to participate was interviewed. As some OSCAILT representatives retired around this time and one PLUS representative changed, newer representatives were purposefully invited to participate once they had some experience of the network. This helped to ensure there was a mixture of longer serving and newer members' accounts included in the data. Similarly, every network representative involved at the time of survey data collection was invited to participate. All documents redacted and provided for the purpose of the research were reviewed for contextual information.

A multiple-case sampling strategy was also applied as two cases of school networks were studied in this research which add confidence to findings in addition to confidence that emergent theory is 'generic' (Miles et al. 2014, p. 33). By following a replication strategy, if a finding holds in one setting, and given its profile, also holds in a comparable setting but not in a contrasting case, the finding is more robust.

Sampling ceased at the point of redundancy or when 'theoretical saturation' was reached and no new information was emerging from the sampled units (Lincoln and Guba 1985) i.e., no other participants or documents were sought for inclusion in the research.

6.9.2. Insider research

This research can be considered insider research as I work for the project that manages the PLUS and OSCAILT networks and have facilitated PLUS for many years and been involved in OSCAILT at different points. The main advantages associated with insider research include a greater understanding of the context and culture of the organisation, a shared frame of reference about the research context, capacity for a deeper level of interpretation about the research, and ease in gaining access to research participants (Mercer 2007; Robson 2011; Hanson 2013; Creswell 2014; Kirpitchenko and Voloder 2014; Fleming 2018). However, there can be significant challenges including minimising the threat of researcher bias and desire for positive outcomes, the need for awareness of potential conflicts, power imbalances if interviewing those in superior roles and ethical considerations such as coercion of research participants and how to deal with confidential information if disclosed (Mercer 2007; Robson 2011; Hanson 2013; Creswell 2014; Kirpitchenko and Voloder 2014; Fleming 2018).

Many authors (Mercer 2007; Robson 2011; Hanson 2013; Creswell 2014; Kirpitchenko and Voloder 2014; Fleming 2018) highlight the distinction between insider and outsider research, observing that it should be considered as a continuum rather than a dichotomy and that the researcher's position can vary, be clarified and be challenged throughout the research. In my own case, as a member of PLUS, I was an insider and shared similar characteristics with research participants such as age, gender and education, but I was an outsider in other regards. For example, I am not a teacher, principal or HSCL and could not share direct experience of those roles with research participants. Although I was involved in OSCAILT at various points prior to the research, my role was more peripheral and at the time of data collection, I considered myself to be an outsider. The emphasis

placed by respondents on confidentiality in this network may partially explain the decision to decline permission for observations of meetings.

Mercer (2007, p.7) describes insider research as a 'double edged sword' in that familiarity and understanding of context and culture can be an advantage but can lead to myopia and lack of capacity see the context more objectively as an outsider might. In preparing my research proposal and seeking ethical consent, I fully acknowledged the bias and subjectivity inherent in my dual role of researcher and member of TED Project staff and was cognisant of the greater ethical implications and potential for bias in insider research (Mercer 2007; Robson 2011; Hanson 2013; Creswell 2014; Kirpitchenko and Voloder 2014; Fleming 2018). Section 6.10 fully addresses the steps taken to reduce this bias and section 6.11 details the ethical considerations, including maintaining respondents' anonymity and confidentiality, which can be more difficult in insider research (Fleming 2018). I have also detailed my positionality in Chapter One, which can influence each stage of the research process (Hanson 2013; Kirpitchenko and Voloder 2014; Fleming 2018), stating that I have always viewed the networks as forums for teachers' learning and advocacy on behalf of DEIS schools. As insider research can lead to the researcher thinking that their perspective is more widely held and prevalent than is the case (Mercer 2007), a number of strategies to enhance the validity of the research were adopted as detailed in section 6.10.1. Questions on learning and sharing of practice comprised just one aspect of the individual interviews conducted. Participants were specifically asked about their motivations, expectations and their perceptions of how the networks have supported their schools, or not, over the years (see Appendix 4). I also used a semi structured interview schedule to ensure a high level of comparability and element of a 'formulaic approach' (Hanson 2013, p. 392) across the interviews in addition to scope for flexibility.

There is some debate as to whether an insider researcher should detail their own position on the research topic with respondents from the outset (Mercer 2007). I provided detailed information about what the research involved when seeking consent, but was very clear that I was interested in learning about network members' perceptions and experiences of the networks. While I did not publicise my personal opinions, I did share my understanding when asked in the interviews. For example, I asked people to describe the structures and practices of the networks, rather than imposing them from my perspective, but where clarification was sought about what this meant, I shared my understanding

based on the literature on school networks i.e., composition, formal and informal structures etc.

Informant bias is a further challenge for insider research (Mercer 2007; Hanson 2013; Fleming 2018) and can lead to the desire to be viewed positively and not be judged by the researcher or to respondents saying what they think the researcher wishes to hear. It may also be influenced by how the researcher is perceived and relationships between the researcher and participants outside the research context (Fleming 2018). As I was fully aware of this, I deliberately sought feedback on challenges participants had experienced in participating in the networks. While some were shared, they were mainly related to their own roles rather than limitations of the networks per se, so the literature provided much of the direction for analysing the limitations of the networks, as did analysis of the networks in relation to their aims. It is possible that research participants, consciously or unconsciously, focused on positive aspects of the networks for a variety of reasons including loyalty to and relationships established with facilitators, the desire to support me and the research or due to the desire for the networks to continue and a concern that negative responses might impact on same.

Power relations come to the fore in insider research (Mercer 2007; Robson 2011; Hanson 2013; Creswell 2014; Kirpitchenko and Voloder 2014; Fleming 2018) and in my case, I sought to interview one person from my own institution in a position of authority regarding my role and a second person from an external organisation in a position of power with regards to OSCAILT and network schools. These individuals were also key gatekeepers with regards to OSCAILT so having their support was paramount, as well as the formal support from the TED Steering Committee (see 6.9.3.), which is comprised of individuals in positions of power regarding TED. Fortunately, I did not encounter any major obstacles to the research and being an insider was very advantageous as I already had a relationship of trust and credibility (Mercer 2007; Robson 2011; Kirpitchenko and Voloder 2014; Fleming 2018) established with many involved. However, due to the hierarchical nature of MIC, formal permission was required to conduct the research, which was a lengthy process. As an insider in MIC, my knowledge of the culture and politics of the institution was a distinct advantage (Mercer 2007; Robson 2011; Hanson 2013) in that I was fully aware of the risk that the research may not be supported for a variety of reasons including concerns about confidentiality and the potential for negative feedback or intrusion on the privacy of network members. Hence the qualitative research

design to cater for flexibility and indeed, I had to adjust my plans when observations of meetings were not approved.

Finally, the research process also highlighted power relations regarding my own role in PLUS, which I facilitated during much of the research, and the risk that members may view the request to participate as ‘coercion’ (Mercer 2007; Fleming 2018) or a conflict of interest on my behalf, particularly since TED provides resources to schools through PLUS. In seeking consent, I presented a short overview about the research to both networks emphasising the voluntary nature and that there would be no consequence to not participating. Some who were invited declined to participate in interviews or simply did not reply which created a tension for me in deciding whether to follow up. I emailed two reminders for non responses and then did not make further contact about the interview process but continued with business as usual regarding TED or PLUS related matters. In conducting the interviews, I felt slightly more at ease with PLUS members as I had interacted and communicated more regularly with them over the years. Interviews with principals, many of which took place in their office, felt more formal and pressurised due to the phone ringing or various interruptions.

6.9.3. Negotiating access

Issues of access are, to a large extent, dependant on the nature of the research and the type of organisation with which one wishes to conduct research (Robson 2011). This research required formal permission from several entities because it involved a Higher Education Institution (MIC) and a government department (Department of Education) as well as research with schools, which are by their nature also hierarchical institutions. Details of the steps followed to secure access and permission to conduct the research are included in Table 12 below. At the outset, I presented my research proposal to the TED Project Steering Committee in MIC for approval in June 2015 and subject to minor changes in the proposal, I was given permission to proceed on the understanding that the parameters of the research were agreed with the Department of Education, the partner stakeholder in OSCAILT at that time, and that data protection procedures would be followed. I was advised upon meeting the relevant Department of Education representative in July 2016 that the research was felt to be very relevant and that it was up to individual schools to decide if they wished to participate. I subsequently attended an OSCAILT meeting on 15th March 2017 and PLUS meeting on 22nd March 2017 to discuss the research with

network members. I presented detailed Information Letters and Consent Forms (see Appendix 10) and answered any queries that network members had. Permission was sought from 1) the principal for a school to participate in the research and 2) from each individual network representative, which was the principal in the case of OSCAILT. A number of representatives signed and returned the forms at the meetings. Follow up emails were sent and phone-calls seeking permission were made in April 2017. Any outstanding permissions, including that of the OSCAILT facilitators and administrator, were sought in advance of data collection. A number of new representatives joined the networks in 2017-2018 as existing ones retired or took up different posts. Permission was also secured from the TED Steering Committee, MIC, in 2018 for the analysis of agendas, minutes of meetings and other relevant documentation for both networks on the condition that network members, including the Department of Education representatives in OSCAILT, granted permission to do so. Each network member was subsequently asked for permission for the same in October-November 2019.

As a facilitator of the PLUS network and member of TED project staff, I was very fortunate that I had connections with and prior knowledge of both networks which certainly eased my path in negotiating access (Lofland et al. 2006). I also had the support of the OSCAILT facilitators and from the TED Steering Committee, MIC, to conduct the research. At each stage in negotiating access to the research sites as detailed in the grid below, I followed the guidelines of Lofland et al. (2006, pp. 41-47) tailoring the ‘account’ to each audience. I endeavoured to present a careful yet brief explanation of the proposed research that outlined my own professional background and credentials, the purpose of the research, what would be involved, the intended use of the data, and information and consent procedures. As the design was ‘flexible’, I indicated to prospective participants what would potentially be involved regarding data collection procedures with the proviso that this may change as the research progressed. I invited each group from whom I sought permission to conduct the research to identify any issues of concern and provide feedback on the proposal and this feedback was instrumental in guiding the research design. This process also helped to raise my awareness of any sensitivities that may have been involved and to respond accordingly.

Being an ‘insider’ undoubtedly has its advantages in terms of negotiating access, knowledge of the context and the politics of the institutions involved (Robson 2011). However, there are some challenges in being a researcher with colleagues, particularly in

hierarchical organisations which are discussed under section 6.11. Additionally, objectivity was a key issue and this is discussed under sections 6.10.1. and 6.11.

Robson (2011) advises that the researcher indicate a date for departure during the initial access negotiations, and to honour any commitments made. Similarly, Stake (1995, p. 60) recommends a protocol for leaving the site. In seeking permission to conduct the research, I gave an estimation of the data collection period as being from May 2017 to the end of the flowing academic year in May 2018. The majority of the data collection through individual interviews with network representatives had taken place at this stage, with a subsequent survey and documentary analysis to follow in phase 4 and 5. I also made a commitment that I would return to both networks once the research was completed and support both to use the findings from the research for the benefit of the networks¹³.

Table 13. Negotiating access and permission

Date	Group	Outcome
June 2015	TED Steering Committee, MIC	Subject to minor changes in the draft proposal permission granted to proceed on the understanding that the parameters of the research were agreed with the DoE, the partner stakeholder in OSCAILT, and that data protection procedures would be followed.
June 2016¹⁴	Department of Education representative and OSCAILT member	The research was felt to be very relevant and I was advised that it was for individual schools to decide

¹³ In December 2019, myself, my PhD supervisors and an OSCAILT network member were granted a Teaching Council John Coolahan Research Support Framework Award to hold a national seminar to share the learning from the PhD and other research, policy and practice on school networking and collaboration between DEIS schools. This event is scheduled for June 2021.

¹⁴ I was on leave of absence from the PhD in academic year 2015-2016.

		<p>if they wished to participate. Also advised to attend a network meeting to outline what was involved in the research.</p>
March 2017	OSCAILT network	<p>Permission secured from the majority of the network schools and representatives to participate and outstanding permission secured in advance of main phase of data collection in September 2017.</p> <p>Detailed Information Letters and Consent Forms available in Appendix 10.</p>
March 2017	PLUS network	<p>Permission secured from the majority of the network schools and representatives to participate and outstanding permission secured in advance of main phase of data collection in September 2017.</p> <p>Detailed Information Letters and Consent Forms available in Appendix 10.</p>
November 2017	TED Steering Committee, MIC and Department of Education	<p>Permission requested for the analysis of agendas, minutes of meetings and other</p>

		<p>relevant documentation for both networks.</p>
<p>April 2018</p>	<p>TED Steering Committee, MIC</p>	<p>Presentation to TED Steering Committee about permission for the analysis of agendas, minutes of meetings and other relevant documentation for both networks, and also for observations of meetings.</p> <p>Letters of request and approval are included in Appendix 11.</p> <p>Permission for access to documentation given subject to certain conditions i.e., that minutes are redacted, that documentation is referenced and written up in general terms with no school or person identifiable, that sections of the work (findings/recommendations) which refer to or are informed by the documentation should be read by schools and nominee of the TED Steering Committee prior to submission.</p>

		Permission to conduct observations of network meetings not supported.
--	--	---

6.10. Research design issues

Application of criteria for assessing the quality of traditional, positivist research i.e., validity, reliability and generalisability, is problematic in the qualitative research paradigm. Drawing on Stake (1995), Merriam (1999), Robson (2011) and Miles et al. (2014), this section will outline how issues of internal validity (trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility), reliability (consistency, stability, dependability and audibility) and external validity (generalisability and transferability) were addressed in this research.

6.10.1. Internal validity - trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility

Internal validity refers to the extent to which research findings are congruent with reality (Merriam 1998; Robson 2011). The ‘reality’ presented in the research findings of qualitative research is done so through the filter of the ‘biographically situated researcher’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p. 11) and primarily via interviews and observations (Merriam 1999). This is the main threat to ‘valid interpretation’ of events (Robson 2011). Strategies to enhance internal validity adopted in this research include:

- Clearly explicating researcher positionality and assumptions (Merriam 1999) – see Chapter One.
- Triangulation of 1) data source i.e., including people and documents (Denzin 2001) 2) method i.e., focus groups, interviews, surveys, and documentary analysis and 3) theory by drawing on relevant theories from the literature on school networks and TPL. These strategies help to corroborate findings from different sources and enhance the ‘trustworthiness’ of the research. According to Miles et al. (2014, p. 299) even inconsistent findings and conflicting findings can also help to develop a more valid account as they can force the researcher to ‘examine the integrity of the data collection methods and even the data themselves’.

- Spending a prolonged amount of time (Merriam 1998; Robson 2011) collecting data over a two year period, including member checking focus groups, can help reduce reactivity and bias as a relationship develops with participants and the researcher becomes more accepted (Robson 2011). However, Robson does caution that it can potentially lead to greater researcher bias. A process of respondent validation or member checking was conducted (Merriam 1998; Robson 2011) to reduce personal bias. Drafts of interview and focus groups findings were presented verbally to research participants and they had the opportunity to provide verbal feedback. Relevant draft chapters were also presented to all research participants who had the opportunity to respond verbally or in writing on the same.
- I also debriefed with supervisors on regular occasions throughout the data collection process to help guard against my own researcher bias (Merriam 1998; Robson 2011) and they reviewed the emerging findings.
- Actively seeking and examination of negative evidence during data analysis, considering rival explanations, and presenting findings in a clear, coherent and systematically related manner (Robson 2011; Miles et al. 2014).
- Finally, the descriptions provided in the thesis are context rich, meaningful and thick (Miles et al. 2014).

6.10.2. Construct validity

Construct validity involves identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied (Yin 2009). To address construct validity, researchers must first define the subject of study in terms of specific concepts and relate them to the original objectives of the study. Secondly, they must identify operational measures to match the concepts, drawing on published studies that make the same matches (ibid). This was accomplished by initially examining the literature on and defining school networks prior to developing the research instruments. In the data analysis and write up phases, concepts that emerged from participants' accounts i.e., social capital and TPL, were identified, the literature was examined and these concepts were defined and incorporated into the Conceptual Framework as it developed in order to understand these particular school networks in relation to the research questions.

Yin (2009, p. 41) further advises the following techniques to increase construct validity, each of which was applied in this research: use multiple sources of evidence; establish a chain of evidence and have key informants review draft case study reports.

6.10.3. Reliability - consistency, stability, dependability and audibility

Reliability is concerned with the extent to which research findings can be replicated. This is problematic for qualitative research with some preferring criteria of dependability and consistency (Merriam 1998; Robson 2011). There are strategies that can be adopted to enhance reliability of qualitative methods and practices which involve being ‘thorough, careful and honest’ in conducting the research and the capacity to prove to others that you have been (Robson 2011). Miles et al. (2014) advise that the key issue is whether the process of the research is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods. In this research the triangulation strategies also enhanced reliability as the basic paradigms and analytic constructs have been clearly specified, data show meaningful parallels across data sources and data were collected across a range of times and respondents linked to the research questions (Miles et al. 2014). An audit trail (Robson 2011) was maintained throughout including raw data such as transcripts and field notes, my research journal and details of the data analysis in Nvivo. A detailed account of decisions made about data collection and analysis such as how the data were collected, the basis for selection of research participants, how categories were developed, and procedures for propositions and conclusions are also detailed (Merriam 1998; Miles et al. 2014). My positionality vis-à-vis the networks has been presented in Chapter One and the research participants and the social context from which data were collected have been described in the research (LeCompte and Preissle 1993).

6.10.4. External validity – transferability

Section 6.4 discussed the difficulty of generalisation in case study research, presenting the alternative of analytic generalisation (Yin 2009). Miles et al. (2014) contend that it is the write up of the research and persuasiveness of the argument that the researcher makes that ensure that the findings will have meaning and resonance to other individuals, sites and times. Drawing on Miles et al. (2014, p. 314) strategies to enhance this process that were adopted in this research include:

- A full description of the characteristics of the original sample of individuals, settings, and processes in order for comparisons to be made;
- Specification of limits of the sample selection i.e., the sample did not include observations of meetings and events or members involved prior to commencement of data collection;
- A diverse theoretical basis to encourage broader applicability i.e., social capital theory and Communities of Practice;
- Sufficient “thick description” in the findings to enhance readers capacity to transfer to other settings;
- A range of readers agree that the findings are consistent with their own experiences as evidenced in the member checking process;
- Findings are congruent with, connected to or confirmatory of prior theory, in this case literature on school networks;
- The processes and outcomes outlined in the conclusions are applicable in similar settings;
- Explicit statement of theory and transferability and suggestion of settings where findings could be tested further.

6.11. Ethical Considerations

Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) clearance was granted in June 2014 for the original research proposal (Appendix 2).

The main ethical issues in this research were: protecting participants from harm; maintaining participants’ privacy and confidentiality and seeking informed consent. Membership of the networks is relatively small, therefore making research participants more easily identifiable which could potentially cause harm and be an invasion of their privacy. Participants were invited to voluntarily take part in the research. Informed consent was sought from each participant. Great care was taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of research participants. No personal data has been revealed. All participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage and this will be upheld throughout the research.

Data from this research was stored in accordance with the MIC Data Retention Policy. All data and information was stored on a password protected computer and encrypted USB key in sole possession of the researcher.

One of the key limitations and subsequent ethical issue related to research design in the context of this study was that of the duality of my role as:

- 1) A staff member of the TED project who has built up a rapport with network members since 2004;
- 2) A PhD researcher examining my own practice and the work of my organisation.

This limitation was compounded by the nature of the case study approach to research which is interpretive in nature and therefore prone to researcher subjectivity and bias (Punch 2009), despite attempts to address reflexivity. A further consideration regarding duality of role was that of one of my supervisor's dual role as Chair of the TED Project and supervisor of this research. A second supervisor, independent of TED, helped to establish balance. A further concern of non-maleficence was identified, not just in relation to the research participants as identified above, but also regarding the work conducted by the TED project on behalf of the College, my colleagues and stakeholder partners that are engaged in the same. The research design and analysis strived to be credible, trustworthy and respectful of the trust and relationships that have been established over a long period of time and cognisant of preserving and maintaining the same.

There are a number of ways in which the ethical issues relating to the collection and interpretation of the data in this research were addressed, in addition to the steps to minimise risk as outlined above. The first was gaining the agreement of individuals in positions of authority to provide access to study participants at research sites (Creswell 2009) as outlined under negotiating access. In addition to informed consent, other steps taken to address ethical concerns before data collection commenced included:

- Clearly articulating the research purpose to participants to avoid misunderstanding or deception which helped to establish the credibility of the research with participants (Creswell 2009);
- While no individual or school was named in reporting on the findings of this research, the names of the schools and organisations involved in both networks are in the public domain. Anonymity of organisations in research is not always possible. As advised by Bassey (1999) this was discussed and agreed in the initial consultation with network members before permission was sought from them.

The ethical concerns of trustworthiness, validity and researcher bias of this research were addressed by:

- Establishing ‘construct validity’ (Yin 2009, p. 41) through the use of multiple sources of evidence or triangulation, establishing a chain of events and having key informants reviewing draft findings in the form of a member check so they can amend the record if they feel it does not represent the truth (Merriam 1998; Bassey 1999; Creswell 2009);
- Data gathering over a period of time to increase the validity of the findings (Merriam 1998; Creswell 2009);
- Clarification of researcher bias, assumptions and theoretical orientation as detailed above (Merriam 1998; Bassey 1999; Creswell 2009);
- Debriefing with supervisors and making the draft findings available to two members of the TED Steering Committee to review in order to challenge the research process and outcomes and enhance accuracy of the account (Merriam 1998; Bassey 1999; Creswell 2009).

6.12. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the research orientation, design, methodological approach and methods, data collection strategy, analytical procedures, research design issues and ethical considerations. The case study approach afforded the opportunity to view each network as a bounded unit and site of social interaction that has both meaning and purpose for those involved and to subsequently understand the PLUS and OSCAILT networks from the ‘emic’ perspective of members and to analyse these perceptions in relation to relevant literature as presented in Chapters Two, Three and Four. The findings from the research will now be explored in the form of contextual background information to both networks and an individual case study report for each network.

Chapter 7 - Profiling the Networks and Respondents

7.1. Introduction

This chapter presents findings on the development of the TED PLUS and OSCAILT networks to begin to address the first research aim (section 1.5.1). PLUS commenced in 1998 and OSCAILT followed in 2009. Drawing on minutes of meetings and data gathered in participants' accounts, this chapter outlines the evolution of each network and presents a profile of both schools and representatives based on a short survey administered in autumn 2018. Due to small numbers and the nature of the case study approach this data is used to provide insight to the particular schools and network representatives rather than for the purpose of extrapolation to the wider context of DEIS schools. Feedback from participants' accounts about network schools, and the nature of the HSCL and DEIS principal roles is included to provide a deeper context to the survey data and to illustrate the impact of the inequalities outlined in Chapter Five on the ground in DEIS schools. This provides a backdrop to the discussion of the role the networks play in supporting the HSCLs, principals and DEIS schools in the subsequent chapters. Finally, key points in relation to the survey findings and contextual information are summarised.

7.2. Background and context to the PLUS network

The PLUS network commenced in 1998 when the Targeting Educational Disadvantage (TED) Project, as originally named, was established in MIC¹⁵. The name was later changed to Transforming Education through Dialogue Project in 2010 to avoid the use of terminology associated with a deficit perspective of families and communities. The TED acronym was maintained.

At the time seventeen primary schools in Limerick city were part of the Disadvantaged Area Scheme. Principals of these schools, as well as the principal of a Youth Encounter Project¹⁶, were invited to a meeting in MIC on 10th June 1998 to explore the possibility

¹⁵ TED was externally funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in 1998 for a number of years. It commenced with a part-time coordinator and expanded in 2003-2004 to a full-time coordinator and two Project Support Workers. In 2011, the TED Coordinator and one Project Support Worker post were subsumed into core MIC staff.

¹⁶ Youth Encounter Projects (YEPs) provide non-residential educational facilities for children who have either become involved in minor delinquency, or are at risk of becoming involved. A pupil may be

of setting up an urban network and to identify issues pertinent to staff in the schools at the time. Following discussion about the schools' needs in dealing with educational disadvantage, the meeting explored how working as a network could help to address same and the following October the network agreed to focus on three priority areas: absenteeism, challenging behaviour and early childhood education (this later became a three-year infant cycle). In March 1999, the name Primary Liaison of University Services (PLUS) and the mission statement were agreed:

The ... network is a partnership of Designated Disadvantaged Schools in Limerick City. It explores issues and identifies needs around educational disadvantage proposing practical steps to actively address these needs (PLUS 1999).

Appendix 12 includes the original aims, goals and objectives as identified by the schools involved. This list of twenty items primarily centred on: 1) bringing schools together for discussion, exchange of resources, support and empowerment; 2) raising awareness of inequalities faced by children in their schools and lobbying for greater equality and justice in the education system; 3) developing understanding and practice on 'educational disadvantage' and 4) developing practical steps to bring about solutions and create change. During the first two years the network established three task forces on the three priority areas and a number of actions were achieved in relation to the same. The TED project also began to seek funding to deliver an initiative to respond to the issue of challenging behaviour in schools. In the early years, principals or their nominee, generally the HSCL, attended the meetings. Extension of membership to new schools was by invitation with agreement from existing members. In January 2005, a special school was included, and in October 2006, five new primary schools joined the network reflecting the introduction of the DEIS programme – four DEIS Band 1 and one DEIS Band 2 schools. In February 2012, three DEIS rural schools were also invited to join the network. However, they have never actively participated in the network due to the distance and having teaching principals, and are not considered members of the network at this stage.

Over the years, PLUS has engaged in a wide variety of activities including: regular meetings, workshops for all school staff, seminars, online summer schools for teachers,

referred to one of these schools by a number of agencies or by the court system. Youth Encounter Projects provide these children with a lower pupil teacher ratio and a personalised education plan.

collaboration on funding proposals, lobbying and advocacy on policy issues of concern to network schools and curricular initiatives.

PLUS schools have also been involved in the following externally funded research and intervention programmes with the TED project in response to issues of concern raised by members which attest to the network aims of developing understanding and practice in relation to educational disadvantage and developing practical steps towards solutions and creating change:

- *Working Together Project (WTP)* (2001-2005). A four-year research and intervention project aimed at promoting positive behaviour amongst primary school children in designated disadvantaged urban settings (Lyons et al. 2006). Three PLUS network schools were involved in this initiative funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and Higher Education Authority (HEA) Targeted Initiatives Scheme.
- *Family School Community Educational Partnership (FSCEP)* (2005-2009). A four-year educational partnership initiative funded by the Strategic Innovation Fund and Dormant Accounts Scheme that worked with five primary schools, including three PLUS schools and two CLÁR¹⁷ area schools in Clare. The FSCEP project set out to nurture effective educational partnership relationships between the home, school and community (Galvin et al. 2009).

In more recent years, the network has continued regular activity including meetings and seminars and ongoing activities that have been introduced have focused on curricular areas and bringing children from DEIS schools on campus:

- The *League of Legends* annual soccer tournament for PLUS schools was introduced in 2008. Approximately 140 5th and 6th class children participate in this annual event. This is funded through the TED annual budget.
- The *MIC Children's Choir* was established in 2013 under the direction of Dr. Ailbhe Kenny, Lecturer in Music Education, Department of Arts Education and Physical Education, and supported by TED Project staff. Since 2013, over 500 children from nine PLUS schools have participated in the choir and approx. 130 MIC students voluntarily visited the schools to work on a common repertoire with

¹⁷ The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) is a targeted capital investment programme for rural areas which have experienced significant levels of depopulation.

the children. This has been funded through a combination of the TED annual budget and external funding from Creative Ireland.

- The *Studio Classroom Visual Arts Project* (2015-2018) was a collaboration between Anne-Marie Morrin, Lecturer Visual Arts Education, Department of Arts Education and Physical Education and the TED Project. Nine classes from 1st – 6th in six PLUS schools participated in this initiative which involved artists working in collaboration with teachers to deliver a blended learning art programme for children in the classroom. This was funded by the TED annual budget.

The network mission and aims were updated in 2014 in consultation with network representatives and the TED Management Committee, to reflect changes in network activity and use of language and are included in Appendix 13. The main thrust of the aims remained the same, but greater emphasis was placed on links between the schools and MIC to bring ‘evidence based practice’ and ‘educational innovation’ to schools, CPD and promoting the interests of and collaboration with children, staff and parents and relevant agencies to promote equality of outcomes in education.

Currently (spring 2021) there are fourteen DEIS Band 1 primary schools from Limerick city¹⁸ and county in the network and two special schools (see Table 1, section 1.3). The HSCL now mainly represents schools but there are some class teachers as well. The network meets on a regular basis (approximately 4 - 5 times per year) and meetings focus on issues pertinent to the schools involved as well as the ongoing PLUS initiatives listed above. A full list of agenda items from 1998-2017 is available in Appendix 14.

Analysis of minutes of meetings from the early years reveals that PLUS, in keeping with its aims, played an important advocacy role for the Limerick city schools involved prior to the following developments:

1. The establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB)¹⁹ in 2002 and subsequent employment of Education Welfare Officers;

¹⁸ There was a reduction from 17 in 1998 to 14 due to amalgamations and school closures.

¹⁹ The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was established in 2002 under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, legislation that emphasises the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention. In 2011, the function of the NEWB transferred to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and in 2014, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, became an independent legal entity, comprising HSE Children and Family Services, the Family Support Agency and the National Educational

2. The consolidation of schemes for disadvantage under the DEIS scheme in 2005;
3. The establishment of the OSCAILT network in 2009.

From 2003-2007, PLUS sent numerous letters to the Minister for Education highlighting the following concerns:

- October 2003 – Letter to the Minister for Education raising concerns about early school leaving in Limerick and the delay in appointment of an Education Welfare Officer for Limerick.
- March 2005 – Letter to the Minister for Education about the ‘significant’ number of children who were not allocated a secondary school place. The issue of secondary school places in Limerick was a contentious one locally and received much media attention (see Appendix 15, which provides some insight). To support the PLUS schools, TED project staff collated data on children who did not receive offers of a secondary school place and supported a series public meetings to raise awareness about the issue. I was subsequently involved in a group of stakeholders that oversaw the delivery of tuition by the DoE through a local community organisation for a group of children who received no secondary school offer.
- April 2006 – Letter to the Minister for Education about the secondary school application process.
- April 2007 – Letter to the Minister for Education, Minister for Children and education spokespeople from each political party on behalf of the PLUS and Cur le Chéile Network schools, arising from a joint meeting of the networks that month, highlighting the needs and issues of the networks in advance of the General Election on 24th May 2007.

Various submissions were also made over the years to different bodies regarding educational inequality and highlighting issues for children and teachers in DEIS schools including:

- National Anti-Poverty Strategy (2001);
- The Teaching Council consultation on Cosán in 2015 (with OSCAILT and Cur le

Welfare Board, which is now called Educational Welfare Services. For more information please see <https://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/>

Chéile);

- DEIS Review (2016) (with OSCAILT and Cur le Chéile).

7.3. Background and context to the OSCAILT network

As highlighted in Chapter One, the OSCAILT network emerged from a Dormant Accounts funded initiative led by the DoE in response to a recommendation made by John FitzGerald (2007) in his Report to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. This report led to the establishment of the Regeneration Board and Limerick Regeneration Agencies in 2007 for a five year term²⁰. FitzGerald observed that there was a ‘serious problem of educational disadvantage’ in the estates concerned and ‘a need for greater support for families, including improved levels of remedial teaching/psychological services’ (ibid, p.6). The report made a range of recommendations regarding education and stated that the DoE ‘should be requested to identify how local schools can be supported, not only in developing their facilities, but also in providing a comprehensive range of services to pupils both during and outside school hours’ (ibid, p. 11).

Research participants indicated that the DoE had been requested to put together a proposal for an initiative for educational disadvantage in Limerick that could be funded through the Dormant Accounts Scheme. Dormant Accounts (DA) cannot be used to fund existing statutory services so on foot of the FitzGerald Report a proposal was prepared for an initiative to open schools for use by the community. Once the proposal was approved by Government, €1.7 million was awarded and the DoE held consultation meetings with schools and other key stakeholder organisations²¹ (OSCAILT 2013b, p.17). Circular 0061/2008 was subsequently issued by the DoE and all twenty two DEIS Band 1 and DEIS post primary schools in Limerick city participating in the School Support Programme were invited to participate in the programme. Appendix 16 includes a list of all twenty two schools involved in the original scheme. While a very welcome initiative for the schools, the nature of the DA funding i.e., not for statutory agencies and once off,

²⁰ Launched by President Mary MacAleese on the 21/01/2008, Limerick Regeneration programme was described in the Irish Times (O’ Brien 2008) as *‘the States’ largest ever regeneration project’* which included *‘radical steps aimed at combating anti social behaviour and criminality’*. After the five year term, responsibility for regeneration was assumed by Limerick City Council in 2012 (OSCAILT 2013b).

²¹ Stakeholders included principals of DEIS schools; Home School Community Liaison Officers (HSCL); the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project, Mary Immaculate College; School Completion Programme Co-ordinators; Limerick Diocesan Office; City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC); PAUL Partnership and Limerick City Sports Partnership.

highlights issues around funding for initiatives to support DEIS schools and local communities to deal with the wider implications of socio-economic inequality. The DoE Mid-Western Regional Office led and administered the scheme supported by the TED Project, MIC. The report of the first meeting of schools, the DoE and MIC to support the roll out of the scheme following the successful awarding of funding took place 14th January 2009. An extract from the meeting report indicates that a decision was made that ‘a separate forum’ would be established where principals would ‘meet and discuss after school activities’ (OSCAILT 2009).

The forum later became known as OSCAILT and ‘provided a forum to share good practice and build cohesion and shared aims’ (OSCAILT 2013 b, p. 6) amongst the schools. All twenty two DEIS Band 1 primary and post primary schools in Limerick City participated in the DA scheme with €77,000 funding made available to each school to cover capital expenditure and the costs of delivering programmes in schools (OSCAILT 2013 b, p.6). Up to €25,000 per school was available for capital funding, with €26,000 available per annum over a two year period for operational costs.

Schools were required to submit an “After School Hours Plan”, setting out the proposed use of the school facilities and proposed activities before and after school, evenings, holidays and weekends. They were required to develop these in consultation with ‘key stakeholders’, including HSCLs, due to their role in linking with parents and SCP Coordinators who have a role in after school provision (OSCAILT 2013 b, p. 22). While the plans had to identify how activity would benefit key stakeholders and target groups i.e., ‘parents and others’, and indicate involvement of the wider community, no information is provided in the OSCAILT report about the extent to which children, parents, staff or other stakeholders in the local community were consulted in deciding which activities to include in the plans. The report found that some HSCLs and SCP coordinators, while recognising the benefits of the scheme, would have welcomed the opportunity for greater consultation both within the school and with the wider school community. The report (2013 b, p.6) on the schemes indicates that:

Schools used the capital fund to renovate buildings, buy equipment, develop facilities and install safety and security equipment. The operational fund was used to run programmes for children and adults. These programmes took place before and after school hours and during holiday times. The programmes were different in each school and included a wide range of activities including sports and fitness, music, information and communication

technologies (ICT), languages, crafts, homework clubs, parenting classes and adult education.

Full details of the report on the scheme are available [here](#) and the impact of the scheme will be discussed under the findings about the impact of the OSCAILT network.

According to the report, ‘OSCAILT provided a mechanism for schools to share information and good practice, discuss and address challenges, as well as an opportunity for the DoE and TED to provide practical supports to schools through facilitation of the network’ (ibid, p.17).

Participants indicated that the network grew ‘organically’ through the ‘genesis’ of the DA initiative and evolved to become more of a ‘principal support’ network by the time the data collection commenced in 2017-2108. Cognisant of ‘avoiding duplication’ of the PLUS network of DEIS primary schools which was facilitated by the TED Project since 1998, the focus of the OSCAILT network was singular from the outset:

So it was no decision to say we’re going to establish a network and it was actually them [principals] then that said we want to stick together but because we were conscious of the PLUS Network and you know, we didn’t want to be, that was there, we said we’ll keep this a single focus (OSCFGFL10).

The existing ‘context’, ‘natural relationship’ (OSCPT44) and engagement that the TED Project had with the DEIS primary schools through PLUS enabled the schools to be supported through OSCAILT. This was seen as important because of the local context at the time. The facilitator focus group participants discussed the significant challenges for schools and communities including criminality, ‘kids coming to school seeing people shot on the street’, ‘40% social housing within a small area which gave rise to all of that’ and ‘in the middle of all that you had school which is a microcosm of society trying to work away on their own and probably feeling alone’ (OSCFGFL10). The FitzGerald report and other reports on Limerick at that time (Hourigan 2011; McCafferty 2011; Power and Barnes 2011; Humphreys et al. 2012) provided evidence of the significant impact of poverty and marginalisation on local communities such as poorer quality of life and

differences in a variety of outcomes across a range of indicators between those in regeneration and local housing areas and more affluent areas, attesting to the challenges faced by children and parents as well as teachers and schools in supporting children and highlighted the need to prioritise investment in these areas (OSCAILT 2013b). Facilitators recounted how there was almost an ‘offloading’ at initial meetings about the DA scheme because principals had ‘never sat before in front of the Department collectively. Like they wouldn’t have had the opportunities to do that’ (OSCFGFL10). Facilitators also acknowledged the challenges facing some principals at the time. Some schools had suffered ‘huge losses’ of resources and experienced teachers due to falling enrolments which ‘was painful for a lot of people’. In the years since OSCAILT began, seven primary schools and two post primary schools have amalgamated and a third post primary school closed down. The number of schools in the network has subsequently fallen from twenty two to sixteen. Facilitators indicated in the focus group and member check that the issues in Limerick at the time coupled with discussions about the viability of some schools, led to the morale in some schools being deeply affected. One research participant indicated their sense of ‘suspicion’ at the time regarding the motives of the DoE staff in rolling out the DA initiative as the following quote illustrates:

The relationship with the Department staff at the time was not totally positive. That changed dramatically for the better, but at the start it wasn’t, in that there was a sense that the Department were, for whatever reason, possibly technical reasons, they were very overpowering if you like ... A number of principals were suspicious of them because they were being used by the Department as means of downloading policy or downloading programs or initiatives to us (OSCPT36).

Facilitators felt that the fact that DA funding was equally available for all the DEIS primary and post primary schools, regardless of whether they were located in a Regeneration area, had a positive impact on the development of trust between the network members in the early days, as illustrated in the focus group extract below. In contrast, the remit of the Regeneration Agencies was focused on their specific areas.

OSCFGFL64: So that was a benefit because straight away schools saw, ok, we are all, you know that is, that was a benefit.

Interviewer: They saw that you were working for all of the schools...

OSCFGFL64: For all the schools...

OSCFGFL10: Yes, and it was big, yes, yes, it was very much and that was one of the big factors.

Interviewer: Yes.

OSCFGFL44: That helped build the relationship as well.

In the principal focus group and individual interviews, participants confirmed how the network evolved in a gradual manner. Initial meetings discussed ‘what types of activities could be suitably done under that [DA scheme] and kind of I suppose ongoing, kind of monitoring and appraisal of that scheme’ (OSCPT57).

When the DA scheme ended in 2012, the funding for activities in schools ceased but the network continued to convene and provide a forum for principals to meet, which was important because, as observed, ‘Then the network was also an opportunity for us to, what was for the first time in reality to meet our fellow principals in a non-sporting way and so on’ (OSCPT36). The meetings also enabled principals to share concerns and create better understanding of issues across primary and post primary school sectors:

What came out of it I think was the OSCAILT – I’ll call it “group” at this stage – and it was a very good forum I think for principals to meet. And especially between the primary and post-primary because there was a lot of sharing that went on. There was a better understanding I think then of the problems that both sectors were having, and what was very interesting as well was the commonality of problems that we were encountering between all of the schools. You know, attendance, punctuality would be definitely one, obviously the other one would be where, because we were dealing with disadvantaged kids, the problems were the very same no matter what stage the children were at, you know (OSCPT100).

Another reason cited for the network staying together at this time was the perception that ‘by attending, you kind of kept on the good side of the Department with regard to the

funding being available because it was always the hope that possibly the funding would continue' (OSTPT36).

Facilitators indicated that writing the research report on the DA scheme became a focus for the network after the funding ceased in 2012 which in turn led to a celebration of the scheme and launch of the report in Thomond Park in Limerick on 12th April 2013 by the then Minister for Education, Jan O' Sullivan. As part of the preparation for this event, the network came up with the new mission statement 'Opening Schools for Life, Learning and Leisure'²². While no further aims were developed, through discussion over a number of meetings including 15/09/2011, 15/11/2011 and 23/01/2012, the future of the forum and benefits of staying together were discussed. The following extract of minutes dated 15/09/2011 outlines some of the benefits expressed for schools in continuing to meet:

It was agreed by the schools that [REDACTED] was very worthwhile and that the schools found it of great benefit to them to have a forum to come to in order to discuss issues relation to the scheme. It was agreed that if the issues discussed at [REDACTED] were broadened it would be of greater benefit to the schools. Schools identified the benefits of [REDACTED] as follows:

- A forum with high motivation
- A forum with great energy
- An effective forum for the sharing of ideas and information
- Great to have all parties around the table
- It potentially constitutes a strong lobby group
- It is very good for Limerick
- The meetings are purposeful with 'no waffle' (OSCAILT 2011).

On 23/01/2012, it was decided that the forum would continue to meet and 'to hold four to five meetings per year and to set up sub groups for specific tasks as they arose' and that 'that the agenda would be set by the membership' (OSCAILT 2012). Continued facilitation of the network was also agreed upon. Facilitators emphasised that it was the principals' desire to stay together as a group at this stage that motivated the network to continue 'and then when it became, went toward the report and the launch, they were

²² A logo was also designed by a child in one of the OSCAILT primary schools. See Appendix 17.

clearly saying we want to be together which is actually probably the best way to move’ (OSCFGFL10). The principal focus group and individual interview participants indicated that the network ‘stayed alive and we have broadened it then as the years went on’ including ‘allowing other people to come and speak to the group and so on’ (OSCFGPT36). Over the years the network has also encompassed looking ‘at certain issues that are happening for the school, for schools and things that are coming up in the city and for our communities, that impact on our schools’, at how OSCAILT ‘can support various schools that need support at the time’ and ‘lobby for funding or to get involved in a project or to lobby the powers that be, the Department or whoever, that we put our voice together to express our opinions’ (OSCPT57).

In 2017, the Embracing Diversity Nurturing Integration Learning for Life Programme (EDNIP)²³ was introduced with funding accessed through the Asylum Migration Integration Fund (AMIF), the Norman Watson Trust and TED to support five OSCAILT and PLUS schools to embrace diversity and nurture integration in response to the opportunities and challenges posed by the increasing diversity in schools. In 2019, funding was secured from a trust to deliver a sister project, TED English as an Additional Language (TEAL) Project, which was developed in response to an urgent need to accommodate the diverse language and literacy needs of students in eight primary and post-primary schools.

7.4. Profile of DEIS schools surveyed autumn 2018

Data collected from principals of PLUS and OSCAILT network schools in the form of a survey in autumn 2018 provided basic demographic information about schools such as the number of pupils, number of classes, staffing and facilities. There are a total of twenty schools across the two networks, with an overlap of twelve primary schools between the two networks. To retain anonymity of the two special schools involved in the PLUS network, information about these schools was not collated. Additionally, two PLUS schools did not return the survey so data is provided only on twelve of the sixteen PLUS

²³ EDNIP was funded by the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund, Department of Justice from 2017-2019 and philanthropic funding from 2019-2020. In December 2020 EDNIP was successful in a bid to the National Integration Fund 2020-2023 to continue the work of the initiative.

schools. These schools are also OSCAILT members. Please see Appendix 5 for the full survey.

7.4.1. School details

The following figure indicates the category of each of the sixteen schools surveyed, with the majority being coeducational (N=6) followed equally by girls (N=3) and boys (N=3).

Figure 4 Type of School

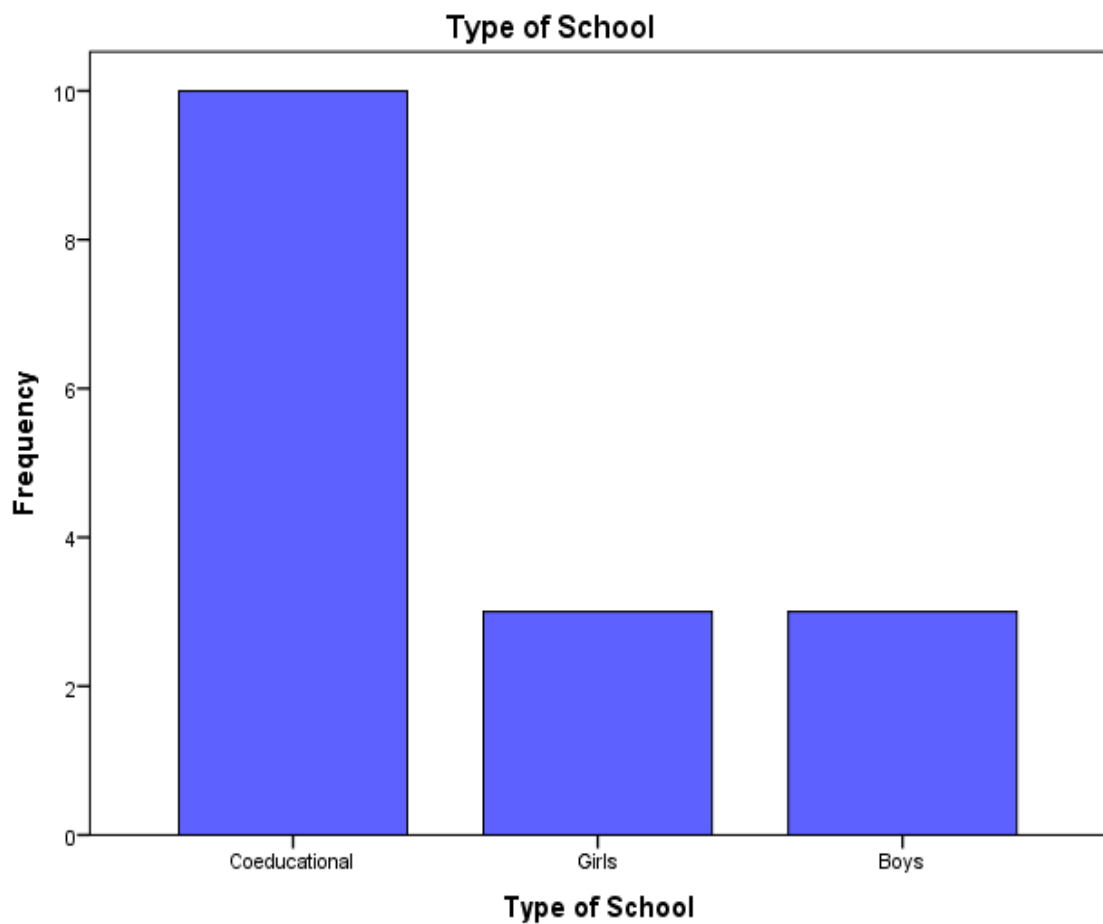
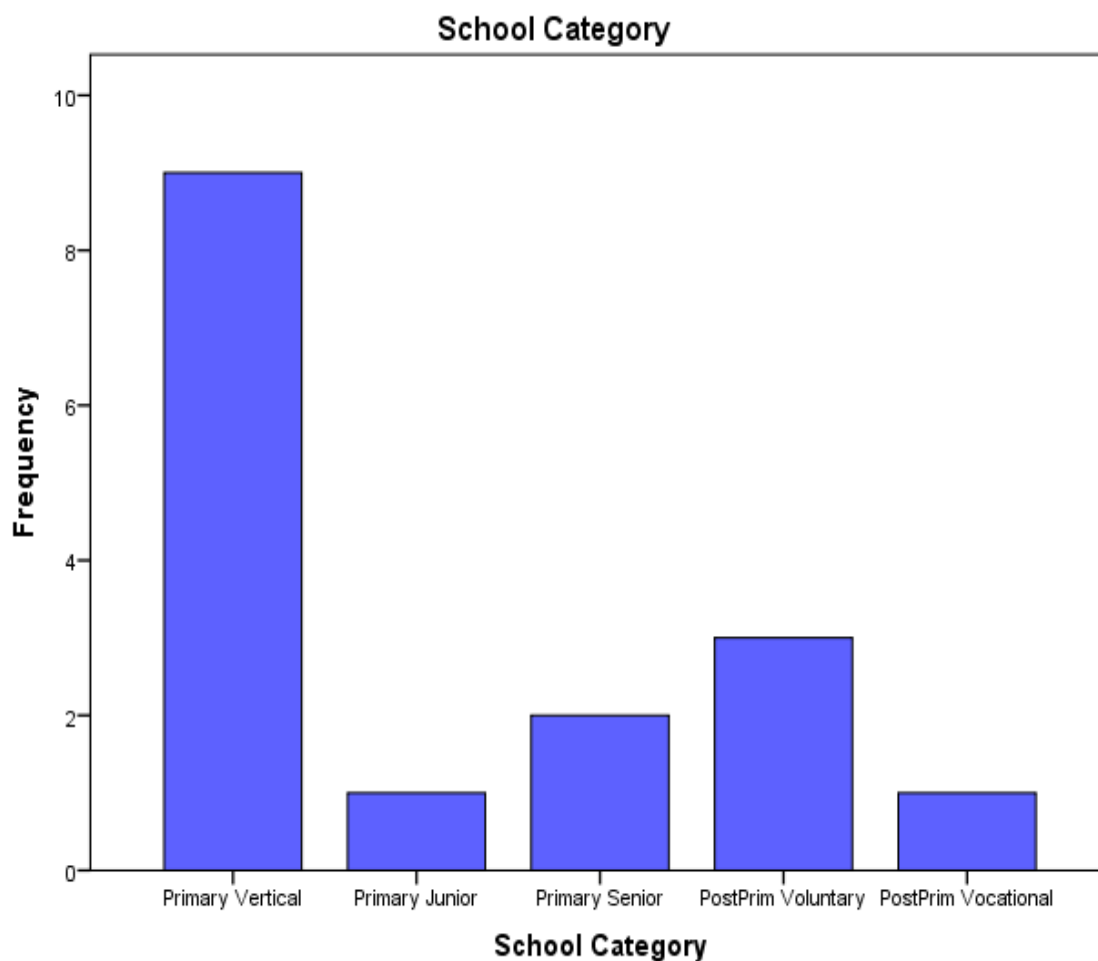


Figure 5 details the category of each of the sixteen schools, with a total of 4 post primary schools – three voluntary and one vocational. Of the twelve primary schools, the majority were primary vertical (N=9), followed by primary senior (N=2) and primary junior (N=1).

Figure 5 School Category



7.4.2. School enrolment

The mean enrolment of schools was 254.6875, with a minimum of 43 and maximum of 529 students. Full enrolment details and breakdown by gender will not be provided to protect school anonymity.

Table 14. School enrolment statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total enrolment	16	43.00	529.00	254.6875	140.90125
Valid N	16				

7.4.3. Principal Status

A total of three schools (18.8%) had a teaching principal²⁴, all at primary level, with the remainder of principals having an administrative role.

Table 15. Type of principal

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Walking	13	81.3	81.3	81.3
Teaching	3	18.8	18.8	100.0
Total	16	100.0	100.0	

7.4.4. Availability of facilities out of school time

Principals were asked to indicate if their school was open during evenings, weekends and out of school time. From table 15, it is clear that the majority of schools (N=11, 68.8%) are open beyond the hours of the school day with seven primary and three post primary schools indicating that they open in the evenings. Table 16 indicates that half (N=8) of the schools, five primary and three post primary, are open out of school term. Just under half (N=7, 43.8%), or four primary and three post primary, are open at weekends.

Table 16. School facilities open evenings

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	11	68.8	68.8	68.8
No	5	31.3	31.3	100.0
Total	16	100.0	100.0	

²⁴ Primary schools are allocated teaching or administrative or 'walking' principals based on enrolments.

Table 17. School facilities open at weekend

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	7	43.8	43.8	43.8
No	8	50.0	50.0	93.8
No answer	1	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	16	100.0	100.0	

Table 18. School facilities open out of term

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	8	50.0	50.0	50.0
No	7	43.8	43.8	93.8
No answer	1	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	16	100.0	100.0	

7.5. Focus group and individual interview feedback on networks schools

Throughout the focus groups and interviews, participants discussed the context of the DEIS schools in which they work, highlighting that while there was similarity in the demographics of the children and families and social context of the school community, there are variances i.e., some schools have higher enrolments of children from a Traveller or migrant background. This is consistent with the learning from DEIS evaluations (Smyth et al. 2015).

While not wishing to stereotype children in DEIS schools, given the impact of inequalities experienced by children from poorer backgrounds in education and society in general as

discussed in Chapter Five, it is important to convey a sense of the complex social issues that DEIS schools may experience because of the role that the networks play in supporting principals and HSCLs to respond to these issues. Participants indicated that some families are deeply affected by high levels of poverty, intergenerational unemployment and the intergenerational impact of educational disadvantage and early school leaving. Participants spoke of families coping with the challenges of addiction, homelessness, asylum seeking, domestic abuse, violence, family feuds and gang crime in the local community, parental imprisonment, migrant families with language and other needs, trauma and the mental health needs of parents and children. These are consistent with findings from a recent report by the ERC on the HSCL scheme (Weir et al. 2018). The impact of this multiplex of factors on children's learning, their academic, social and emotional development and their 'readiness to learn' (PLUSPT79) in comparison to their peers was emphasised. Gains in literacy and numeracy levels in the DEIS Limerick city schools in recent years, since the implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, were acknowledged and these are in keeping with gains made in DEIS schools nationally (Smyth et al. 2015; Weir et al. 2017). However, participants indicated that it was 'social issues' and parental attitudes towards or capacity to support their children's learning that remained a challenge.

An ecological perspective of children, families and communities (Bronfenbrenner 1979) was evident in participant's accounts and the significance of schools embracing families and communities in order to support children's learning and development was stressed throughout indicating participants' recognition of the greater challenges that poor and working class children face in education. The importance of supporting parents was particularly highlighted, with the principals in the OSCAILT focus group observing that, despite having the support of a HSCL, supporting parents was also 'a big part of our job' (OSCFGPT55). PLUS focus group participants discussed the impact of 'the family's previous experience of education', and the need to 'get the parents on board and to get comfortable around a school' especially if they had 'very negative experiences of in school before' (PLUSFGPT24).

Despite the challenges that participants outlined, working in a DEIS school was felt to be a very positive and rewarding experience, with one participant declaring that:

I would not work in any other type of school other than DEIS. It's so rewarding, while it is challenging, it is rewarding every day, once you can get through to one parent, it doesn't

matter who that parent is, once you can put a smile on a child's face, that's the reward that's in the job (OSCFGPT55).

7.6. Profile of survey respondents

Data on PLUS and OSCAILT network representatives was also collected in autumn 2018 including gender, age, highest level of qualification, role, formal and informal professional learning and participation in other support groups (Please see Appendix 5 for the full survey).

Survey data was collected after focus groups and individual interviews when the researcher had to return to network representatives (as opposed to original focus group and interview participants) to seek permission from each individual network representative at that point in time for analysis of network documents²⁵. There had been some changes in membership of both networks in the intervening period due to retirements or changes in roles i.e., a HSCL returning to classroom²⁶, and only one post primary principal participated in the focus groups and individual interviews. Seven of the sixteen OSCAILT survey respondents and six of the eight PLUS survey respondents previously participated in focus groups and individual interviews. The survey data on network participants, therefore, provides a snapshot of network representation at a particular point in time e.g., autumn 2018. The rationale for collecting additional data at this point was to create a profile of schools for contextual information and current network representation at that time. Furthermore, as the Conceptual Framework developed through data analysis, formal and informal learning opportunities and support for the principal and HSCL roles became increasingly prevalent as key elements of the model and outcomes of both networks. The survey provided an opportunity to ascertain what other formal and informal professional learning opportunities participants had availed of in the previous year as well as what other supports they availed of in their role.

²⁵ Permission for document analysis was a longer process than originally anticipated at the outset, as detailed in the methodology chapter, and required approval in the first instance from the TED Steering Committee, which was granted on the condition that permission was then sought from individual representatives. The researcher had to engage in a second round of seeking consent for the same.

²⁶ HSCLs can hold the post for a minimum of three and maximum of five years, after which they must return to a teaching position. They can apply again for the post after three years in their teaching position. See DES (2019c) Circular 0016/2019.

7.7. PLUS Network survey respondents

7.7.1. PLUS respondents – Age and gender

The PLUS survey was administered at a network meeting in autumn 2018. The majority of the eight survey respondents were female, with only two males (Table 18). Of the nine PLUS representatives who completed individual interviews, two were male and seven were female.

Table 19. PLUS survey participants' age and gender

		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Age	30-39	2	4	6
	40-49	0	2	2
Total		2	6	8

7.7.2. PLUS respondents – Highest level of qualification

Half of the participants had attained at Postgraduate Diploma (N=4) as their highest level of qualification, with a quarter having attained a Degree (N=2) and a further attaining a Higher Degree (N=2) i.e., a Masters or PhD Degree.

Table 20. PLUS survey participants' highest level of qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
			Percent
Degree	2	25.0	25.0
Postgraduate Diploma	4	50.0	75.0
Higher Degree	2	25.0	100.0
Total	8	100.0	

7.7.3. PLUS respondents – Length teaching in school, role and length in HSCL role

Table 20 shows the length of time respondents had been teaching in their school at the time of data collection, with all but one working in their current school for nine years or more.

Table 21. PLUS survey participants - Length teaching in schools

Length	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative	
			Percent	
3 years	1	12.5	12.5	
9 years	1	12.5	25.0	
11 years	1	12.5	37.5	
13 years	1	12.5	50.0	
16 years	1	12.5	62.5	
17 years	1	12.5	75.0	
19 years	1	12.5	87.5	
21 years	1	12.5	100.0	
Total	8	100.0		

The following table provides a breakdown of the PLUS survey respondents by role, with the majority in the role of HSCL. Two of the eight respondents also indicated that they held a post of responsibility.

Table 22. PLUS survey participants' age and role

	Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
Class teacher	0	1	1
HSCL	2	4	6
Assistant principal	0	1	1

Total	2	6	8
--------------	----------	----------	----------

Five of the six HSCLs answered the question regarding the length of time they had been in the role, with the majority (N=3) serving in the role for two years, as detailed in the following table.

Table 23. PLUS survey participants - Length in HSCL role

Years	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
2 years	1	2	3
3 years	0	1	1
7 years	0	1	1
Total	1	4	5

Survey participants were asked if they had sought to represent their school on the PLUS network, with only one confirming that they had. Six respondents indicated why they had become the PLUS representative, as evident in table 23, which confirms that it is generally the HSCL who represents primary schools. This raises the issue of the decision process at school level about which teacher represents the school on the network and whether any other staff members are given the opportunity.

Table 24. Why PLUS survey participants became the PLUS rep?

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
HSCL is the school rep	1	3	4
Part of post responsibility	0	1	1
Rep out sick	0	1	1

7.7.4. PLUS respondents – Other supports

Survey participants were asked if they participated in any other support groups available to them in their role. Only those in the HSCL role answered this question, with the majority identifying the HSCL clusters as support they availed of (N=5), followed equally by in school support (N=1) and Network of HSCLs (N=1).

Table 25. PLUS survey participants – Other support

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
HSCL clusters	5	62.5%	3	37.5%	8	100.0%
In school support	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Network HSCLs	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%

7.7.5. PLUS respondents – professional training in partnership and collaboration and working with parents

Only one PLUS survey respondent indicated that they had an input on partnership and collaboration with parents as part of their B.Ed. programme. None reported receiving an input on partnership and collaboration with other agencies. All six of the HSCLs indicated that they had received professional training in partnership and collaboration as part of their HSCL training, followed by Meitheal (N=1), Incredible Years (N=1) and DEIS Literacy Initiative training (N=1). Regarding professional training in parental involvement, five of the six HSCLs indicated they had received training in the same through various means, including HSCL training (N=3), Croke Park hours (N=1), Incredible Years (N=1), Rainbows (N=1) and Meitheal (N=1).

Table 26. PLUS survey participants' professional training in partnership and collaboration

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
HSCL training	6	75.0%	2	25.0%	8	100.0%
Meitheal	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Incredible Years	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
DEIS Literacy Initiative	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%

Table 27. PLUS survey participants' professional training in parental involvement

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
HSCL training	3	37.5%	5	62.5%	8	100.0%
Croke Parke hours ²⁷	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Incredible Years	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Rainbows	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Meitheal	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%

7.7.6. PLUS respondents - Formal and informal professional learning in previous 12 months

Finally, survey participants were asked if they had engaged in formal or informal professional learning specific to DEIS schools in the previous 12 months. The Teaching Council (2016, p. 11) conceptualisation of informal learning as ‘all forms of educationally enriched discussions’ i.e., phone calls or conversations with colleagues, as

²⁷ Croke Park hour – Following the Croke Park Agreement in 2011, Circular 0008/2011 was issued to schools regarding the use of an agreed additional 36 hours per year. Many schools use these hours for staff meetings, which are called Croke Park hours. This Circular was amended by Circular 0052/2014 when the Haddington Road Agreement 2013-2016 was introduced, with effect from the beginning of the 2014/15 school year, providing for an amount of time up to and not in excess of 5 of these additional hours to be available for planning and development work on other than a whole-school basis and as approved by management.

opposed to a formal training session, was included with this question for clarification purposes.

All six of the HSCLs indicated that they had, with the two non HSCLs indicating that they had not. The following table provides an overview of the formal professional training relevant to DEIS schools specified.

Table 28. PLUS survey participants' formal professional learning specific to DEIS in previous 12 months

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
HSCL	4	50.0%	4	50.0%	8	100.0%
induction/training						
HSE training	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Friends for life	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
DEIS planning	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Incredible Years	2	25.0%	6	75.0%	8	100.0%
SCP intake	3	37.5%	5	62.5%	8	100.0%
Local cluster	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Rainbows	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Meitheal	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%

In relation to informal professional learning specific to DEIS schools, only 5 of the HSCLs and none of the non HSCLs indicated that they had engaged in this type of learning with table 28 detailing the type of same. Interestingly, one participant identified Incredible Years as formal learning, while another described it as informal learning. The HSCL clusters were also viewed as both.

Table 29. PLUS survey participants' informal professional learning specific to DEIS in previous 12 months

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Restorative Practices	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Incredible Years	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
HSCL cluster	3	37.5%	5	62.5%	8	100.0%
Speech & Lang	2	25.0%	6	75.0%	8	100.0%
Discussion HSCLs	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%
Supervision	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	8	100.0%

7.8. OSCAILT Network survey respondents

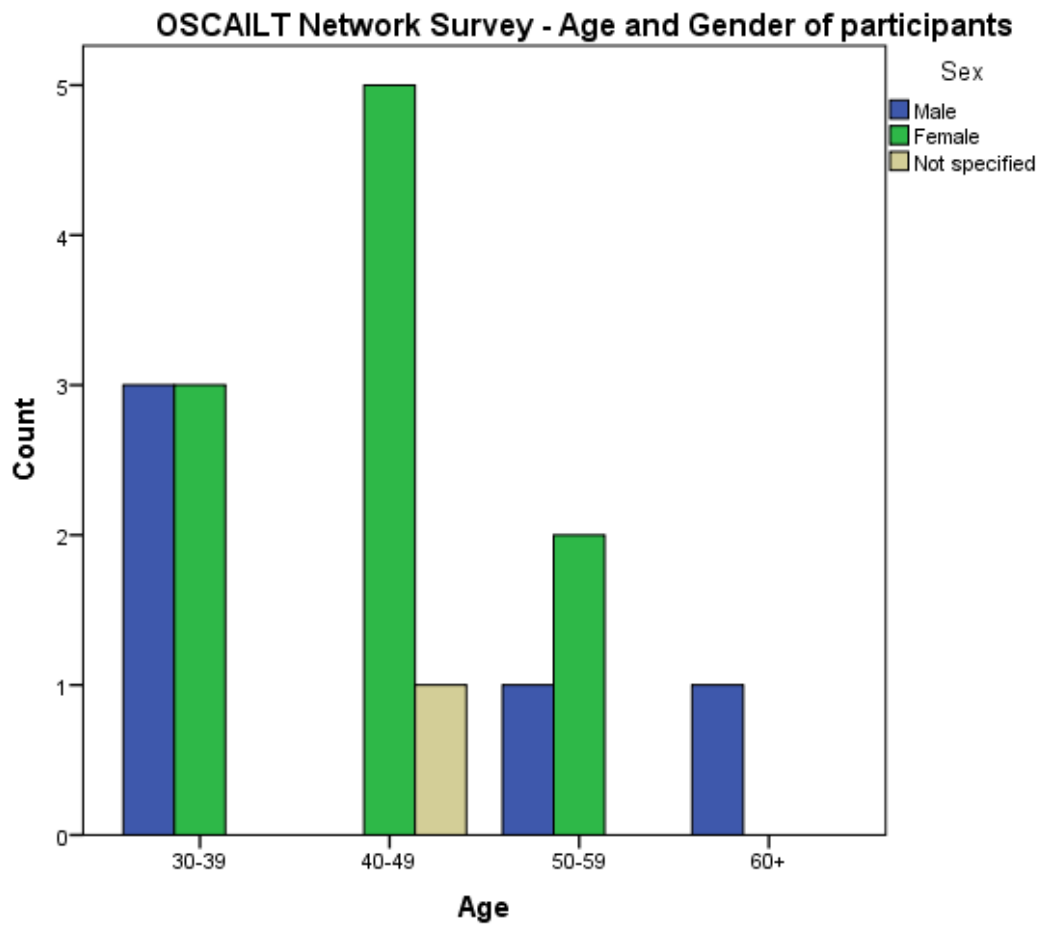
7.8.1. OSCAILT respondents - Age and gender

Table 29 provides a breakdown of OSCAILT survey participants by age and gender, with the majority being female (N=10) and five male participants. There was an even split between the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups (N=6) followed by 50-59 (N=1) and 60+ (N=1). One participant did not indicate their age.

Table 30. OSCAILT survey participants' age and gender

		Gender			Total
		Male	Female	Not specified	
Age	30-39	3	3	0	6
	40-49	0	5	1	6
	50-59	1	2	0	3
	60+	1	0	0	1
Total		5	10	1	16

Figure 6 Age and gender of OSCAILT survey participants



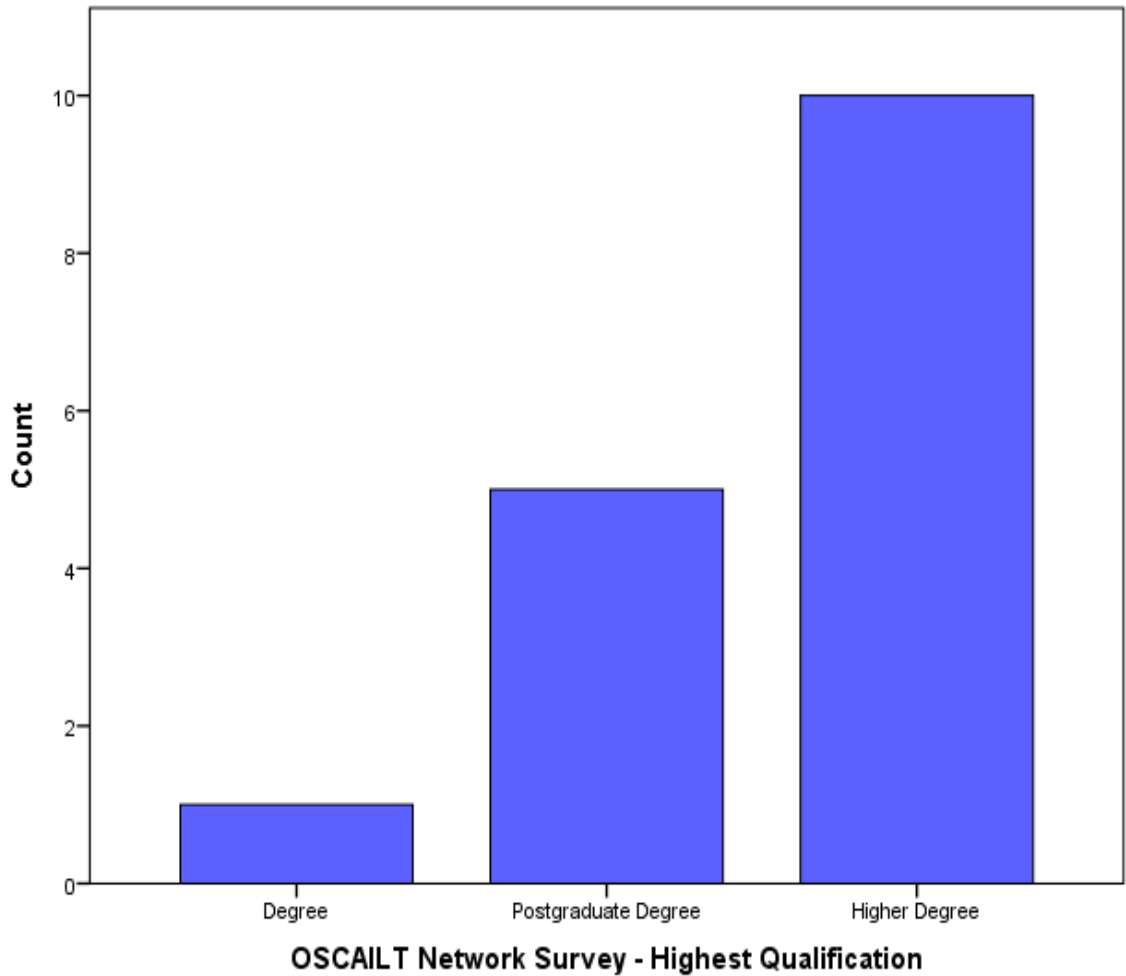
7.8.2. OSCAILT respondents - Highest level of qualification

The majority of OSCAILT survey participants (N=10) had obtained a Higher Degree level qualification i.e., Masters or PhD, followed by Postgraduate Degree (N=5) and Degree (N=1).

Table 31. OSCAILT survey participants' highest level of education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Degree	1	6.3	6.3	6.3
Postgraduate Degree	5	31.3	31.3	37.5
Higher Degree	10	62.5	62.5	100.0
Total	16	100.0	100.0	

Figure 7 OSCAILT survey participants' highest qualifications



7.8.3. OSCAILT respondents - Length in principal role

Table 31 indicates that the majority of participants were in the role of principal of their current school for less than five years (N=12), with a total of six or 37.5% in the role for a year/less than a year, confirming the high level of turnover of principals due to retirements in OSCAILT during the data collection period.

Table 32. OSCAILT survey participants - Length principal in current school

Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1.00	6	37.5	37.5	37.5
2.00	2	12.5	12.5	50.0
3.00	2	12.5	12.5	62.5
4.00	2	12.5	12.5	75.0
6.00	1	6.3	6.3	81.3
8.00	1	6.3	6.3	87.5
10.00	1	6.3	6.3	93.8
12.00	1	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	16	100.0	100.0	

The majority of participants (N=10 or 62.5%) had not previously held the role of principal in another school. A total of six participants (37.5%) indicated that they had previously been principal in another school. Table 32 details the length of time they held this role, ranging from 2 to 10 years, with the majority (N=5) between 4 to 10 years indicating that they were experienced principals when they took up the role in the current school.

Table 33. OSCAILT survey participants - Length principal other school

Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
.00	10	62.5	62.5	62.5
2.00	1	6.3	6.3	68.8
4.00	1	6.3	6.3	75.0
7.50	1	6.3	6.3	81.3
8.00	2	12.5	12.5	93.8
10.00	1	6.3	6.3	100.0

Total	16	100.0	100.0
--------------	-----------	--------------	--------------

Table 33 shows the length of time that participants had been principal in a DEIS school. Three quarters (N=12) had less than 5 years of experience as a DEIS principal, with 31.3 % in their first year and 12.5% in their second year. Two participants (12.5%) had served more than 10 years.

Table 34. OSCAILT survey participants - Length principal DEIS school

Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1.00	5	31.3	31.3	31.3
2.00	2	12.5	12.5	43.8
3.00	3	18.8	18.8	62.5
4.00	2	12.5	12.5	75.0
6.00	1	6.3	6.3	81.3
8.00	1	6.3	6.3	87.5
10.00	1	6.3	6.3	93.8
22.00	1	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	16	100.0	100.0	

Table 34 reveals that the mean length served as principal in a DEIS school was 4.5 years, with a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 22 years.

Table 35. OSCAILT survey participants - Length principal in a DEIS school

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Length Principal DEIS Schools	16	1.00	22.00	4.5000	5.36656
Valid N	16				

7.8.4. OSCAILT respondents – Other supports

Survey respondents were asked if they participated in any other support groups available to them in their role. Most participants (N=14) indicated that they did. Table 35 provides a breakdown of the variety of sources of support that participants have availed of. Just under half (N=7, 43.8%) indicated that they received support from the Irish Primary Principals Network. Misneach Training, Joint Managerial Board Training and OSCAILT were each identified by two participants or 12.5% each.

Table 36. OSCAILT survey participants - Other support groups

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN)	7	43.8%	9	56.3%	16	100.0%
Misneach Training	2	12.5%	14	87.5%	16	100.0%
Restorative Practice group	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Professional Development Support Service (PDST)	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Centre for School Leadership (CSL)	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
National Association of Principals and Deputies (NAPD)	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Joint Managerial Board (JMB) Training	2	12.5%	14	87.5%	16	100.0%
Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) – Principals and Deputies Committee	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Supervision	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%

Mentor for Newly Appointed Principals	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
OSCAILT	2	12.5%	14	87.5%	16	100.0%
Embracing Diversity	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Nurturing Integration Programme (EDNIP)						
DEIS Literacy Initiative	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
School Completion Programme Committee	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Doing Interview Boards	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%

7.8.5. OSCAILT respondents – Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and professional training in partnership and collaboration and working with parents

Participants were asked if they had received input in their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) on 1) partnership and collaboration with other agencies and 2) parental involvement, which are both important aspects of the HSCL and principal role. Only three participants reported that they had received input on partnership and collaboration with other agencies. Table 36 below details their responses.

Table 37. OSCAILT survey participants' Initial Teacher Education input on partnership and collaboration

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Important aspect all training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Very little	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
B.Ed	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Postgraduate Diploma	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
SEN						

A quarter (N=4) indicated that they had received an input on working in partnership with parents as part of their ITE. Table 37 below details their responses.

Table 38. OSCAILT survey participants' Initial Teacher Education input on partnership with parents

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Collaborative Approaches	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Elective Alternative Education Experience (AEE)	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Important aspect all training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Very Little	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%

Additionally, participants were asked if they had received any professional training, including in-service training, in these same two areas since they became a teacher with seven indicating they had in partnership and collaboration and half (N=8) indicating they had received training in parental involvement.

Table 38 and 39 indicate the variety of sources through which participants had received inputs in these areas.

Table 39. OSCAILT survey participants' professional training on partnership and collaboration

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Diploma in Leadership	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
CSL mentoring programme	2	12.5%	14	87.5%	16	100.0%

HSCL training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Meetings with DoE	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
DEIS PDST training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
DEIS Inspectorate training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
DEIS training JMB	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Limerick Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB)	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
PDST Associate Leadership team	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
LANS ²⁸ training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Limerick Education Centre (LEC)	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%

Table 40. OSCAILT survey participants' professional training on partnership with parents

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
IPPN conference seminar	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
HSCL training	2	12.5%	14	87.5%	16	100.0%
DEIS PDST training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
DEIS Inspectorate training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
DEIS JMB training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
LCETB	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%

²⁸ LANS is an inter-agency project that works to ensure that the needs of children and young people are assessed accurately and that appropriate and integrated supports are put in place to meet those needs.

Associate Leadership training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
LEC	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Postgraduate Diploma SEN	2	12.5%	14	87.5%	16	100.0%
Incredible Years	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Deputy principal course	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%

7.8.6. OSCAILT respondents – Formal and informal professional learning in previous 12 months

Finally, participants were asked if they had engaged in formal or informal professional learning specific to DEIS schools in the previous 12 months.

Three quarters (N=12) indicated that they had engaged in formal professional learning, and identified the types themselves. Table 40 provides a breakdown on the type of formal professional learning in which they engaged, mainly DEIS planning (N=4 or 25%) and CPD from the PDST (N=4 or 25%).

Table 41. OSCAILT survey participants' formal professional development in previous 12 months

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
DEIS planning	4	25.0%	12	75.0%	16	100.0%
CPD from PSDT	4	25.0%	12	75.0%	16	100.0%
Inservice from Inspectors	2	12.5%	14	87.5%	16	100.0%
Primary Language Curriculum Day	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
LEC training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
INTO Education Conference	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%

Child Protection Training	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Misneach	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%

The majority of participants (N=10) indicated that had engaged in informal professional development and Table 41 details the various types that respondents identified, mainly OSCAILT (N=6) and discussion with other staff (N=2) or other principals (N=2). Two participants did not respond to this question.

Table 42. OSCAILT survey participants' informal professional development in previous 12 months

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
OSCAILT meetings	6	37.5%	10	62.5%	16	100.0%
Cluster meetings with other principals	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Collaboration with other principals	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Discussion other staff	2	12.5%	14	87.5%	16	100.0%
Discussion other principals	2	12.5%	14	87.5%	16	100.0%
Case Conference with social worker	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Conversations with Deputy	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
PSDT in school for planning	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
CPD on Attachment & Trauma	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Mindfulness	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
CPD Support for children abused	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%

IPPN group	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
INTO principal group	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%
Other	1	6.3%	15	93.8%	16	100.0%

7.9. Participants' descriptions of their roles

7.9.1. PLUS members' perceptions about the HSCL role

PLUS participants' accounts depicted the varied nature of the HSCL role. Responsibilities referred to included: tasks set by the principal, liaison with parents and home school visits, liaison with preschool and class teachers, organising transition programmes, coordinating support programmes in school, liaising with other HSCLs in their family cluster, attending family and local i.e., city and county cluster meetings, organising community education classes and activities for parents and grandparents and liaising with multiple support services and agencies. Not surprisingly, participants highlighted the need for 'organisational' and 'planning' skills in the role!

As with principals, they emphasised the importance of 'building up your relationships with parents' (PLUSPT27) and being 'flexible' and 'responsive' to their needs, which can mean that they sometimes miss meetings, such as PLUS, because 'you're dealing with people and real problems and you can't say "So sorry, have to go" ' (PLUSPT30). Some felt that the role was more akin to 'social work' than teaching because of the support role that they play and unfortunately, they are exposed to 'a lot of sad stories and tragic stories through families' (PLUSPT27). However, they do not have debriefing or supervision support available to them in the same way as other professionals, such as social workers, fire service and Gardaí, would have.

This was reiterated in the member check, with participants specifically declaring the need for supervision for HSCLs because of 'what we deal with on the doorstep' and they are regularly 'in the line of fire' in hearing parents issues and concerns when 'it's really raw' (PLUSPT78), often before the principal may be aware of issues.

Building 'positive' relationships with support agencies and networking with a wide variety of groups was cited as a key aspect of the HSCL role, with one person commenting that they worked with nearly 22 different statutory and non-statutory agencies. PLUS was cited as a space for more 'open discussion', whereas the HSCL cluster focussed on the 'bureaucracy' and administration of the HSCL role i.e., planning and guidelines.

Participants also indicated that the role was now capped at five years and that it can take a few years to settle into the role. Additionally, the role is not homogenous in every school in the sense that ‘different HSCLs work differently with their principals’ (PLUSPT25) and some HSCLs are shared between two or three schools.

7.9.2. OSCAILT members’ perceptions about the principal role

OSCAILT network participants shared insights on the nature of the role of a DEIS principal. In particular, they highlighted the amount of paper work they must complete to secure supports for children and the school e.g., SEN applications and appeals and funding applications for school lunches. The financial challenges for DEIS schools were raised as a ‘real issue for DEIS schools’ because parents may not have money for voluntary contributions, book rental money or swimming money and principals are often ‘trying to make money happen’ (OSCPT51). Although a key part of their leadership role is to be a ‘leader of learning’ in the school, the reality of being DEIS principal goes far beyond the ‘job description’, because of the support they provide to families, as the following quote about the ‘nuts and bolts’ of the DEIS principal role illustrates:

You talk to any of the DEIS principals, you’re supposedly a leader of learning. It’s probably the last job that you do. You can be an accountant, a health and safety consultant, you’re a drugs counsellor, you’re a family mediator, you’re supporting parents who are suffering from domestic violence. There’s so many facets to the job (OSCPT35).

Indeed, some felt ‘leading teaching and learning’ was ‘aspirational’ and a ‘misnomer’ because ‘the reality in a DEIS school is so completely different’ (OSCPT51). Participants highlighted the ‘demanding’ and ‘challenging’ nature of the DEIS principal role both professionally and personally, because they are ‘dealing with so much more’ (OSCPT92) including ‘the social issues and the emotional issues of the children and their parents’ (OSCPT51). While they acknowledged the stress and isolation of the principal role in every school, participants felt these were compounded in DEIS schools by a sense of isolation because peers that they meet through other support groups ‘don’t get’ the ‘day to day challenges’ they encounter and ‘it’s only when you’re in that bubble that you can relate to the other people’ (OSCPT92). The value of a supportive deputy principal and in school management team was stressed.

7.10. Summary and conclusion

This chapter has presented the background and context to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks. It is clear that each network emerged organically in response to specific issues and in a particular social and historic context. The role of each network also evolved organically over time. Both networks have stood the test of time indicating that they serve a purpose that is in some way meeting the needs of schools involved and that they have a particular relevance for them. The reasons why, based on the interview and focus group findings, will be explored in the discussion chapter and Chapters Eight and Nine will review the findings in relation to the mission and aims of the networks.

The school and individual demographics presented provide a snapshot of schools and network members at a particular point in time in 2018. While there is some variance in size and composition of the DEIS primary and post primary schools involved, there are also some similarities which have been referred to in participants' descriptions of DEIS schools.

Data collected on the individual network representatives indicates a degree of similarity in terms of their role i.e., either principal for OSCAILT or HSCL for PLUS, but some variance in terms of gender, age, qualifications and level of experience. OSCAILT principals were more likely to have a postgraduate degree (31.3%) or higher degree level qualification (62.5%) than PLUS representatives, half of whom had a postgraduate degree (50%), followed by 25% with a higher degree level qualification.

Additionally, findings highlight a gap in ITE and CPD in working in collaboration with parents and other educational stakeholders, with low levels reported of input in both for ITE in particular. PLUS members indicated that professional learning in partnership and collaboration was largely through HSCL training (75%) and this training was also the main source of training in parental involvement cited (37.5%). OSCAILT members detailed a much wider variety of sources of professional training in both areas. Participants' accounts of the DEIS principal and HSCL role reveal that a significant part of their jobs involves supporting parents and working in collaboration with other agencies.

Findings about the formal and informal professional training that members engaged with in the previous year indicate that there is a degree of overlap in terms of what was perceived as formal or informal e.g., PDST support was listed as both by OSCAILT members and Incredible Years were listed as both by PLUS members. Half of OSCAILT

members cited the network as a source of informal learning related to DEIS in the previous 12 months. Formal learning relevant to DEIS cited by OSCAILT principals consisted mainly of DEIS planning (25%), CPD from the PDST (25%) and in-service from the Inspectorate (12.5%). PLUS members cited HSCL training or induction (50%) most frequently for formal learning followed by School Completion Programme Intake Framework (37.5%) and Incredible Years training (25%). The HSCL cluster was cited most as a source of informal learning (37.5%) followed by inputs on Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) (25%).

Findings about other professional supports that network members engage in indicate that principals in OSCAILT have a wider range of groups/services that they draw on for professional support. OSCAILT members detailed a list of 14 different professional supports that they engage with including the IPPN (43.8%), Joint Managerial Board training (12.5%), Misneach (12.5%) and OSCAILT (12.5%). PLUS respondents only cited three sources: HSCL clusters (62.5%), In school (12.5%) and Network of HSCLs (12.5%).

The findings summarised above are important in the context of this research because, as established in the literature review, the networks can be viewed as a source of informal and formal professional learning and as a professional support for the representatives in their role as principal or HSCL.

Chapter 8 – PLUS Case Study Report

8.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from focus groups and individual interviews about PLUS network members' perceptions regarding participation in the network and the model of the network that has emerged over the years since the network was established in 1998. The PLUS case study report is structured around the key elements of school networks drawn from the literature and presented in Chapter Three i.e., purpose, structures (hard i.e., membership, coordination, formal and informal and soft i.e. trust, relationships and knowledge), processes and interactions (management and leadership, participation, learning and interpersonal relationships and trust) and challenges. The case study report also reflects on the outcomes of the network for DEIS schools and individual representatives and the stated mission and aims of PLUS.

8.2. PLUS Network Model

8.2.1. Purpose

In the PLUS focus group, participants commented that the mission statement (Appendix 13) was 'very accurate' and encapsulated 'all of our goals' (PLUSFGPT81) or a sense of common purpose across the schools involved. In keeping with the aim 4 of the network (Appendix 13), PLUS was perceived as a 'common voice' to 'speak up for the issues' experienced by PLUS schools which are 'stronger' than non DEIS schools experience (PLUSFGPT24). Supporting the first aim, interview participants observed that the network was a forum for discussion and support for issues affecting schools as well as the sharing of practice as 'it's a great forum to bring issues related to designated disadvantage' and 'bounce ideas' off others (PLUSPT65). The role of PLUS for policy related discussion or 'how political climate impacts on DEIS schools' or 'the new DEIS policy' (PLUSPT25) was also highlighted.

For HSCLs, PLUS was 'a valuable networking opportunity' (PLUSPT27) and a 'professional network' providing an opportunity 'to meet for peer support' (PLUSPT30). Participants were clear that PLUS serves a different purpose to the HSCL local cluster meeting which focuses on 'every day running and maybe linking families and that kind of thing' (PLUSPT30) whereas PLUS was 'more education specific' (PLUSPT27).

The responsive nature of the PLUS to concerns identified by schools emerged from participants' accounts indicating that to some degree, the network has met its stated mission of 'proposing practical steps to actively address these needs' and aim of 'bringing evidenced based innovation to schools'. Analysis of minutes reveals that the initiatives were progressed to respond to absenteeism and behaviour. A research report on attendance in network schools, 'Empty Desks' (Finneran 2001) was published and reference to the launch in the minutes 28/03/2001 states that:

Reaction to the publication was huge, from teachers and from the media. Most of the country's media covered the story, and while initial reporting tended to focus on the 'headline-grabbing' negative aspects, most of the coverage was positive, focusing on Empty Desks as an active response by teachers to the issue of absenteeism (PLUS 2001).

Absenteeism was a regular agenda topic up until 2005, with various responses from the PLUS network. A meeting dated 4/5/2001 agreed that information on chronic non-attenders in network schools would be collated by TED staff and that a sub group would approach 'the Health Board²⁹ and other agencies such as the psychological services, seeking their assistance to provide supports for those families faced with the problem of chronic absenteeism' (PLUS 2001). Follow up activities included tracking of attendance in 2002 and the development of a resource for schools, supported by PAUL Partnership in 2005, was also developed on approaches to promoting attendance. This resource was also the basis of an online summer school which the TED project delivered from 2005 for a number of years.

There was also some evidence that PLUS played a key role as the impetus for responses of a more strategic nature to issues identified by schools in the form of larger scale research and intervention projects which were managed by the TED project i.e., the WTP and FSCEP. In keeping with the TED mission to work through 'dialogue and collaboration to unlock the enormous learning potential within learning communities', each of these initiatives have actively consulted with stakeholders within schools i.e., children, parents, and school staff, and from the wider community i.e., community and voluntary organisations and education and other statutory bodies in their design, implementation and evaluation (see Lyons et. al 2006; Galvin et al 2011; Higgins et al.

²⁹ Reference to the Mid Western Health Board. The Health Boards were replaced by the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2005.

2020 for full details). In more recent times, focus group participants indicated that PLUS was responsive to the changing and emerging needs in schools that are ‘evolving as the years go by, there’s new issues and new needs within the schools’ (PLUSFGPT79). The example cited frequently was EDNIP and increasing diversity in schools, which was discussed at PLUS and OSCAILT meetings.

8.2.2. Ethos

The promotion of equality of opportunity for children in DEIS schools, as per the PLUS mission statement, emerged from participants’ accounts as core to the ethos of PLUS. This was encapsulated in participants’ recognition of and desire to address the societal and systemic challenges or ‘all the inequities that are there in the system and the schools and in the social background of the children’ (PLUSPT79). A shared understanding between schools of the context in which they work as well as a desire to support each other was palpable, with one person commenting ‘there’s kind of a spirit in DEIS schools that we’re all in the same boat and everybody helps each other out’ (PLUSPT79).

The value of networking as a practice for HSCLs to link with different agencies was prevalent, with participants recognising it as a fundamental principle and ‘ethos embedded in the home school job’ (PLUSPT13), along with building relationships with parents. Networking was stated to be important for HSCLs, and principals, because it provides opportunities for ‘sharing the ideas and again sharing best practice, anything that’s working well within schools’ (PLUSPT27). In the member check, participants highlighted the importance of networking opportunities for all teachers in DEIS schools and the relevance to other members of staff due to the isolation inherent in teaching.

8.2.3. Structures

8.2.3.1. Membership

The PLUS network was described as coordinated by the TED Project, MIC and a ‘get together’ of the DEIS primary schools in Limerick where representatives collaborate to tackle educational disadvantage by ‘locking heads’ and ‘getting together and seeing how things are going and what initiatives we can put forward’ (PLUSPT81).

In the early days, principals or their designated representative mainly represented schools but currently representatives are primarily HSCLs and the conducive nature of the role was recognised for attending meetings because ‘we are freed up during the day’

(PLUSPT13). However, there are some class teachers acting as representatives but other school staff e.g., SNAs, do not attend meetings.

Despite being different types of schools with variance in their intake, the similarity of context between the DEIS primary and special schools within the network was emphasised in that ‘we’re all coming at it [educational disadvantage] differently, you know but the same problems exist in each school, you know to varying degrees or people have different ways of addressing it’ (PLUSPT79).

Focus group participants acknowledged that ‘most schools would be very committed’ (PLUSFGPT79) to the network but expressed concerns that not every school involved was represented at ‘the meetings throughout the year’. Participants recognised that the commitment of schools may have waned over time particularly for ‘newer principals’ who may not ‘realise the importance of sending their representative’ (PLUSFGPT79) and suggested that the facilitator make direct contact with schools not participating to encourage them to do so. Participants also indicated that schools may ‘take it for granted’ (PLUSFGPT79) that they are included in PLUS network activity regardless of attendance at meetings and asking schools to ‘recommit and shake it up a little’ (PLUSFGPT79) was therefore suggested.

8.2.3.2. Coordination and Facilitation

The structured and coordinated nature of PLUS meetings was emphasised with regular meetings taking place i.e., five or six per year. Meeting agendas, minutes, set timing and regular ongoing agenda items are features that confirm a coordinated approach.

Meetings were felt to be ‘very structured’, ‘efficient’ and ‘useful to either your school environment or the home schools’ (PLUSPT13). The agenda includes information about ‘things that are coming up in Mary I³⁰’ (PLUSPT49) and other events that may be of interest, as well as the various initiatives run through PLUS and MIC electives. Appendix 14 includes an overview of agenda items from 1998 – 2018.

Communication from the facilitator included regular emails and reminders about meetings and initiatives which were perceived as helpful because ‘my school may have missed out if I didn’t get a reminder’ (PLUSPT78). The facilitation and coordination of the network by MIC staff was perceived as providing ‘continuity’ over the years which

³⁰ Reference to Mary Immaculate College.

helps to ‘bring new people into’ (PLUSPT79) the network³¹. TED project staff were described as ‘liaising’ with MIC and schools regarding PLUS initiatives and elective students, which helps to create a sense of ‘shared responsibility’ and an ‘element of feedback’ (PLUSPT79) with the college through the PLUS network about the same³².

8.2.3.3. Formal and informal structures

Formal and informal structures within the PLUS meetings were discernible across accounts. Formal aspects include the agenda, minutes and timing i.e., ‘it will start when it’s due to start and finish on time or before’ (PLUSPT25). Meetings were described as ‘informally formal’, ‘formally flexible’ (PLUSPT13) and having ‘a bounce’ because although there is an agenda, there was always ‘space’ to ‘veer off slightly if there’s important information’ but that the facilitator is ‘very good at drawing it back, so we do fulfil the agenda’ (PLUSPT30).

Sharing of practice between members was an important informal aspect identified which can take place ‘at a very simple level’ over ‘tea, coffee and sandwich’ when representatives ‘might be speaking to the person next to you and they might tell you about something that’s going on in their school’ (PLUSPT13). Refreshments are provided at every meeting and time is allocated before meetings commence for members to avail of the same and talk to each other.

8.2.4. Processes and Interactions

As observations were not feasible, information on the processes and interactions are drawn from the focus groups, interviews and analysis of minutes.

³¹ The researcher joined the TED project in 2004 and has facilitated PLUS since 2005, apart from a secondment followed by statutory leave from Oct 2008- Dec 2011, statutory leave from Dec 2012 – Aug 2013 and while Acting TED Coordinator in 2013-2015. During my leave and while Acting TED Coordinator, there were two people who covered the Project Support Worker role and facilitated PLUS. From 2005 to data collection, there has been a high degree of continuity in TED staff facilitating the PLUS network.

³² It is worth noting at this point, that the lecturers who place students on B.Ed. electives in PLUS schools are not TED staff, but may be regarded as such by participants who would meet them as PLUS meetings. While the TED project does not play a role in placing or assessing elective students, it does facilitate a connection between the MIC lecturers and DEIS schools for particular electives i.e., LEGO Education, Teaching in a DEIS school and Working with Families, and they are regular agenda items are would be regarded by participants as part of the PLUS network activity.

8.2.4.1. Management and Leadership

PLUS was described as facilitated by TED project staff who are ‘very experienced and knowledgeable’ (PLUSPT79) in addition to providing continuity. The ‘dynamic’ at meetings was described as ‘very friendly’, and ‘calm’ with a ‘nice environment’ that is ‘very open, it’s very relaxed’ which was felt to encourage people to share as ‘the people there are listening, that they are engaging with you, that they are interested’ (PLUSPT78).

The facilitator’s approach was described as flexible because if a ‘side conversation becomes the main conversation’ at the meeting, ‘everyone just listens’ because ‘it is of benefit to all of us’ (PLUSPT25). Meetings were described as ‘collaborative’ and ‘chaired well’ because ‘people feel that they can go in and ask a question and seek advice or support or something’ (PLUSPT30).

8.2.4.2. Learning

Both formal and informal learning opportunities were identified as taking place through PLUS. Formal learning included workshops made available to all school staff and whole school inputs, curricular inputs by MIC lecturers and LEGO Education training which was made available to participating teachers in AY2017-2018, when the data was being collected. Informal learning occurred through the sharing of practice and experience with others, learning about services available to schools and inputs from guest speakers.

Participants were specifically asked their views on what enabled learning and sharing to take place. The informal aspects such as tea, coffee and ‘chatting’ were identified, as well as listening to each other, confidentiality, and the ‘friendly’, ‘open’, ‘relaxed’ and ‘respectful’ environment at meetings. One participant commented that ‘there’s no fear’ in speaking at the meeting and ‘I feel like I’m very comfortable with sharing information and taking on board the information other people are sharing as well’ (PLUSPT78).

An ‘openness’ (PLUSPT49) and ‘willingness’ of members to ‘buy in’ (PLUSPT30) to the network and participate in sharing with and learning from others was identified as enabling learning to take place. The ‘open space’ (PLUSPT13) for sharing practice which is built into the agenda was cited as supporting learning with one participant stating ‘I’ve certainly learned a lot of things from it’ (PLUSPT13). Group size i.e., ‘it’s not too big’, and the commonality between members also enabled learning, with most schools being DEIS primary or having similar contexts and most representatives being HSCLs. Having formal learning opportunities available to schools was perceived as supporting learning,

as were the communication and ‘reminders’ (PLUSPT78) from the facilitator about the same. Finally, the value and relevance of the network for members was also highlighted with one participant describing the meetings as ‘worthwhile’, and ‘very valuable to us’ (PLUSPT30).

8.2.4.3. Participation

Participants relayed a number of ways of participating in the network including ‘sharing of good practice’, ‘sharing of ideas’, ‘listening to each other’, sharing of experiences and discussion of what works well, or not, in their schools as well as identifying issues of concern at meetings. Analysis of minutes reveals that in 2001 - 2002, representatives gave presentations about their schools under the agenda items School Presentations or Sharing Good Practice. Sharing of Practice was re-introduced in 2009 and became a standard agenda item whereby representatives share what is working well or any concerns for their school. Participants also indicated that they had the opportunity to ‘input to the agenda’ and that there is willingness of members to engage in meetings and sharing of practice, as detailed in the following quote:

And the sharing of good practice works well, that people traditionally have been good, that we’ve been lucky with the representatives from schools have been open and have been willing to participate. I know we’d like to have more of them participating but anyone that has engaged has done so very well (PLUSFGPT79).

The various ways that network members report back to their principals and schools include sharing information at a debriefing session with the principal, contacting the principal and relevant teachers about a particular initiative e.g., the MIC Children’s Choir, and sharing information at staff meetings, during Croke Park hours or at in school management team meetings. Drawing on the information from guest speakers about support services i.e., Bedford Row Family Project or the Children’s Grief Project, was another form of feeding back to schools but it was felt that this information ‘had to be given at the relevant time’ to the relevant people (PLUSPT49).

8.2.4.4. Interpersonal relationships and trust

It was evident that participants valued the opportunity to meet with each other, chat and network at PLUS meetings. One HSCL observed that their ‘jobs are so busy, we have

little opportunity to share experiences' (PLUSPT30) and that attending PLUS was an opportunity to do so. Others emphasised the importance of the 'informal chatting' (PLUSPT49) and 'speaking to somebody over tea and coffee' about a concern and 'next thing that issue could be solved for you' (PLUSPT13). Participants also recognised that class teachers 'don't get enough opportunity to go outside your class, outside your school' (PLUSPT13).

PLUS was viewed as a forum for 'making links with other people and building relationships' in order to support HSCLs in their role and enable them go to other members or guest speakers 'at a different stage again about a query or you might be linking in with something that you might have mentioned in the meeting' (PLUSPT81).

Interaction with MIC staff through PLUS was perceived as reciprocal or a 'two way' relationship and 'collaborative process' (PLUSPT27) with schools in which participants have the opportunity for 'face to face' interaction, questions, feedback or recommendations for people involved in delivering initiatives and electives. As one participant observed 'I suppose from the principal's point of view here, the Home School is their eyes and ears and the community. So, they'll send us up to the PLUS network in order to feed back to yourselves as well' (PLUSPT13).

A sense of trust in the network was conveyed in participants' accounts, with one participant stating that they 'have the freedom to discuss particular concerns' because people are 'terribly discreet' (PLUSPT30) and members 'feel safe' sharing and asking for advice or suggestions. Trust also included the respect that members 'instinctively' have around confidentiality, data protection and sharing information about vulnerable families which was described as being 'instinctively there ever before we go in the door' (PLUSPT30).

8.2.4.5. Network Activity

A distinguishing feature of PLUS are the various activities delivered by the TED project through the network including MIC Children's Choir, the Studio Classroom, and the League of Legends Soccer Tournament for the PLUS network schools. PLUS was perceived as providing opportunities for collaboration through these initiatives that support school to school interaction as they 'enable coordinated activities between schools' and 'enables us to take part in big projects' (PLUSPT49).

Students from three MIC education electives are delivered in collaboration with PLUS schools: 1) Teaching in a DEIS school and 2) Working with Families as part of a Specialism in DEIS on the B.Ed. programme and 3) a LEGO Education elective. Participants' views on these will be considered in more detail under outcomes of the network. A fourth elective, Evidence-based Programmes and Innovative Initiatives in DEIS Contexts, links to the schools through inputs from teachers on programmes such as Reading Recovery and Maths Recovery, but is not specifically linked to PLUS.

Other network activity includes whole school inputs or seminars available to all schools delivered over the years e.g., Mindfulness, Trauma and the Child, inputs on curricular areas and regular guest speakers from MIC or other agencies (see Appendix 14 for details).

As previously stated, sharing of experiences or practice has been allocated time at meetings and has become a discreet agenda item. Examples since 2009 include: book projects, initiatives for migrant parents, intercultural events, piloting of initiatives in schools, developing a Home School policy, experience of programmes such as Incredible Years, Little Voices, Literacy Lift Off, Doodle Den, Rainbows, Roots of Empathy, Active School Flags, Yellow Flags, and Junior Entrepreneur Programme, information on transfer programmes, art initiatives, mindfulness, Men's Clubs, literacy initiatives and accessing play therapy.

8.3. Challenges

While some participants felt that there were no challenges for either themselves personally or their school, a number of challenges were identified related to representatives roles, the scheduling of meetings, the practicalities of getting out of school to attend meetings, and a fear that low attendance at some meetings could impact on the long term sustainability of the network.

The 'nature of the job' of HSCL (PLUSPT49) was cited as a challenge as they have a 'very loaded timetable' (PLUSPT13) with 'lot's going on' (PLUSPT27) and, have to attend a variety of meetings around the city, meet with parents and complete other duties in the school. HSCLs indicated that they must be 'flexible' and 'responsive' and prioritise certain aspects of their role, especially 'if you have a parent who needs support (PLUSPT78). Indeed, during the data collection with participants, two individual

interviews with HSCLs were interrupted due to issues related to their role that they had to respond to immediately.

Other participants highlighted the challenge of leaving the school for meetings if scheduled for yard duty, if there is training taking place in school or when a Croke Park hour scheduled that day. For class teachers, difficulty trying to ‘free people up’ was identified and that ‘schools have to be willing and realise the importance of sending somebody and make that commitment’ (PLUSPT79).

A perceived lack of diversity in school representatives was highlighted, with the majority of representative being HSCLs. This was felt to limit the focus of the agenda to engaging with parents rather than on teaching and learning in general in the school. It was acknowledged that curricular initiatives in recent years, such as the LEGO Education elective, the MIC Children’s Choir and the Studio Classroom, had helped to broaden this focus. To ‘have balance’ in the perspectives of the wider school staff participation in initiatives feedback directly from teachers that participated in them was suggested, rather than through the ‘third party’ (PLUSPT79) of the school representative.

Active participation of schools and sustainability of the network into the future was identified as a challenge in the focus group and a fear that continued low attendance would see PLUS ‘peter out’ (PLUS FGPT81). This was linked to schools and principals recognising the value of the network and prioritising sending a representative from the school, with some participants expressing the opinion that participation in the initiatives should be dependent on having an active representative who attends meetings regularly.

A gap identified during the individual interviews and further explored in the member check was a perceived lack of interaction between the PLUS and OSCAILT networks, which were described as ‘two separate entities’ (PLUSPT78). Greater cohesion and dialogue was recommended between the two e.g., for review and evaluation purposes, because as observed in an individual interview ‘it’s when you put management [principals] together and when you put people on the ground like HSCLs together, that I think you get your best review and evaluations’ (PLUSPT78). Similarly, member check participants indicated that such interaction could promote greater understanding between principals and HSCLs.

Frustration due to variance in access that schools may have to resources and supports based on their geographic location was cited as challenge. It was recognised that this is

‘outside of people’s control’ and that it ‘can just be physically where a school is located and the resources that are in the area’ (PLUSPT79).

8.4. Outcomes of PLUS

8.4.1. Support for DEIS schools

Emerging from the focus group and individual interviews a number of key outcomes for the DEIS schools participating in PLUS were identified.

8.4.2. Third level link

The relationship and link between MIC and the DEIS schools through PLUS was perceived of as reciprocal and symbiotic in that the college, schools, teachers and children all benefit from involvement and participants accounts provide some evidence that the second aim of PLUS is being met i.e., facilitating links between schools and the expertise, resources and facilities of MIC .

Many participants described the link with MIC as ‘beneficial’, ‘hugely beneficial’ ‘very beneficial’ and ‘important’ (PLUSPT79) for DEIS schools for a variety of reasons. It was described as providing a link through which to access expertise and ‘best practice... new practice and new ideas’’ (PLUSFGPT81) in teaching and learning as well as ‘new methodologies’ (PLUSPT79), ‘new approaches to learning’ (PLUSPT13). The link was ultimately of benefit to children, because they have access to the aforementioned initiatives which were perceived as supporting teaching and learning in their schools. This will be explored in more detail in the following sections.

Participants observed that having MIC ‘on board with schools’ through PLUS ‘is very positive’ (PLUSPT81) and shows the commitment of the college to support DEIS schools. Leading a project such as EDNIP was perceived as confirmation that ‘Mary I are very much on board with engaging their community in Limerick city’ (PLUSPT13).

Participants emphasised the skills and expertise that DEIS elective students brought to schools and classrooms, the ‘new ways of doing things’ and the practicality of having an ‘extra pair of hands’ (PLUSPT49) to help out in the classroom and provide one to one or small group support. The DEIS electives were also perceived as being an ‘eye opener’ (PLUSPT27) for MIC students.

The relationship with the TED project and MIC, via PLUS, was perceived as collaborative, as creating links, 'building relationships' and 'connections'(PLUSPT79 & PLUSPT65) between the schools and MIC with a 'central point' of contact through the . PLUS facilitator, for queries about or contacts in MIC. Additionally, the relationship developed through PLUS was perceived as creating a feedback loop to the college about DEIS elective student placements and TED initiatives.

8.4.3. Promoting access to third level

Participation in PLUS network activities that involve children coming on campus to MIC were described as providing an important opportunity for children from the DEIS primary schools to experience and become more familiar with a third level college. These visits were viewed as contributing to a positive experience of a third level environment, taking the 'fear' out of it so that it's not 'daunting' (PLUSPT13) and supporting the aspiration that 'this is a place I can go'(PLUSPT79). PLUS activities were viewed as supporting the remit of the HSCL and DEIS schools in promoting aspirations for higher education and 'breaking the cycle' (PLUSPT13) of lower progression rates of children from DEIS schools to higher education, broadly supporting the PLUS aim of enhancing educational outcomes for children.

Participants emphasised the importance of including parents in visits to third level colleges, and inviting parents to attend performances by the MIC Children's Choir or Studio Classroom art exhibitions or LEGO showcases. Despite the geographic proximity to the city centre schools in the network, participants indicated the strong possibility that many parents of children in their schools may never have been in the college before or 'haven't had a third level experience' (PLUSPT81). Participants stressed that it was vital for parents to be 'comfortable in this environment' (PLUSFGPT24) in order to support parental aspirations for children to progress to third level. Some parents may lack confidence or not know how to support their children in accessing third level education or may be 'afraid' to push their child to achieve something for 'fear of failure' (PLUSPT65). However, as this participant observed, 'If we have literacy and maths score at the national average, all our children should be going to college' and emphasised that 'it's the social barriers we need to break' (PLUSPT65).

8.4.4. DEIS Elective students

Participants commented on the ‘excellent standard’, professionalism and expertise of the DEIS and LEGO Education elective students who were perceived as ‘new, young, fresh, creative, enthusiastic teachers’ who bring ‘new ways of doing things’ (PLUSPT30) into classrooms. Placements were viewed as a ‘wonderful opportunity’ for busy schools and teachers to learn ‘different methodologies’ (PLUSPT78) and ‘upskill’ (PLUSPT30). The elective students were cited as both a positive and ‘practical response’ that supports the DEIS schools in that they were ‘a great extra pair of hands’ (PLUSPT49), ‘help coming in through the door’ (PLUSPT78), and ‘extra personnel’ (PLUSPT79).

Teaching in a DEIS School module students worked with the class the teacher to support children by providing ‘invaluable’ one to one support, small group support, or ‘a little bit of extra help’ (PLUSPT79) for children who were ‘just a little bit behind’ (PLUSPT13). Students have provided one to one or small group support in music, drama, art, literacy, numeracy, oral language skills, and nurture time groups which enabled ‘building up relationships’ (PLUSPT79) between the student teachers and children and making the experience enjoyable for both. Individual support for a child ‘who maybe has the greatest need’ (PLUSPT78) or ‘most at risk’ (PLUSPT81) was felt to have a ‘domino effect’ on the rest of the class as the teacher can devote more time to the other children in the class who are also in need’ (PLUSPT78).

The DEIS placements were viewed as beneficial because it can be an ‘eye opener’ (PLUSPT27), it can help to challenge any ‘fears’ that students may have about teaching in DEIS schools, help them to realise whether they are ‘suited’ (PLUSPT13 & PLUSPT27) to teaching in a DEIS school, and raise awareness about the extra supports and resources that DEIS schools have.

The Working with Families module was perceived as beneficial as students ‘shadow’ the HSCL and ‘engage with parents, have a chat with them’ and ‘get a feel for our school campus and the parents that we are involved with’ (PLUSPT13), which the student teachers ‘seemed to really enjoy’. This can be a ‘big eye opener’ and ‘big learning curve’ particularly ‘where attachment is poor between the parent and child’ (PLUSPT65).

One participant expressed the view that all student teachers should have a placement in a DEIS school stating ‘It shouldn’t have to be an elective, it should be part of the [B.Ed.] curriculum because they are coming across very, very complex issues’ (PLUSPT30).

Some participants had provided inputs to the DEIS elective students over the years while in the role of HSCL about working effectively with parents in education or about transfer programmes.

8.4.5. LEGO Education elective

LEGO Education students brought expertise to schools ‘that the teacher in the class probably doesn’t have’ (PLUSPT27). Students were described as ‘really well educated on the programme’, ‘really well organised’, and as delivering ‘the programme to a fantastic level’ (PLUSPT27). Participants welcomed the opportunity teachers were also given to ‘upskill’ as part of the initiative. A particular benefit of being a member of the network was that schools could borrow LEGO Education kits which are expensive to purchase and ‘that’s where the network comes into being brilliant if a few of the schools between us share it (PLUSPT27).

Participants commented that children found the LEGO Education elective ‘highly enjoyable’ (PLUSPT49), became ‘really engaged in it’ and ‘loved working on it’ because it was ‘different’ yet ‘educational’ as ‘they’re still learning’ (PLUSPT78). The elective students and initiative were perceived as enhancing teaching and learning in the DEIS schools through the ‘implementation of coding’ (PLUSPT27) which was perceived as ‘hugely important’ for the school as the children learn skills that they ‘really need going into secondary school’ or that could potentially be ‘an avenue professionally or in college’ (PLUSPT30). LEGO education was also viewed as of particular benefit for children ‘who may have literacy issues and excel at coding because it’s a different form of literacy’ (PLUSPT30).

Another participant indicated that the initiative was a timely support because with ‘all the DEIS initiatives around maths and literacy, we’re now at national average scores. So, we’re ready now to move forward into the STEM subjects’ (PLUSPT65). Feedback on the LEGO Education elective provides some evidence that the second aim of PLUS, which includes linking schools to ‘current best practice in a range of curricular areas’ is being met.

8.4.6. Resources and expertise

Participants indicated that PLUS had supported DEIS schools as a conduit to access resources and expertise in keeping with the networks second and fifth aims. Resources

included the aforementioned initiatives run by the TED Project through PLUS, which give schools an opportunity ‘to tap into the resources that Mary I make available for the DEIS schools’ (PLUSPT13). These initiatives were viewed as tying ‘in with the objectives of the curriculum, you know, so it ticks all those boxes for us’ (PLUSPT13) and supporting schools to ‘find new approaches to learning’ (PLUSPT13).

Participants highlighted their appreciation for facilities made available to schools through PLUS including the LEGO education equipment, the opportunity to participate in Science Week in MIC and the sports facilities for the League of Legends Soccer. Participants commented that they would not have ‘space, the resources’, or ‘the manpower (PLUSPT13) to run similar initiatives in their school. Financial challenges to providing facilities and activities were highlighted such as LEGO equipment, which is ‘quite expensive’ (PLUSPT27). Some schools are ‘very under resourced’ (PLUSPT13), ‘fairly strapped for money’, or ‘struggling at the moment’ (PLUSPT49) financially because their numbers might be small and ‘we don’t get huge capitation grant and we’ve big bills’ or schools are located in ‘old buildings’. In this regard the facilities of MIC were perceived as ‘a great resource that we can tap into’ (PLUSPT49) and ‘hugely positive for the children’ (PLUSPT13).

Expertise that schools availed of through PLUS included workshops or seminars over the years in response to topics identified at meetings which were ‘opened up’ to all staff in schools on topics such as Special Education Needs, behaviour management, oral language development, literacy development, Mindfulness and Trauma and the Child (see Appendix 14 for details of guest speakers). Guest speakers were cited as a form of expertise available to schools with one participant commenting that ‘you’ve always tapped in and you have the access to professionals and the experienced people who can speak to us, from a different place, but to support us with what the big issues that are happening on the ground’ (PLUSPT30). Another observed that schools had identified issues as challenges through PLUS in the early years ‘long before they appeared in you know plans and curricular areas and Department [of Education] level’ (PLUSPT79).

8.4.7. PLUS initiatives

Participants spoke positively about the activities delivered through PLUS for DEIS primary schools as illustrated in the following quotes:

So, it (PLUS) supports the schools because we have been involved in lots of interesting initiatives, the children have always loved the initiatives that we have been involved in, the teachers have always enjoyed it (PLUSPT25).

PLUSFGPT78: I suppose the feedback is really positive. Well we were involved in the Children's Choir and the League of Legends and the children loved it, teachers loved it, a very positive experience for the children coming into a college and being a part of something here.

Interviewer: Yeah, ok.

PLUSFGPT81: They do, same as our school, yeah. They love performing for the Choir as well, they love giving a performance and again, it's a trip to third level that a lot of their parents never stepped in, no matter what third level, they get to do it (PLUS Focus Group).

The initiatives were perceived as 'opportunities to participate in things we wouldn't have had' (OSCPT74) or schools and children 'may not otherwise be able to avail of' (PLUSPT65) such as having an artist in the classroom through Studio Classroom or singing in a choir.

The League of Legends in particular was described as 'synonymous with the PLUS network' (PLUSPT65) in schools and some participants indicated that it was an incentive, motivation, reward or 'huge carrot' (PLUSPT30) for good behaviour, particularly for 6th class pupils towards the end of the school year.

The PLUS initiatives were described as 'win/win' because they are fun for children and 'educational': 'whether it's Lego or art or science or anything like that is, or coming for the football, everything like that is fun, the kids absolutely love that' (PLUSPT25). This was viewed as important in the context of a DEIS school because 'you're always trying to make the learning exciting for the children in order to keep them and retain them in the [education] cycle' (PLUSPT13).

Additionally, they were cited as being valued by teachers because they 'tick all the boxes' (PLUSPT49) in that they are 'enjoyable' and 'enhance learning'. Teachers were felt to value these learning opportunities because 'anything that is someone different, from a teacher's point of view, any classroom teacher, it's great to have an external, another

voice coming into your class' (PLUSPT25). Indeed, minutes dated 20/11/2013 noted feedback from representatives indicating that teachers were learning from the Choir students:

Noted: Teachers were learning new techniques from the students about the warm ups (PLUS 2013 b).

The initiatives were also cited as enhancing children's 'self-worth and self-esteem' and promoting learning 'outside of the classroom, that it's not just confined to the curriculum' (PLUSPT79) and opportunities for collaboration or interaction with other schools.

8.4.8. Learning and knowledge creation

8.4.8.1. Formal and informal learning

As stated under the model, participants emphasised both formal and informal learning opportunities within PLUS. Participants' accounts conveyed the relevance of learning from PLUS through sharing of experiences and learning about services and practical application of the same in the roles or schools. One participant commented that 'there is an element of learning in each meeting' as 'school life is so busy that it's constantly changing' and 'there's always something to be brought up or talked about' (PLUSPT79). Another observed that 'listening to other teachers and seeing what's working for them' was beneficial because 'you bring that back to the table' in school (PLUSPT81). Participants in the role of HSCL found learning about different support services schools can 'tap into' (PLUSPT49) and 'knowing who to go to and where to go to and what to ask for' (PLUSPT81) of benefit because the HSCL would not necessarily have the expertise to advise people on what to do in difficult situations. Rather, 'you can give them support and refer them to the support services' (PLUSPT49).

Equally, participants recognised that through meetings the facilitator learns about what is happening on the ground in schools as members 'bring our own experience to the PLUS meetings' of 'what's happening or what's current' and this 'might direct you to the next meeting' (PLUSPT81). Participants emphasised that they had learned through PLUS about 'the importance of networking', about the supports available from MIC for schools and that staff were 'open to new learning and progression and community involvement' and that 'People [in MIC] are working really hard to make education good for families and kids and teachers and communities' (PLUSPT30).

8.4.8.2. Knowledge creation

While there was less of an emphasis in the PLUS participants' accounts on the creation of knowledge than in OSCAILT, from the researcher's perspective a body of knowledge about DEIS schools has been created through the reports on the research and intervention projects involving PLUS schools such as the WTP (Lyons et al. 2006) and FSCEP (Galvin et al. 2009). These initiatives emerged as a direct result of issues and concerns of the PLUS schools. Additionally, TED Project staff conducted research on the delivery of Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) on site in PLUS schools in 2012 (O'Connor et al. 2012). The onsite model of delivery of SLT in the PLUS schools was influenced by direct interaction between PLUS representatives and the Principal Speech and Language Therapist in the Mid-Western Region of the HSE following a presentation made at the network in November 2006. In 2015, TED staff published a report following a needs analysis of the literacy needs of 12-18 year olds as identified by teachers in DEIS Post Primary Schools, Youthreach Centres, Youth Encounter Projects and a short term educational centre (O'Connor and Higgins 2015). The impetus for this report came from a school in the PLUS network. In 2016, an evaluation of the MIC Children's Choir was also published (Kenny et al. 2016) and research has been conducted for each phase of the Studio Classroom initiative from 2015 to 2018. Research and evaluation studies have also been undertaken by TED staff on programmes that were implemented in PLUS schools e.g., Mission Transition Evaluation (McGann and Mahoney 2010), Incredible Years Evaluation (O'Connor and Mahoney 2010), Evaluation of the Doodle Families Literacy Programme Pilot (Bourke and Higgins 2016) and EDNIP (Higgins et al. 2020).

8.4.9. Building relationships and trust

Focus group and individual interview participants indicated that PLUS has contributed to building relationships and trust between representatives and schools. Participating in meetings was perceived as decreasing isolation that can be experienced in schools because of the 'connection' made with other members who 'get to meet other schools, get ideas, swap information' (PLUSFGPT24) Participation was also felt to support 'maintaining good relationships with other schools' (PLUSFGPT81) and the network was described as the 'perfect platform' to 'make links with other people and building relationships with them' (PLUSPT81).

A reciprocal relationship between the schools and MIC through the PLUS network was palpable in the focus groups and interviews. Participants indicated that they had developed a strong personal connection with MIC staff members through PLUS and this was perceived as creating a 'more personable approach' (PLUSPT13) to interaction of DEIS schools with third level institutions because the 'face to face' interaction created a mechanism for 'feedback' from schools about initiatives and electives and a 'central point for a query' (PLUSPT30). Participants discussed feeling appreciated by TED and MIC for 'anything schools have taken on board' (PLUSPT79) such as elective students and PLUS initiatives, as well as a desire to be supportive of MIC and other schools, or as expressed by one participant 'I suppose to support Mary I or to the other schools that "Look we're all on board, we're all in this together and we want to be a part of it" (PLUSPT81). The relationship was described as a 'collaborative process' in which schools can avail of services or programmes from MIC and also have the opportunity to 'provide an input' (PLUSPT27) through participation in the network. The mutual benefit for both schools and MIC was highlighted with one person stating that MIC benefitted from the relationship with schools by 'being in touch with what's happening on the ground with schools' and also through the 'student placement' (PLUSPT30) for DEIS electives.

The relationships developed through PLUS were perceived as enabling school to school activity such as the League of Legends and MIC Children's Choir in addition to the development of links with other agencies that can provide support for schools and families such as the Bedford Row Family Project and Children's Grief Centre.

One interviewee indicated that they had trust in MIC that network initiatives and activities will be 'efficient', 'well run', 'useful' and will 'tie in with the objectives of the curriculum' (PLUSPT13). Additionally, 'we sign up to anything in Mary I' because 'it's going to be a good service' (PLUSPT13) and they trust that the children will have a positive experience when they visit the college. The loaning of LEGO equipment to schools was perceived as MIC placing trust in the schools involved or as expressed 'It shows I suppose that they trust our school set up as well' (PLUSPT13). Participants also indicated their trust that support is available to schools through PLUS, as specified in 'I'm sure that if there was something I was looking for, for children in the school, I could come to PLUS and they would link me or support me in helping the children' (PLUSPT65).

8.4.10. Support for HSCLs and other representatives

PLUS was perceived as supporting network representatives in their roles through: access to expertise and information; links to support agencies; networking, camaraderie and peer support and the relevance of the meetings to their roles as the main supports.

8.4.10.1. Expertise of guest speakers

Participants indicated that the guest speakers had been a support to them in their role (see Appendix 14 for full details). One participant was of the view that PLUS ‘keeps us connected with what’s cutting edge in research and what’s cutting edge in sort of best practice’ (PLUSPT49), which was felt to be important because ‘you’re doing a disservice to children otherwise if you’re not at the cutting edge of learning’. Another observed that HSCLs for example, may not always be ‘au fait with all of the new programmes that difference agencies are coming up with’ and that through PLUS ‘we make more links and we learn more about agencies and we learn more about programmes’ (PLUSPT30).

8.4.10.2. Informative

The majority of participants indicated that network meetings were an important source of information that supported representatives in their role particularly through discussion and sharing of practices and experience about what works well in schools which can ‘set off some light bulbs in your head’ (PLUSPT78) about how something might work in their own school. The network was also cited as a source of problem solving around the table as ‘it’s not very often at all that you wouldn’t be able to solve the problem’ (PLUSPT13). Another participant observed that ‘from within the school’ they ‘bring to the table things that aren’t working, things that are working’, which is of benefit for all, as the following quote illustrates:

It could have come from another outside agency that is working in the school and sharing of these, I suppose these practices if you want to call them, interventions, is only good because everyone is gaining from it. Because the one thing you get from people from DEIS schools is that they’re constantly looking out for each other and saying “Look, this has worked for us, do you want to give it a go? Here’s my number and my email.” ’ (PLUSPT81)

PLUS was also viewed as a source of information about initiatives and projects that MIC ‘are currently running and will be running’ (PLUSPT25), events in MIC, ‘what is happening in curriculum development’ (PLUSPT30).

Participants indicated that the network is a source of information relevant to the HSCL role which they disseminate through their other ‘networks’ with one participant observing ‘So we’ll go back to our city and county cluster, we have a family cluster here. Again, we disseminate that information’ (PLUSPT13).

HSCLs indicated that PLUS meetings are a source of information that would not necessarily be discussed in their various clusters such education policy, new developments, topical issues in schools or the ‘political climate’ (PLUSPT30). The examples cited included the DEIS Action Plan in 2017, new SEN allocation models (2005, 2012, 2017) and how schools could ‘tap into regeneration to enhance our families and support for families’ (PLUSPT65). PLUS was also cited as a source of information helpful to HSCLs in their role to support parents around the transfer of children to non mainstream post primary school settings as they have the opportunity for direct contact with staff from two such schools in the city.

8.4.10.3. Links to support agencies

PLUS was perceived as contributing to participants’ knowledge of support services, particularly for those new to the HSCL role, and how to link with them with one participant stating ‘It’s just good to know that those agencies exist and how different agencies work ... and how you can link in with them’ (PLUSPT78). Another relayed that a guest speaker at a PLUS meeting had subsequently been invited to speak at the HSCL cluster because the participant felt ‘people needed to hear that information’ (PLUSPT13). Members also have the opportunity to share their experiences and learn more about support agencies, particularly if there is some ‘overlap’ in their remit, and members are trying to decipher ‘which is most likely to suit our parent and their particular issue of the family’ (PLUSPT30). For one participant, making a direct connection with a guest speaker from a support agency was particularly important in making ‘the leap’ between ‘knowing there’s a good service out there’ (PLUSPT49) and how and when to access it.

8.4.10.4. Networking, camaraderie, and peer support

Participants' accounts emphasised that PLUS is a source of peer support for members with participants stating it was 'a support network for Home Schools' who have 'few opportunities to meet for peer support' (PLUSPT30) and 'a really supportive network' (PLUSPT27). Others stressed the importance for members 'to know you're not alone' (PLUSPT79), of 'just meeting people and chatting' (PLUSPT79) and the 'sense of camaraderie' (PLUSPT49) experienced from 'the support of colleagues and the knowledge that there's other people in the same boat' (PLUSPT79). For one participant, the network provided a sense of reassurance and 'a sense of wellbeing' in that members 'identify things that are working well or have improved or you can identify that we're not doing too bad of a job' (PLUSPT79). In the member check, participants re-emphasised the importance of peer support, with particular reference to the nature of the HSCL role and the lack of supervision available to them. As one participant observed: "What we deal with on the doorsteps ... and we need supervision for that. It's incredible really that we don't get some form of it" (PLUSPT78). Participants were of the view that such supervision should be 'one to one' as opposed to in a group setting because 'I don't think people would be able to get off their chest what they need to get off their chest' (PLUSPT81).

PLUS was also recognised as having a role in building links with people, with one participant stating that 'the best way to seek support and advice and to find out what's going on in the area is to network with people' (PLUSPT13). Participants spoke of the 'isolation' that can be experienced in schools where 'we can be very much in our own bubble' and identified the connection and link the network created to the 'wider sort of things that are going on in education' (PLUSPT49).

8.4.10.5. Relevance of the meetings for role

Participants stressed the relevance of PLUS for all members, regardless of role, and one indicated that a motivating factor in their active participation in the network, was the relevance and usefulness of the information that can be brought back to schools about services and PLUS initiatives stating: 'I suppose I chose to continue attending the PLUS network because at the end of the day, it's useful' (PLUSPT13). Another participant emphasised the relevance for all teachers stating that 'there's special ed., there's curricular areas, there's issues that have arose within the school, issues to do with

management, with personnel development, wellbeing, every issue is kind of covered (PLUSPT79).

A third participant relayed that one of the aspects they feel is ‘very important’ about PLUS is that the facilitator has ‘their finger on the button’ in the topical issues of concern are discussed which ‘reflects what’s happening in our society’ and the issues ‘impacting on our schools’ (PLUSPT30).

Some participants indicated that the previous school representatives recommended that they attend PLUS or that they prioritise PLUS from other groups they could be involved with in the HSCL role.

8.5. Review of PLUS in relation to its stated mission and aims

This research was not designed as an evaluation of PLUS and OSCAILT and the ethical clearance granted by MIREC and permission given by the TED Steering Committee and research participants was on the understanding that the aims were as stated in section 1.5. i.e., to understand the development of the networks, to understand the how they operate, function and build connections, and to understand knowledge creation and sharing. However, a balanced presentation of the findings and subsequent insight to the networks should consider the findings in relation to the mission and aims of each network and this case report has reflected throughout on whether particular features or outcomes are in keeping with same.

There is evidence, particularly in the first ten years, that PLUS has to some extent achieved the first part of the mission ‘to explore issues and identify needs around inequities in educational opportunities and propose practical steps to actively address these needs’. The case report details the steps taken to address the issues of absenteeism, behaviour in the form of the WTP, the contentious issue of secondary school applications in Limerick in the early years, and enhancing home school community relationships through the FSCEP. More recently, the network has taken a narrower focus on the HSCL role because they are the primary attendees and comprise a core component of the DEIS School Support Programme. The delivery of curriculum related activities funded through the TED annual budget and others recognises that the costs associated with extracurricular activities such as music and art and the limited financial resources of DEIS schools and parents to provide same can preclude children from availing of these important opportunities.

The evidence in relation to the second part of the mission is more complex to quantify i.e., ‘improve and enhance educational outcomes for children’. Firstly, it is not clear what is meant by ‘educational outcomes’ i.e., is it purely academic, or does it include social and emotional development, physical development, spiritual development and so forth? As I was involved in redrafting these aims, my recollection is that it was the broader understanding, but this needs to be clarified with networks members and was not teased out with research participants.

While there is no data available on the impact on students of the work on absenteeism or the issue of secondary school places, data on some of the initiatives indicates that there has been some positive outcomes for children as a result of TED research and intervention work, which grew out of concerns identified by PLUS.

An external evaluation of the FSCEP (Hainsworth 2009) found that the project enhanced the learning environments of the five schools by supporting teachers and principals in their work with families and community, supporting the development of programmes and providing resources. The FSCEP impacted on the home learning environment through acknowledgement of the talent and skills of parents and opportunities to further develop skills specific to supporting children’s learning. It also impacted on the learning environment of the community by strategically nurturing partnerships between the school and community organisations. FSCEP impacted on the learning environment of children by supporting and facilitating the key stakeholders in their lives to work together to develop effective, strategic educational partnerships which encouraged fun learning activities that supported children regardless of ability. It also encouraged development of social and personal skills, self-esteem and confidence and improved literacy and numeracy attainment as well as arts and sports skills.

An evaluation of the MIC Children’s Choir (Kenny et al. 2016) found that the benefits experienced by children as reported by children themselves in focus groups and teachers included: widening opportunities for musical participation and education; development of musical, performance and singing skills; development of social and emotional skills through choral participation and performance; fulfilment of elements of the Music curriculum; creating awareness of and building aspirations towards third level education and meeting and interacting with other children from schools in their locality.

Quantifying and understanding the impact of the PLUS network meetings, guest speakers and workshops with regards to enhancing educational outcomes for children is

less clear cut. This is directly related to the nature of the networks, as this thesis argues, as a forum for teacher professional learning and support (Azorín 2020) as opposed to a specific remit on improving student attainment scores. As the various DEIS evaluation reports have highlighted, attributing gains in achievement to one particular factor e.g., the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, is quite complex, given the multitude of programmes and initiatives in DEIS primary schools. Benefits experienced by children as a result of PLUS meetings etc., if any, are likely due to the multiplier or ripple effect of these activities.

A gap identified between the stated missions, aims and practice of PLUS is that of the voices of other school staff, parents and children. The focus of the network on particular roles i.e., HSCL, highlights issues about membership and exclusivity and how the perspectives and experiences of the wider school community are brought to bear on the networks. While there is evidence that the larger scale initiatives e.g., WTP, FSCEP, consulted with the wider school community in their design and implementation, the wider school staff, children and parents do not participate in PLUS.

A further consideration relates to the responsive versus strategic nature of PLUS. The lack of clarity on the nature of ‘educational outcomes’ raises the question of whether there should be a more considered and strategic focus in the network with regards to enhancing educational outcomes for children and if so, how should ‘educational outcomes’ be defined, by whom and what might a more strategic approach involve? Such an approach could be of benefit to the DEIS schools involved by raising awareness about the once off and piecemeal nature of external funding for intervention programmes and difficulties schools experience in raising funding and sustaining programmes.

8.6. Conclusion

In summary, the PLUS case study report detailed the key elements in the analysis of networks and presented the model of the network. It is clear that PLUS has an ethos of promoting equality of opportunity for children in DEIS schools. PLUS has evolved into a platform for members to interact and network with other HSCLs and teachers to share experience, to learn from each other and for peer support. It embodies both formal i.e., coordination of activity and meetings, and informal features i.e., ‘chatting’, which enable the network to function and fosters learning and the development of trust and relationships

between members. In addition to being a source of peer support, PLUS was also cited as a support for members in their role through access to guest speakers, information and links to various support agencies. Challenges identified include difficulty attending meetings at times, a perceived lack of diversity in membership, with most members being HSCLs and concerns about lack of participation and sustainability.

The various activities delivered through PLUS in recent years i.e., MIC Children's Choir, League of Legends and Studio Classroom, were perceived as contributing the aims of schools' DEIS remit to encourage participation in third level education through positive experiences of a third level campus and in tandem with the B.Ed. students visiting PLUS schools for DEIS and LEGO Education electives, were viewed as supporting teaching and learning in their schools. Finally, the case report reflects on whether the mission and aims of the network are being met and considers gaps in practice.

Chapter 9 - OSCAILT Case Study Report

9.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from focus groups and individual interviews about OSCAILT network members' perceptions about their participation in the network and the model of the network that has emerged. The case study report is structured around the key elements of school networks drawn from the literature as presented in Chapter Three i.e., purpose, structures (hard i.e., membership, coordination, formal and informal and soft i.e. trust, relationships and knowledge), processes and interactions (management and leadership, participation, learning and interpersonal relationships and trust) and challenges grounded in the data i.e., a multiagency approach. Key outcomes reported for individual representatives and DEIS schools are also detailed and the mission is reviewed in light of the findings

9.2. OSCAILT Network Model

9.2.1. Purpose

Facilitators indicated that from the outset OSCAILT was a direct response to the FitzGerald report (2007) recommendations, based on the challenges in Limerick city and 'at the time we had 22 schools doing 22 different things with their 22 populations responding to their local needs' (OSCFL44). After the DA funding ceased, the purpose of the network evolved. While many acknowledged the original purpose, participants primarily described OSCAILT as a support group, platform, forum or committee for principals of DEIS primary and post primary schools involving staff from the DoE and MIC³³.

I suppose, it's a forum group that provides DEIS principals with ... I think it's a safe space for me. A forum that provides us with a space to engage with fellow professionals that are walking the walk. I think working in a DEIS school can be ... I think it's quite a unique context and just to know that there's other ... At times

³³ OSCAILT was facilitated by the TED Project, MIC in partnership with the Department of Education until autumn 2019, when the DES withdrew and MIC became the sole facilitator. All data was collected prior to this departure and participants' accounts and the subsequent case study report are based on the DES being members of the network.

when you should be paddling your own canoe when you're within your own school structure, it can be quite lonely (OSCPT35).

The similarity of school contexts i.e., DEIS Band 1 primary and DEIS post primary level, was highlighted and although variation between schools in terms of their context and needs was recognised, schools were described as being 'very alike', having 'common problems and the same problem goals' (OSCPT92).

Support in OSCAILT was illustrated in terms of discussing 'topical issues' of 'mutual concern' to the principals involved, who would be 'in the front line' of dealing with the issues raised. It encompassed sharing good practice, discussing issues in education, guidance, reassurance, collaboration, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) based on the needs of the schools and network and developing leadership skills. The focus of the network on supporting schools to realise 'best outcomes for children' and its 'advocacy' role were also emphasised (OSCFL44).

It was evident that participants viewed OSCAILT as being very responsive to the issues and needs of members and the schools that they represent with one member stating in the focus group that 'There's great follow through on ideas like, they're not just ideas' (OSCFGPT59). They emphasised how the network, the DoE and MIC, helped to raise awareness about critical issues facing schools that they had raised in OSCAILT meetings such as the 'EAL crisis' or 'migrant crisis' in 2015-2016 school year.

9.2.2. Ethos

An 'openness' (OSCPT64) on behalf of schools to support the community through a 'holistic service to a family' (OSCFL44) that goes beyond the physical opening of the school building was evident in participant accounts. They depicted a holistic approach to caring for children, teachers, families and the wider community as the following extract illustrates:

Interviewer: Ok so it's a holistic kind of approach?

Yes and the whole emphasis on the community, the community outside the school as well. I like that, like they're all pulled into it. (OSCPT56).

Another participant outlined their perception of the essence of the philosophy of OSCAILT as a focus on caring for children, families and ‘creating safe community hubs’ (OSCPT35).

An ethos of care, respect and being non-judgemental was palpable in principals’ descriptions of the facilitators’ approach with one commenting that ‘there’s no judgements and everything you say is accepted, it’s not silly and it’s not a stupid question’ (OSCPT56). This extended to other members as evident in the following: ‘And I think everyone within it actually cares, which a big thing is too. You can see a lot of caring and actually sharing of practice’ (OSCPT15).

A further aspect of the ethos identified was a support for ‘the agent’ or principal who wishes to make a difference in the lives of the families and communities with which they work as the extract below details:

OSCAILT is a support for the agent who has to keep hope. You have to stay hoping that you’re going to make a breakthrough. I love that starfish story, the one where the lad starts in the morning time and he’s throwing starfish after a storm into the sea and there’s 5,000 or 10,000. You can’t make a difference. Well it made a difference to that one (OSCPT20).

A personal and institutional commitment to social justice in addition to an ethos of caring for families and ‘making a difference in children’s lives and supporting teachers’ (OSCFL44) so that ‘ultimately outcomes for children are improved’ (OSCFL10) were highlighted by network facilitators in discussing their motivations for continuing their involvement with OSCAILT.

9.2.3. Structures

9.2.3.1. Membership

Participants were very clear that OSCAILT is a ‘principals only’ (OSCPT55) network along with MIC and the DoE. Minutes dated 24/09/2014 note that the meeting specifically agreed that:

As a principals' network it is best if the person attending the meeting is the decision maker (i.e., principal or acting principal) for the schools and not a representative OSCAILT 2014).

In the facilitator member check, participants discussed how they had always viewed themselves as 'members' of the network as opposed to 'external facilitators' who 'facilitate a group to make a decision' because 'there were a lot of things we were collectively deciding' (OSCFL10). The 'neutral' role of the MIC facilitator was highlighted as an important feature and key element in sustainability as well as building relationships and trust between network members, particularly between the DoE and the schools. The two DoE representatives were described as 'very much an integral part of the whole process' who are not just 'an outside agent who comes in to listen' (OSCPT100).

Membership of OSCAILT changed over the years. The number of schools participating reduced from 22 at the outset to 16 when data was collected in 2017-2018 due to amalgamations and closures of schools. There were also numerous retirements resulting in changes in school representatives. The DoE involvement ceased in December 2019 when the representative's role took on a more national brief. While not members, other agencies cited as having a strong link to the network in the early years included the Limerick Education Centre and the Inspectorate, arising from links to initiatives funded under Limerick Regeneration Programme i.e., Limerick DEIS Literacy Initiative³⁴.

9.2.3.2. Coordination and facilitation of the network

Participants highlighted the importance of the 'structured' and coordinated nature of OSCAILT. The MIC involvement was described as providing a 'secretariat' (OSCPT76) function.

³⁴ Limerick DEIS Literacy Initiative 2011-2019 - Mary Immaculate College, Department of Education and Limerick Education Centre together with 12 DEIS (Band 1) Limerick primary schools. Eight Literacy Network Teachers worked within these twelve schools with some working in a shared capacity. The Literacy Network team held monthly meetings in the LEC. These meetings facilitate the sharing of best practice, resource collaboration and a sense of community development. Funding was provided by the Supporting Social Inclusion and Regeneration in Limerick (SSIRL) through its Programme Innovation and Development Fund (PIDF).

Participants indicated that meetings, which take place five times per year, are ‘focused’, ‘targeted’ and well organised with a timekeeper appointed at each meeting, an agenda and minutes taken. Many emphasised the ‘vital’ role and importance of having a lead organisation or individual responsible for the coordination of network activity and chairing of the meetings, which in this case was recognised as MIC supported by the DoE. This was perceived as contributing to sustainability of the network, without which, OSCAILT would ‘fall apart’ (OSCPT23).

Coordination of OSCAILT was also enabled the implementation of other network activity such as the delivery of initiatives in schools and follow up action to take place and was identified as a critical element for sustainability by facilitators and principals alike, as principals would not have the capacity to take on additional work due to the demanding nature of their roles.

9.2.3.3. Formal and informal structures

Both formal network structures and informal aspects were identified, as encapsulated in the following ‘So it’s formal and informal but it’s an informal discussion in a very formal setting right?’ (OSCPT23). The formal structure included having an agenda, documentation of meetings, network governance the setting.

The informal aspects included flexibility in the agenda, which is ‘never linear, it’s never the same thing at every meeting’ (OSCPT35). Rather, members can ‘bring something to the meeting’ (OSCPT15) and ‘there’s still an informal nature to it, in that everyone can talk’ (OSCPT15). The most clearly identifiable informal aspect of the network emphasised was the tea and coffee before the meeting where people ‘make time to chat with one another’ (OSCPT51) and ‘that’s where you let it all hang out really’ (OSCPT56). Members clearly value this aspect of the meeting as it was suggested at the end of year review on 1/6/2017 to:

Change the structure of meetings – tea/coffee at 9.00 to allow information sharing etc. and the meeting then starts at 9.45 (OSCAILT 2017)

Participants observed that members often stay around to talk to others afterwards) and ‘very often they [principals] are lingering because they have to catch up with something’

(OSCFL44). Indeed, one facilitator commented that ‘the amount of other work that got done out of this is immeasurable really, you know. Because you’d have several people staying back to move something else on’ (OSCMCFL64).

9.2.4. Processes and interactions

9.2.4.1. Management and Leadership

Until January 2020, OSCAILT was managed and lead through the coordination of the MIC and DoE facilitators. Network facilitators were described as creating a ‘confidential, trusting space’ (OSCPT23), as being professional, positive, welcoming, respectful and non-judgemental ‘very approachable’ (OSCPT92), supportive, available to support members ‘behind the scenes’ (OSCPT56) and responsive to concerns raised. They had organised numerous guest speakers or CPD over the years on topics identified at meetings and also invited members to propose agenda items for meetings. The difficulty for DoE facilitators in directly responding to issues raised at meetings due to the constraint of their role or confidentiality was acknowledged but participants felt that they listened and took on board issues raised, with one observing ‘it’s a great comfort to us to know that they are not just sitting in there for the sake of sitting in’ (OSCPT100). Facilitators confirmed in the individual interviews and member check that they endeavoured to provide individual responses as appropriate such as to a particular query or on occasion, with a one to one conversation if a principal wished to discuss a concern in confidence.

Across the interviews, participants identified a number of skills and attributes of the OSCAILT facilitators including: giving everyone an equal voice, listening to members, communication skills, pulling ideas together and creating energy behind tasks. Facilitators emphasised the importance of having ‘facilitation skills’ in order to create a ‘safe space’ where diverging viewpoints can be expressed and explored, and observed that it may be more possible for a non-principal facilitator to offer a more ‘objective’ perspective on issues affecting schools. Having an ‘independent’ chair was regarded as ‘critical’ by one participant who felt that particular network members had dominated discussions at meetings in the past. However, at the time of interview this participant felt that facilitators had ‘got to grips with it’ (OSCPT36).

9.2.4.2. Participation

The myriad of ways in which members contribute to the network was revealed in the interviews including attendance at meetings. Some noted that newer principals may prefer

to ‘just observe and see what happens’ (OSCPT51) at meetings or just listen, which can also be a great source of information as observed in ‘I’m kind of finding out a lot by even just listening in’ (OSCPT15). More recent members indicated that they also observed ‘longer serving members’ contributing by modelling the sharing of their experiences at the meeting.

A strong sense of ownership by principals of the OSCAILT agenda was evident in the individual interviews with many indicating that they had the opportunity to ‘feed into the agenda’ (OSCFGPT55), which is based ‘on our needs, what we feel as a group’ (OSCPT51) or ‘generally topics that are coming up in all schools’ (OSCPT59). One participant stated that facilitators are ‘not dictating to us the terms of the meeting’ (OSCPT92). Another stated: ‘The agenda comes from us... We’re not being talked at, we’re talking together’ (OSCPT55). Analysis of the minutes of meetings supports this sense of ownership with ‘speaker and topic for next meeting’ as a regular agenda item from 2009-2011 and many examples evident throughout the minutes of facilitators requesting suggestions for meeting topics and guest speakers. Facilitators relayed that agenda items were most likely to ‘evolve’ through ‘dialogue’ at meetings, with one describing the meeting agenda as ‘communal’ (OSCFL44).

Having the freedom to ‘set our priorities at a given time’ (OSCPT51) through the agenda or end of year evaluations was empowering for some in a context where most agendas for schools are set by the DoE or other agencies, as expressed by one participant ‘Because every other agenda is set by the Department of Education or the Financial Services Support Unit. But this is “What works for this group? What worked before? What would you like to see more of? What do we need to do differently?” (OSCPT51).

Due to their coordination role, facilitator participation has involved investing much personal time in gathering data for reports or progressing ‘targeted’ pieces of work that may not be directly relevant to every member outside of meetings because they are cognisant that principals do not have the time to do so and of keeping meetings as relevant as possible for all members. They also acknowledged that where attendance of a member is poor, they must respect principal autonomy and capacity to leave school to attend meetings stating that ‘It’s difficult for us to challenge anyone who is not participating ... So, it’s not like we can pick up the phone and say, “Any chance you’d start coming to the network?” (OSCFL10).

Network members also had opportunities to volunteer to represent OSCAILT on other fora such as Music Generation Limerick³⁵, the Limerick Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC)³⁶ or the Area Based Childhood³⁷ (ABC) Start Right initiative. While one of the main benefits of participation in the network cited was that there was no extra work and 'it's rare you'd leave with a job', participants could if they wished 'look into something yourself and feedback' to a meeting (OSCPT59).

9.2.4.3. Learning

Participants identified a number of ways in which the operation of the network creates structures and spaces for people to collaborate and learn. Having the meeting dates set out in advance and written in the diary is important 'so that we prioritise it and make sure that it happens, that we can all attend them' (OSCPT51). The availability of a suitable venue i.e., Limerick Education Centre or a school also helps to create that space. By bringing principals together with a focus on issues of concern to them in their role, meetings create 'a good' environment (OSCPT20) conducive to discussion, conversation, sharing of experience between members, both during and after the meeting.

The responsive nature and ownership of the meeting agenda encouraged learning and sharing of experience. In response to issues discussed at meetings, facilitators often organise 'additional expertise based on what we decide is necessary' (OSCPT36) or guest speakers to talk about topics of concern to members thereby creating opportunities for them to learn more about relevant concerns or interact with individuals from outside agencies that support schools and families. Details of guest speakers are available in Appendix 14.

³⁵ Music Generation - Ireland's National Music Education Programme that transforms the lives of children and young people through access to high quality performance music education in their locality. Initiated by Music Network, Music Generation is co-funded by U2, The Ireland Funds, the Department of Education and Local Music Education Partnerships. For further information see https://www.musicgeneration.ie/about/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI_v-vzNml5AIVTbDtCh3gYQHdEAAAYASAAEgLURvD_BwE

³⁶ CYPSC - Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a key structure identified by Government to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland. Their age remit spans all children and young people aged from 0 to 24 years. The purpose of the CYPSC is to ensure effective interagency co-ordination and collaboration to achieve the best outcomes for all children and young people in their area. For more information see <https://www.cypsc.ie/>

³⁷ Area Based Childhood (ABC) Initiative - Along with PAUL Partnership and Moyross/Northside Community Development Group, OSCAILT was a successful applicant for funding for the initiative from Department of Youth and Community Affairs Area Based Childhood Poverty Initiative in 2013. A member of OSCAILT sits on the consortium overseeing the initiative.

Facilitation of the network was cited as a vital factor in enabling learning and sharing to take place. Facilitators were perceived as bringing structure, focus and organisation to the network, thereby enabling learning and sharing to take place as the following extract illustrates:

Interviewer: What helps or enables that kind of learning or sharing of practice to take place within the network?

I suppose having an agenda prepared or the actual, you know having the meeting structured, the agenda is prepared in advance so, and having a timed and allowing or not allowing people, some people who like to talk at length, not allowing them, keeping a constraint on it you know? (OSCPT57).

Additionally, facilitators were felt to be ‘very good at communicating a message and drawing all of the strands and ideas together’ (OSCPT20) and dedicated to ensuring ‘that the best possible outcomes are going to be achieved for the kids that you’re working with’ (OSCPT35).

The openness, honesty and willingness of participants to share were identified as a significant factors in enabling learning and sharing of practice to take place. Participants felt there was an ‘openness and honesty’ (OSCPT23) in the network and that ‘people who come to it all the time, and they’re open and they share’ (OSCPT51). This participant declared ‘I feel I can be very honest about what the reality is on the ground and what we deal with every day’ (OSCPT51). For another, openness encapsulated being ‘open to learning’ (OSCPT35) and that members should be open to sharing practice as well as identifying ‘gaps’ in practice or ‘where you need to add huge value to what’s going on’ (OSCPT35). The ‘generosity’ of network members to share their experiences was highlighted by one participant, who acknowledged that in general despite ‘competition between schools’ at OSCAILT people were saying, “This worked for me, why don’t you try it?” (OSCPT74).

Closely linked to ‘openness and honesty’ and willingness to share, is trust, which was also cited as a key element that enables learning and sharing to happen. Participants indicated that they can share because ‘we make it very clear at the beginning that things that were discussed were confidential’ (OSCPT100), ‘it’s familiar’, ‘the trust is there’

(OSCPT23) and ‘you know it’s safe’ (OSCPT56). Facilitators identified having relevant topics, regular meetings, ‘good trusting relationships’ between members, ‘good facilitation’ and ‘experienced principals’ (OSCFL10) who can share their knowledge as enabling learning and sharing to take place.

Many participants referenced the end of year evaluation in the individual interviews which creates a space for members to feedback ‘What we felt we could do with more of, what we’d like to happen’ (OSCPT51). Analysis of minutes indicates that the end of year review was either conducted at a meeting or via email, in which case members’ feedback on ‘what worked well’ or ‘what could be improved’ were discussed at subsequent meetings.

9.2.4.4. Interpersonal relationships and trust

Participants’ accounts indicated that formal and informal communication occurs between network members at meetings, the more formal discussion being that about the agenda items and the informal ‘chatting’ either before or after the meeting.

On occasion principals of nearby schools had travelled together to a meeting, which one participant perceived as positive because ‘We’ve set up a more closer relationship and it’s working very well for both schools at the moment’ (OSCPT15).

Many participants emphasised the communication with other network members between meetings and how they had often ‘picked up the phone’ to seek advice about different issues or were quite confident that they could do so based on the relationship established through network meetings. Some principals viewed it was an opportunity for ‘partnership with principals’ (OSCPT15) and to collaborate with others in confidence for answers or solutions to issues that they were experiencing and to bounce ideas off other people. As one participant noted ‘five heads are better than one’ (OSCPT23), while another felt that ‘Working together makes your job easier, that you’re not sitting in here in an office, thinking oh my god, my job is so difficult’ (OSCPT55). When other principal support groups are unable to answer a query, collaboration with fellow OSCAILT members can often be a source of answers or solutions as the following quote illustrates:

And again sometimes I get off the phone from you know any of the [principal support groups], I’m more frustrated than I was before I went on the phone because they haven’t

practically given me the answer I'm looking for you know? Whereas being able to collaborate with others, I get the answer better and then I can bring it back to the school in a more focused way and I feel better you know? (OSCPT23)

Communication between meetings also included emails from network facilitators about agenda items and following up on network meetings as well as conversations between members and facilitators about pertinent issues. Facilitators commented that they were 'continually connecting with each other about the different projects, the different elements that have come up or topics that have come up in OSCAILT and trying actually to give a support to the schools' (OSCFL64). They described the network as a 'partnership' and 'particular kind of relationship' (OSCLF44) between the schools, MIC and DoE

For many participants, the opportunity to have direct, face to face communication with representatives of the DoE was an important benefit and strong motivational factor in continuing their involvement in the network over the years.

9.2.5. Multiagency approach

In the focus group and individual interviews, participants emphasised the 'multi-agency' (OSCPT35) approach of the OSCAILT network highlighting that there are 'big players' connected to the network i.e., MIC, the DoE and the Limerick Education Centre.

OSCAILT was perceived as a forum to 'access', connect with and improve communication with other agencies, both statutory and non-statutory, that have a remit to support children and families, through the invitation of guest speakers to meetings, details of which are contained in Appendix 18. An example cited frequently was the invitation of a guest speaker from a statutory agency to discuss recent changes in a welfare referral process which gave network members the opportunity to raise 'our concerns' (OSCFG55) and discuss how the processes and procedures impacted children and schools.

Many participants emphasised how they had learned through 'word of mouth' (OSCPT92) about supports, services and initiatives available to schools and/or families through network meetings. Meetings were also identified as a 'sounding board' to gather feedback on agencies 'that are coming into schools and working with children' (OSCPT35).

Participants acknowledged the various committees that OSCAILT is represented on such as the ABC Start Right initiative, Music Generation, and CYPSC, highlighting the ‘different hats’ that some members wear outside their role as principal. This was seen as important because ‘they’re bringing information from different organisations, there’s different angles’ and because it raises awareness of members of ‘what’s actually going on in the wider world’ (OSCPT35). Similarly, a facilitator commented that meetings were an important means of ‘disseminating information’ to schools about multiagency supports and that at times principals ‘haven’t realised how much has been going on in the interagency world’ (OSCFL10).

Furthermore, participants felt that OSCAILT created avenues to other bodies and groups to access supports and funding for schools. As one participant stated OSCAILT ‘gives us the opportunity to connect our school, if necessary, to other agencies for our benefit’ (OSCPT23).

9.3. Challenges

9.3.1. Time pressures and school context

A number of challenges to participation, learning and sharing in the OSCAILT network were identified. Many indicated that due to the demands of their role leaving school can be particularly difficult because they cannot leave when ‘you’ve got a problem in the school or if you’ve got something you need to sort out’ (OSCPT92). Quite simply ‘the cut and thrust of a school just doesn’t allow you to walk out, you know’ (OSCPT92). The length of time and the difficulty scheduling meetings and ‘trying to get everybody in the same room at the same time’ (OSCPT20) were highlighted. Despite time pressure, many participants indicated that they would do their ‘utmost’ to attend and do ‘prioritise’ OSCAILT meetings.

Some emphasised the challenge for schools of participation in new initiatives due to school context or capacity to engage, such as when a school has recently amalgamated, or where there may be a lack of desire on behalf of the school staff to engage.

9.3.2. Teaching principals

The teaching principal role was a particular challenge identified across accounts and their absence was described as ‘a missing voice and a missing experience’ (OSCPT36). Indeed,

their voices are also missing in this research as those who are teaching principals declined to participate in the focus group and interviews due to the demands of their role. Facilitators indicated that changing meetings times to after school hours had been discussed over the years to accommodate teaching principals, and the minutes confirm this was agreed on two occasions 17/11/09 and 03/12/2013. As the meeting venue, time and attendee details have been redacted, however, it is not possible to confirm from the minutes whether this had the desired impact. However, research participant accounts would suggest otherwise.

9.3.3. Participation in meetings

Non-attendance at meetings, whilst attributed to the demanding nature of the principal role or school factors such as a recent amalgamation, was recognised as a limitation as without regular participation of all the DEIS principals the network could ‘lose its effect really’ (OSCPT55). Lack of participation of post primary principals was highlighted across individual interviews, focus groups and member checks. Indeed, the end of year review detailed in minutes dated 01/06/2017 cited the following item under ‘what could be improved’:

Representation: Need post primary principals to attend - need to survey membership to understand why some people are not attending (OSCAILT 2017).

It also proved difficult to secure an interview with post primary principals, with only one participating. Other participants noted, however, that post primary principals in Limerick have their own active network under the National Association of Principals and Deputies (NAPD).

Participants recognised the challenges for principals of leaving school but some were of the view that for it to be a successful network, it was important to have all principals attending regularly to maintain relationships particularly regarding transfer to post primary. Concern was also expressed that those who do not attend regularly do not ‘see the value of it’ (OSCPT57).

9.3.4. Confidentiality and competition

Confidentiality and the potential for a breach of the same was viewed as a threat to the success of the network, with one participant declaring ‘So sometimes I worry about confidentiality. Does everybody treat it the same way?’ (OSCPT55). While many participants expressed a high level of trust in the network, they recognised that all members of the network, especially newer members, would need to understand and respect the importance of trust and confidentiality.

For other participants, competition between neighbouring schools and a fear of exposing themselves or issues in their school, was a challenge. As one participant stated: ‘Your ability to be completely frank and to be completely open is limited ... you might have your own issues, but there’s a thing that you can’t air all your dirty linen in public because your feel it may reflect poorly on you or your school in some way’ (OSCPT57). Individual personality and comfort levels with sharing at network meetings were also recognised as a factor, with one participant stating ‘ there are some people willing to give a lot and others who don't’ (OSCPT59).

9.3.5. Sustainability

The end of the DA scheme in 2012 was cited as a significant challenge for some schools who were unable to sustain the initiatives that were delivered under the programme and particularly as there was no ‘phase out’ (OSCPT36) of the scheme. Indeed, sustainability of the activities and funding for the scheme was a regular network agenda item 2009-2013. Concerns were also expressed about sustainability into the future due primarily to attendance and also with a turnover of principals. Participants acknowledged that a recent transition period ‘with new principals coming in’ (OSCPT51) at the time of data collection was a potential challenge to learning and sharing in that the network would lose ‘corporate memory’ (OSCFL10) and would have to ‘start from a different base again’ as the success of the network was founded on ‘experienced principals and good trusting relationships as well’ (OSCFL10).

9.4. Key outcomes of the OSCAILT network

Throughout the focus groups and individual interviews participants reflected on the outcomes of the OSCAILT network for members and the DEIS schools involved.

9.4.1. Support for DEIS schools

9.4.1.1. Development of initiatives and offshoots

Participants identified a number of key ways in which the network had supported the DEIS schools involved including initiatives delivered in response to identified needs such as the DA funded scheme, and EDNIP. A process of discussion and consultation took place between the DoE, MIC and schools around the use of the Dormant Accounts funding. Schools benefitted from the original scheme through capital expenditure and ‘operational money’ (OSCPT74) which participants indicated enabled them to open their schools ‘after hours’ for the duration of the scheme.

Some participants indicated they were still benefitting from the ‘knock-on effect’ (OSCPT74) as facilities were installed to open schools after hours i.e., a security system, or that activities had continued, albeit on a smaller scale or that despite the loss of funding, before and after school activity is ‘standing on its own’ (OSCPT23).

Facilitators highlighted the ABC Start Right initiative, which delivered an early intervention and prevention initiative focusing on the ante-natal to 6 years age-group in the city centre and north side of Limerick city. A member of OSCAILT sits on the consortium overseeing the initiative, which led to the delivery of Speech and Language Therapy in OSCAILT primary schools and the development of a resource on the transition from preschool to primary schools that involved seven of the OSCAILT schools.

EDNIP emerged from discussion about principals’ concerns about having sufficient resources available for children to help them to settle into school and to meet their English language needs. Analysis of the minutes and participant accounts also indicate that OSCAILT facilitated discussion on the opportunities and challenges presented by increasing diversity in population in the schools concerned in October and November 2015. Subsequently, a letter was sent to the Minister for Education, Jan O’ Sullivan, TD, on 1st February 2016 identifying ‘a variety of issues relating to the increasing diversity of children in our schools’ including: English as an Additional Language allocations, resourcing, emotional and psychological supports for children and families living with trauma and the transition from primary to post primary. The letter was accompanied by a confidential report entitled ‘Learning from each other: Sharing the experiences of embracing the increasing diversity of students and families in our schools’, which detailed the experience of schools and the opportunities and challenges encountered.

Discussion at network meetings and the report to the Minister subsequently formed the basis for a successful funding application to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) for EDNIP. According to participants, EDNIP illustrates how OSCAILT has been responsive to the needs and concerns of the schools regarding diversity in ‘a very, very big way’(OSCPT55), as it helped ‘raise awareness’ of the challenges schools were facing and the funding enabled schools to support children and parents. Participants also acknowledged the role that the MIC facilitator played in harnessing the expertise available in MIC to apply for and secure funding for the EDNIP project, without which they felt ‘It would not have happened’ (OSCFGPT74).

9.4.1.2. Support to access resources and expertise and link with a third level institution

Participants identified OSCAILT as a forum to access resources and expertise for the schools involved. For example, the link with the DoE was perceived as beneficial when some schools needed additional supports for newcomer children during an ‘EAL crisis’ in 2015-2016 and helped to ‘solve that crisis and to get the proper resources in place’ by creating a link with the national office in Athlone and raising awareness of and verifying the critical nature of the issue: ‘And they could confirm quite quickly with Athlone, that “Yes, this situation is very real” ’ (OSCPT55). Access to expertise was cited as a benefit of participation in the network, for example from MIC, the DoE, Limerick Education Centre, and through the various guest speakers over the years. Speaking specifically of the EDNIP funding application, participants indicated that facilitators were able to access the expertise in MIC such as the Finance Office, Human Resources and the Research and Graduate School Office. The link with MIC was perceived as giving the network an ‘academic tint’ (OSCPT76) and access to research expertise for the collation of data and research reports on issues in the schools involved such as the DA report and tracking of issues in schools.

Facilitators emphasised the beneficial link that OSCAILT created between the DEIS schools and Limerick Regeneration programme. The DEIS Literacy Initiative was funded by Supporting Social Inclusion and Regeneration in Limerick (SSIRL) through its Programme Innovation and Development Fund (PIDF) and the remit of DoE staff in Limerick supporting OSCAILT in the early years was linked to their statutory remit on the Limerick Regeneration Boards.

From participants accounts, it was evident that OSCAILT supports the schools in their DEIS remit and in fulfilling their DEIS plans. As one participant observed:

It has added huge value to the work that we're doing. It has definitely supported us in terms of the key pillars of the DEIS strategy in particular. The numeracy and literacy, in terms of our DEIS planning. If you look at the advice and support we've gotten, I think as well coming back to the Dormant Accounts and opening of the schools, five, six years ago, like I suppose, we've continued with that and if anything, we've expanded upon it (OSCPT35).

9.4.2. Support for DEIS principals

9.4.2.1. Peer support and reassurance in the leadership role

OSCAILT provides members with a valuable and unique opportunity for peer support through meeting with and developing supportive relationships with other local DEIS principals in 'a space to engage with fellow professionals that are walking the walk' (OSCPT35). Many stressed that being the principal can be a 'lonely' (OSCPT23, OSCPT74, OSCPT36) and 'isolating' (OSCPT15) job with a 'heavy responsibility to bear' (OSCPT51) in the role of school leader. The experience of peer support in OSCAILT helped to decrease that sense of isolation or the 'burden of responsibility' (OSCPT23) and to 'not to feel alone' (OSCPT55). OSCAILT provided an opportunity 'share that responsibility' (OSCFGPT55) and diminish the isolation experienced in the day to day running of the school where '... the buck stops with you all the time. And decisions have to be made on the spot, so it can be tough and it can be draining and stressful' (OSCPT74).

The shared understanding of the leadership role in a DEIS school and reassurance that they 'are not the only one' (OSCPT74) and 'I'm not on my own' (OSCPT56) was a significant source of peer support. Participants emphasised that other network members were principals of schools with 'similar issues and similar problems' (OSCPT35) who 'understood exactly where I was coming from' (OSCPT56). This was perceived as important because 'Nobody really gets the reality of a DEIS 1 school in Limerick city with all those challenges. Nobody else gets it only the other principals in that game' (OSCPT51). Others observed that the network was a source of reassurance and confidence that they can and are 'doing a good job' as participation 'reaffirms you, boosts your confidence' (OSCPT55) and helped members to realise 'I'm not doing too badly myself' (OSCPT76).

OSCAILT was a ‘reassuring presence’ because other schools are dealing with similar social issues. Knowing there are others ‘in the same boat’ (OSCPT15), gives people ‘a confidence and an ease and a calm’ (OSCPT51) and is reassuring when people feel ‘overwhelmed’ (OSCPT57). The knowledge that ‘If they can do it, if they got through it, then I’ll be able to do that too’ (OSCPT56) was both comforting and encouraging.

In the role of school leader, there can be an expectation by staff that principals have ‘all the answers, and I certainly don’t have all the answers’ (OSCPT35). The network, however, was cited as a source of reassurance drawn from support, the advice of others, problem solving and sharing of ideas amongst principals.

For newer DEIS principals, the network was ‘very reassuring’ (OSCPT35) and a ‘vital’ source of support and guidance from ‘peers who have experienced this or know something about it or at least understand enough to listen and reassure’ (OSCPT20).

9.4.2.2. Solidarity, camaraderie and collegiality

A strong sense of solidarity with and support from colleagues in the network was palpable across participants’ accounts. OSCAILT provided a safe space for principals to ‘vent’ and to ‘listen’ (OSCPT23) and many emphasised the supportive relationships developed with other principals. Participants highlighted the ‘peer support’, ‘camaraderie’, ‘sense of solidarity’ and ‘sense of collegiality’ (OSCPT36, OSCFL44, OSCPT56, OSCPT57, OSCPT59, OSCPT76) they experienced in the network. One participant observed that ‘the shared collegiality of the principals is phenomenal like’ (OSCPT36), indicating that the OSCAILT meeting was ‘one of the meetings you would make a real effort to be available for because you were meeting with your fellow colleagues around the city. You may be fighting an argument among the hurling field or whatever or you may be challenging for the PR of the thing [hurling match], but in reality, we appreciated each other and it was a great personal support to us’ (OSCPT36).

9.4.2.3. Support for new DEIS principals

In the individual interviews, participants stated that OSCAILT was a ‘massive support as a new principal’ where they could avail of ‘support and guidance as a newbie’ (OSCPT51). Some outlined how they listened and observed for a while or ‘sat and listened a lot before you participate’ (OSCPT51) or ‘I’d say the first two years I didn’t

say anything. I was just listening, listening, absorbing, absorbing everything' (OSCFGPT56).

Participants indicated that longer standing, more experienced DEIS principals took on a 'mentoring' (OSCPT56) role for new members and were also perceived as 'modelling' openness, honesty and sharing in the network, 'for somebody who's come it to it, for somebody who's come in new. The older, more experienced longer serving members seem to do that' (OSCPT51).

Those who were nearing retirement at the time of interview declared that they had or would recommend it to their successor. Indeed, a principal new to the role confirmed that their predecessor said 'There is a great network and they're good people and if you're stuck for things you can ask for help' (OSCPT20).

9.4.2.4. Guidance and information

Participants indicated that OSCAILT is 'a network of support and guidance' (OSCPT51) for DEIS principals which is an important source of advice, direction and support. As participants observed 'you've got a good set of heads around the table' (OSCFGPT59) and 'a lot of wise heads around the table ...not just the principals', but also MIC, the DoE and the Inspectorate who are 'just giving a lot of very sound advice and good guidance' (OSCPT35).

OSCAILT was cited as an important source of information and sharing of ideas relevant to their role as principal of a DEIS school, particularly for newer principals or 'newbies'. Such 'information sharing' opportunities were viewed as beneficial because 'We are quite insular, we don't have time to talk to each other, we're all busy running around in our own little patches' (OSCPT57). Participants stated that 'it's a great forum to bounce ideas off each other' and 'lots of different ideas come to the table' (OSCPT35), 'people have little pockets of knowledge and particular areas of expertise that you can tap into' (OSCPT51), 'you get to talk, learn and ask questions' (OSCPT56), and they clearly valued 'the information that comes from Mary I, the information that comes back from the DoE, the trends, you know that kind of thing' (OSCPT57).

A review of the minutes confirms that meetings were a source of information on a wide variety of topics over the years including: summer works scheme, insurance, social

welfare, Garda Vetting, Child Protection, developments in the after school sector, relevant conferences, DEIS specific inspections and initiatives, behaviour, mindfulness, funding schemes and updates on local initiatives available to schools.

9.4.2.5. Supporting principal well being

There was a compelling sense in the principal focus group that OSCAILT was a support for participants' wellbeing, with one remarking, 'Like this is very good for our mental health' (OSCFGPT55). In the individual interviews many indicated that participating in the network was a proactive step for principals to take to nurture their personal wellbeing or 'definitely good for the mental health' (OSCPT74), to deal with the challenges of isolation and stress in their role, as well as to support whole school wellbeing in the challenging contexts in which they work. This is supported by analysis of minutes dated 25/11/14 which state that:

[REDACTED]– following on from the previous meeting at which the issue of supporting principals in their very demanding roles was discussed, Dr. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] facilitated a mindfulness session. This was very well received and appreciated (OSCAILT 2014).

Subsequently OSCAILT principals were also invited to attend a full day workshop delivered for the PLUS network entitled 'Principals Take Care' in March 2015.

Participants indicated that the role of principal can be 'stressful', 'draining', such a huge demanding role that you would stress out and you would burn out very quickly' and that principals can 'get overwhelmed' (OSCPT35, OSCPT51, OSCPT57, OSCPT74). The more demanding nature of the DEIS principal role was recognised and attributed to 'the social issues and the emotional issues of children and their parents' (OSCPT51). Similarly, one facilitator stated 'If you are a DEIS principal your [support] needs are significantly greater' (OSCFL10). Participants clearly found the network to be a support for their wellbeing to deal with the challenges inherent in their leadership role indicating that that they can 'let rip', 'off load', 'talk about problems', and 'unload' in 'safety' (OSCPT23, OSCPT55, OSCPT56) at OSCAILT meetings. The experience of feeling 'listened to', and 'not feel that we are being judged' (OSCFGPT55) in an atmosphere and environment of trust was an important source of support for principal wellbeing because

‘principals have particular issues that they have nobody else to talk about to [in their school]’ (OSCPT23). Some found this therapeutic or ‘like a form of therapy’ (OSCPT92) because ‘you’re being listened to I suppose’ (OSCPT92) and ‘It’s just you’ve the few hours to go and talk to someone’ (OSCPT56). The informal aspect of the meetings, the ‘cup of tea beforehand’ was also identified as an important place to ‘let it all hang out’ and talk to others about ‘what is really troubling me’ and ‘if you were feeling really frazzled or bad, you’d say it’ (OSCPT56).

Participants who came to OSCAILT as a new principal indicated that it had been beneficial for their wellbeing, with one remarking that ‘I felt that I was in the trenches ’ on becoming principal and that ‘I was fighting my way on behalf of the school’ (OSCPT100) and OSCAILT helped to change that outlook . Another commented that meeting with other principals during the first few months of taking up the post when things were ‘really chaotic’ helped them to ‘feel level again’, as ‘there was a hundred things going on and I was racing’ (OSCPT15).

Participants acknowledged the importance of principal wellbeing in order to support whole school wellbeing with one participant stating that ‘the knowledge, the professionalism and the wellbeing of the principal has an influence over the whole school’ (OSCPT23). Taking the time to go to network meetings was recognised as ‘supporting yourself in your role, as much as anything else’ and prioritising ‘your own wellbeing’ (OSCPT51) as not only can principals suffer personally if they neglect their wellbeing but that the knock-on effect may be that ‘your relationships with your staff and the atmosphere within’ the school can also be impacted.

9.4.3. Learning and knowledge creation

In a role where they are often expected to ‘have the answer to every issue’ OSCAILT was felt to be an important opportunity for principals to learn, as illustrated by the following quote by a more established principal:

Because new principals all have their MEds and PhDs and all sorts of management skills and they may not value the fact that this was nearly the first time where I was able to go to a meeting and like show that I wasn’t perfect, you know, that I didn’t know everything and learn from it. Because when you go to, when you meet with the teachers or you know you go to meet with them at lunch time or whatever, they expect you to have the answer to every issue and OSCAILT was an opportunity for

us to learn you know, to learn about other, to learn about how things in other schools and other agencies might deal with something (OSCPT36).

Formal and informal learning opportunities as well as knowledge sharing and creation were discussed by participants.

9.4.3.1. Formal learning

More ‘formal’ learning opportunities availed of through OSCAILT, referred to as ‘CPD’ or ‘in service’, were reported to be ‘hugely beneficial’ (OSCPT57). Appendix 18 provides an overview on the variety of topics on which the network had an input. At the time of data collection, the most recent example was the aforementioned DEIS planning workshop that had been organised with the Inspectorate and Limerick Education Centre, following discussion of the topic at an OSCAILT meeting on 05/10/2017. Participants stressed the relevance of the ‘CPD’ or learning with one linking this to the responsive nature of the network in that members ‘identify those needs at the meetings and then CPD is sought for us. What we feel is meaningful and helpful and relevant for our schools at that time’ (OSCPT51). Similarly, another declared that ‘what’s brought to the table are relevant and topical stuff’ (OSCPT59).

9.4.3.2. Informal learning

More prevalent however, in participants’ accounts, were the informal or ‘hidden’ (OSCPT100) learning opportunities which came about through discussion at meetings. All stakeholders, including MIC, the DoE and other agencies were believed to be ‘learning from each other’ (OSCPT55) and a feedback loop was identified between the principals and the DoE, where ‘the real learning takes place’ about the ‘reality on the ground’ (OSCPT55) for the DEIS schools in the network.

9.4.3.3. Learning through the sharing of experience

Information sharing at OSCAILT meetings was a significant source of informal learning, with participants emphasising the importance of regular attendance or ‘you can miss so much’ (OSCPT35). It was evident that there is a considerable amount of ‘nuggets’ to be gleaned by principals because ‘you are picking up a lot at those meetings’ (OSCPT15).

Participants felt that this kind of information sharing ‘adds huge value to the work that you’re doing’ (OSCPT35), enables them to ‘keep abreast of new ideas’ (OSCPT100).

A myriad of ways were detailed in which participants learned through the sharing of experience with OSCAILT colleagues both at and between meetings, indicating a strong link between learning by sharing of experience and peer support. Participants had learned about particular resources or funding sources available to their school because others ‘had alluded to it at the coffee break’ (OSCPT36) or because of ‘the generosity of other principals to share’ (OSCPT74) information about resources that ‘they were able to tap into’ (OSCPT36). Others observed that learning through the sharing and ‘refining’ of experience of different initiatives, programmes or approaches with others was an important source of ‘confidence’ (OSCPT51) that ‘pushes your boundaries’ (OSCPT56) to actually try out new things.

For some, learning from OSCAILT colleagues was felt to be a valuable form of ‘CPD’ through which to develop ‘your leadership style’ (OSCPT23) and skills by listening to ‘more experienced’ members, who are ‘very knowledgeable practitioners’ (OSCPT35) share approaches they had adopted in their school. Another participant emphasised that more experienced principals have dealt with ‘the difficult teacher, the difficult parent’ and could share with others ‘what worked, what didn’t work and what they did’ (OSCPT56). The network was cited as a source of information and answers to ‘queries’ that principals might have about different resources, initiatives or implementation of policy such as DEIS Inspections, Garda Vetting, the new SEN model (2017-2018) or DEIS planning in schools. One participant indicated they could draw on the experience of others to ‘know what to expect’ (OSCPT56), for example, with a DEIS Inspection, which they may not have experienced previously, stressing how valuable it was to be able to share and learn from each other in the network in this way and observing that ‘We are looking outside our school all the time. You know and we’re kind of reaching into each other’s schools all the time, taking the best out of them. You wouldn’t get that anywhere’ (OSCPT56).

9.4.3.4. Learning about others schools

Learning about other schools was a key feature of the informal learning in OSCAILT such as senior primary schools learning about how infant schools operate. While ideas

may not always ‘directly transfer’ to another school context, one participant stressed that learning about initiatives in other schools can ‘set you off on a track of thought about what might or might not work’ (OSCPT100). Holding network meetings in schools was identified as a crucial way to learn more about other schools because members have an opportunity to see them with one participant stating ‘I think it’s all about what OSCAILT is about. That’s what we should be doing, if it’s possible, that schools should be hosting’ (OSCPT55).

9.4.3.5. Learning about difference services available to schools and families

Learning about different services available to schools and families was cited as a central aspect of learning within OSCAILT, either through guest speakers, information shared on the agenda or from sharing experience with others. Participants highlighted some services they had learned about through OSCAILT including: Bedford Row Family Project (members were invited to the launch of an evaluation of the service by the TED Project in November 2017), Homemaker Service (guest speaker 03/12/2013 and 30/04/2015), Social workers (guest speaker 18/01/2017), ABC Start Right (updates at meetings), the Blue Box, and Jigsaw. Such learning about services was identified as vital because members may not already know about them and due to changes in staff or continual developments in services ‘the goalposts change all the time’ (OSCPT56).

9.4.3.6. Knowledge creation and sharing in OSCAILT

Participants indicated that OSCAILT contributed to creation and sharing of knowledge between members as well as the wider education sector. The learning from OSCAILT, as well as relationships built between schools, was perceived as laying the foundation for other initiatives such as the DEIS Literacy Initiative, with a participant highlighting that the work of OSCAILT was acknowledged at the launch of the DEIS Primary School Literacy Initiative report on 13th January 2017.

Another way in which OSCAILT created and shared knowledge was collation of information and writing of documents on issues arising in the DEIS schools concerned such as mental health and wellbeing and diversity of student population. The content of these documents are confidential and therefore they were not analysed for the purposes of this research. However, reference was made to them by interview participants and in the minutes of meetings as well as to the dissemination of the same to relevant

Government departments or Ministers to raise members' concerns at a higher level. These documents are also available for OSCAILT members to draw on in terms of what services other schools are availing of or practices they engage in. The dissemination the report of the DA scheme was another important means by which OSCAILT created and shared knowledge about and learning from the original scheme.

Finally, the learning from the EDNIP programme was highlighted as a key way in which knowledge would be created and shared with other schools in the future.

9.4.4. Building relationships and trust between stakeholders

9.4.4.1. Breaking down barriers and building relationships

It was evident from across participants' accounts that the network was 'a phenomenal mechanism' (OSCPT35) that had played a significant role in building relationships between schools, the DoE, MIC and other partners. The DA scheme created a platform for communication between schools and the regional DoE office which helped to break down barriers and build trust. Greater communication between schools and enhanced understanding about their individual school contexts developed a sense of 'collegiality' which 'broke down a lot of the barriers, or perceptions ... that others were probably doing an awful lot better than we were' (OSCPT100). Principals and facilitators emphasised that strong relationships developed between principals and the regional office of the DoE lead to far greater awareness of the issues on the ground in DEIS schools, with one principal commenting that:

As a result of those interactions, without a shadow of a doubt, particularly from the Departments perspective, the Department in Limerick, I think as a result of the regional support, they get 100% what's going on and the difficulties that are in schools (OSCPT35).

Facilitators confirmed their insight to 'current issues' stating that the connection through OSCAILT keeps them 'in touch' with what's happening in DEIS schools and enables them to 'give practical examples or what schools would experience or were going through' in the own work context as well as being able to talk knowledgeably about the 'needs of this cohort of children' when trying to 'open doors' with different support agencies (OSCFL64). The 'neutral' or 'independent' nature of the MIC facilitator was an important feature in developing relationships between the 'two sides' i.e., the DoE who

‘had to keep a certain distance’ because they were ‘the ones setting the policy’ (OSCFL64) and the schools.

Some principals also reported that they had developed better relationships and ‘mutual respect’ with the Inspectorate, with one stating ‘but it’s not about the dreaded knock on the door anymore, the big bad wolf is coming’ (OSCPT55).

9.4.4.2. Developing relationships between network members

There was no doubt that having the DoE regional office staff ‘at the table’ in the original DA Scheme was a ‘big hook’ (OSCLF64) and the opportunity for ‘direct access’ to and face to face communication with the DoE was cited by many principals as a key motivating factor in their continued involvement in OSCAILT. One participant commented that such ‘relationships with people on the ground’ were more important than ‘statutory links up the food chain’ (OSCPT35).

Relationships between principals were enhanced by the network with the opportunity to ‘meet local principals that you don’t get a chance to meet’ and participants indicated that they had developed ‘friendships’, ‘personal relationships between principals’, strong networks and ‘very strong close relationships’ (OSCPT56, OSCFGPT55, OSCFGPT74). Equally, facilitators highlighted the ‘strong relationship’ developed between themselves which ‘wasn’t always easy’ but ‘we always came to a mutual solution’ (OSCPT10). Facilitator interviews particularly emphasised the attention paid to relationships, building respect and trust in the process of developing the network, with one observing that ‘unless we pay attention to relationships and the quality of relationships, we’re going nowhere really’ (OSCFL44).

9.4.4.3. A deep sense of trust in the network

A deep sense of trust in the network and the strength of relationships between members were palpable across participant interviews and focus groups. Participants emphasised that trust took time to build and was buttressed initially by the fact that in the original DA scheme, each school was awarded the same amount of funding regardless of primary, post-primary, school size or involvement in Regeneration. Facilitators revealed that once principals realised they ‘were all in the same boat’, they ‘came out of their silos and they actually did form a bond’ (OSCFGPT64) which was cemented by recognition that, although schools may have been in ‘competition for children’ and enrolments, they were

all working towards a common goal, i.e., ‘for the betterment of all the children ... and the communities we serve’ (OSCPT64). A longer serving member observed that ‘in time we all got to know each other, that little barrier we put up around ourselves ... tended to drop a little bit and people spoke more freely’ (OSCPT100).

Principals expressed their strong belief in the network as a confidential, ‘trusting environment’ and ‘safe space’ where ‘everything that’s said in the room is for the audience that’s there and it means that we can all chat freely within the group’ (OSCPT15). One participant conveyed this sense of trust and confidence by stating that:

I feel I can be very honest about what the reality is on the ground and what we deal with every day ... I feel that I don’t have to give the holy God answer if you know what I mean? And even though the Department are sitting there, we’ve got an Inspector sitting there with us, I feel that I can say what the reality is (OSCPT51).

The sense of trust in the ‘safe space’ was generated by the non-judgemental and respectful approach of the network facilitators, with one person observing that ‘I would doubt whether I should have said things at times ... But I’ve never been made to feel like that’ (OSCPT23). Similarly, another relayed that facilitators ‘are very respectful of where we’re coming from and what we have to say and there’s no judgements’ (OSCPT56). For facilitators, trust is fostered in the network by respecting the ‘integrity’ of what people are saying and they highlighted that people can disagree with each other and have different viewpoints without ‘fear of being judged’ (OSCFL44).

Confidentiality and trust between members and facilitators were described as being reciprocal with one participant observing that confidentiality ‘goes for everybody’ (OSCPT55), and another discussed how facilitators can share information or advice with principals ‘based on confidence that we trust each other’ (OSCPT20).

9.4.4.4. Developing relationships and connections beyond the network

The ‘trusting’ relationships established were perceived as ‘adding value to’ (OSCFL10) and enabling the implementation of other initiatives in the city including the DEIS Literacy initiative and the School Excellence Fund DEIS cluster. One participant highlighted how the network ‘has almost done itself out of a job now because a lot of those collaborations just happen so organically and so naturally’ (OSCPT35).

Collaboration was cited as taking place not just between principals but led, to ‘inter-school’ collaboration with ‘communities of practice developing within the school system. Not just within senior management, but middle management, teachers on the ground, just working collaboratively’ (OSCPT35).

OSCAILT was also described as a creating a ‘bridge’ (OSCPT23) to other initiatives such as ABC Start Right, Music Generation and EDNIP. Additionally, it created connections between members as well as with other statutory and non-statutory agencies and ‘gives us the opportunity to connect our school if necessary to other agencies for our benefit’ (OSCPT23). OSCAILT representation on committees such as CYPSC, ABC Start Right and Music Generation also fosters such connections. Facilitators emphasised the beneficial link and feedback loop that OSCAILT created for schools to the Regeneration process in Limerick when the agencies were established because principal representatives and DoE staff sat on the two boards and DoE staff were ‘were able to give clear information to the schools about what was happening’ (OSCFGFL10). The link was felt to be of benefit ‘from the school’s point of view and regeneration point of view’ (OSCFGFL64). The connection with MIC made members ‘more aware of what’s going on in’ in the college and DEIS elective students more ‘aware of the DEIS schools and of DEIS policies and procedures’ (OSCPT76).

9.4.5. Advocacy and raising awareness of the DEIS school context

The feedback loop between the schools, the DoE and MIC was perceived as raising awareness of the challenges and issues experienced by the DEIS schools involved ‘because the local Department officials are aware of the issues that are coming up’ (OSCPT76). Facilitators confirmed that being ‘better informed as to how things might be impacting on the ground’ (OSCFL10) had helped to them to raise awareness and on occasion ‘change the direction of where somebody is going with something’ (OSCFL10) at policy level. In September 2014, this was acknowledged at an OSCAILT meeting, with minutes dated 24/09/2014 stating the following:

Noted: At Departmental level the [REDACTED] network is seen as an important source for on the ground information on [REDACTED] and principals from [REDACTED] have spoken at national meetings. [REDACTED] invited principals to contact her if they would be willing to speak at future events. (OSCAILT 2014)

Participants emphasised the advocacy role that the network had played in ‘influencing policy’ (OSCFGPT55) over the years by giving ‘clout’ (OSCPT23) or ‘weight’ to their concerns. The support of the DoE for the network was viewed as recognition of the challenging nature of the role of principal in a DEIS school because ‘the Department are actually saying “Yes, you do need this, DEIS is harder and you need support and take that time [to go to the meeting]” ’ (OSCPT56).

Principals recognised that OSCAILT was a ‘united’, ‘collective’, ‘stronger’, and ‘shared’ (OSCFL10, OSCPT23, OSCPT36, OSCFGPT59, OSCFL64, OSCPT74, OSCPT76) voice for the DEIS schools whereby ‘if there is an issue and we’re lobbying together as a group, it’s not one voice, it’s many voices, which is always stronger’ (OSCPT51). Facilitators described the network as ‘improving and strengthening the voice of education in terms of having a voice to inform policy makers’ and ‘a single voice for feeding into national policy’ (OSCFL10). Examples of how the network influenced policy cited included participation of principals in national seminars with the DoE, submission to the DEIS review with the PLUS and Cur le Chéile networks (2016), submission on the opportunities and challenges on the integration of migrants to Social Inclusion Unit, DoE, Minister for Education and other education stakeholders (February 2016), consultation by the NEWB on integrated services, OSCAILT being referenced by Social Inclusion Unit, DoE, at national level and the OSCAILT Dormant Accounts scheme being referenced in Dáil debate under parliamentary questions on various dates including 17/04/2008 & 13/05/2008 with specific reference to the Dormant Account Educational Disadvantage Programme and 06/10/2009, 03/11/210, 01/07/2010, & 17/05/2011 with reference to updates on the Task Force for Active Citizenship and availability of school premises for use by the community.

The connections established to other agencies enabled links to ‘big players’ (OSCFGPT56) and ‘access to people’ (OSCFGPT56) through meetings i.e., representatives from statutory agencies. Having such an opportunity to inform them of ‘what our concerns are’, was also perceived as ‘feeding policy’ (OSCFGPT55). Facilitators also perceived communication with staff in other statutory agencies about processes and procedures e.g., Tusla, as feeding into policy.

9.5. Review of OSCAILT in relation to the stated mission

The mission of OSCAILT is to ‘Open schools for Life, Leisure and Learning’ but no specific aims were developed. The report of the DA initiative (OSCAILT 2013b) considers the extent to which the objectives of the original initiative were met. In relation to outcomes for children, based on feedback from children, parents and school staff, the scheme was found to have a number of positive outcomes including: enhanced quality of life; enhanced academic outcomes; opportunities to learn and socialise in a safe and nurturing environment; development of skills in creativity, art, communication and socialisation; increased motivation to attend school; nutrition; development of positive relationships with peers and adults; raised expectations; increased opportunities through accessible and affordable programmes (OSCAILT 2013b). There is some evidence from the report on the EDNIP initiative with five of the primary schools that the mission of OSCAILT was being achieved in these schools (pre-COVID restrictions and school closures). A report on the initiative from 2017-2019 (Higgins et al. 2020) found that it had a significant impact on the quality of children’s lives and learning and the following outcomes for children were observed, based on feedback from children, parents and school staff: nurtured a sense of belonging and promoted integration; created happy memories; promoted learning; positive impact on attitude and behaviour; nurtured empowerment; supported social development and nurtured bonding between families and between children and positive social and developmental impact on babies and toddlers attending the Parent and Toddler group.

Since the funding ceased for the DA initiative however, there has been no formal review or evaluation with regards to the extent to which the OSCAILT mission is being met by the network or the schools. Some of the research participants indicated that they managed to continue some of the DA activities but others stated that the cessation of funding was a huge loss for their school and sustainability of the activities was cited in the interviews an ongoing concern. This raises the serious issue of the capacity of once-off funding for DEIS schools in order to maximise their facilities for use by the wider community, to truly ‘Open schools for life, learning and leisure’ and to provide affordable after school and extracurricular activities for children. As Chapter Five has shown, DEIS schools lack the capacity to fundraise through voluntary contributions to the same extent as schools with a more affluent intake. OSCAILT was part of a successful bid for ABC funding in 2013, but the initiative focused on 0-6 years. While the redacted minutes are available up to 2018, it is not clear whether OSCAILT made

further bids for funding to maximise the use of school facilities for the wider community. Given that OSCAIL has evolved, as evident in the research participants own accounts, to a support network for principals, a review of the mission may be timely, as would the development of specific aims, or deeper consideration could be given to whether a more strategic focus should be placed on attracting sustainable funding to meet the original mission as not all OSCAILT schools are involved in EDNIP or TEAL. The findings presented here could provide a useful starting point in developing more detailed aims and a more strategic focus.

As with PLUS, the network is primarily focused on a specific role i.e., DEIS principal, and gaps exist in OSCAILT practice regarding the voices and perceptions of other school staff, parents and children and the limitation of this network to specific schools has an exclusionary effect as those not eligible, who might like to participate but cannot, are also excluded from the benefits as reported by research participants. Although not mentioned in research participants accounts, I personally have received queries from other schools about participation in OSCAILT as well as from deputy principals.

9.6. Conclusion

This chapter detailed the model of the OSCAILT network and the impact for individual network representatives and schools. Participants detailed the ‘holistic’ ethos of the network towards children, families, school staff and the wider community. As with PLUS, informal and formal aspects are evident in OSCAILT. The formal elements include coordination, facilitation and CPD opportunities, while the informal encompass flexibility, ‘time to chat’ and the ‘hidden’ learning opportunities. A strong sense of ownership of the network agenda was relayed which helped to build relationships and trust between members and foster learning and sharing of experience. Trust was of particular importance in OSCAILT due to members’ roles as school leaders, the level of responsibility they carry and the stated importance of opportunities to interact with those ‘walking the walk’ (OSCPT35). As such OSCAILT was cited as being a positive step for members to take regarding their own wellbeing and an important source of learning for DEIS principals involved through the sharing of experiences and information at meetings, particularly for newer principals. Key challenges identified include the difficulty in leaving school to attend meetings, the ‘missing voice’ of teaching principals and lower

participation levels of post primary schools and concern for the knock-on effect in terms of sustainability.

For schools, OSCAILT was cited as helping to build relationships between member schools as well as connections with other stakeholders, as developing initiatives directly in response to concerns raised via the network, as creating a link to a third level institution and supporting access to resources and expertise. The role the network has played in advocacy and raising awareness about DEIS schools was also highlighted. Finally, the findings are considered in relation to the mission of the network.

Chapter 10 – Discussion

10.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings presented in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine with reference to the literature review chapters (Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five) and presents the Conceptual Framework. After six phases of detailed analysis of the data, and refining of the Conceptual Framework, the findings are considered with specific reference to the practice, policy and theoretical literature. Analysis and synthesis of the research findings with the literature reveals four key propositions about the PLUS and OSCAILT networks of schools and each proposition will be examined in detail. The final section of the chapter will reflect on the limitations of the research.

10.2. Developing the Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework was developed based on an inductive approach (Miles et al. 2014) with an initial review of the literature on school networks conducted in the early stages and a draft Conceptual Framework developed (Appendix 1). This guided and informed the development of the research questions, data collection and early stages of analysis. The various stages of analysis (section 6.8), including the write up of findings in the case study reports (Chapters Eight and Nine) confirmed that, as initially projected, relationships and trust were a significant factor in the development and success of both networks and participants' accounts indicated that both individual and collective benefits were experienced from networking. Social capital theory was subsequently explored to understand the individual and collective impact of connections developed as a result of relationships in the networks. The relevance of the networks for individual wellbeing and the schools' DEIS remit was also apparent in the emerging findings. Understanding the way in which knowledge creation and sharing occurs in the networks, what enables the same and any changes in thinking in practice for stakeholders, as per Research Questions 4,5 and 6 (section 1.5.4), required a more nuanced understanding of TPL based on social interaction with peers. Subsequent exploration of both international and national policy and literature on TPL provided a policy basis to the research and a greater understanding for the rationale underpinning networking and collaboration for TPL and educational reform, as presented in Chapter Two. A significant gap in the theoretical basis to explain how learning takes place in the networks was still evident. While initially discounted due

to the concentration on school networks, I then returned to the Communities of Practice (CoP) literature. A review of the case study reports for the components of domain, community and practice indicated that CoPs resonated clearly with the work and a more thorough analysis and write up of the CoP literature confirmed its relevance and applicability. An initial list of propositions about the networks in relation to the research questions was developed to guide the discussion chapter (Appendix 9). This was subsequently structured around an exploration of the development of social capital through the networks, how the networks operate as CoPs that enhance professional learning, support wellbeing and support schools to meet their DEIS plans, which was then broadened to School Self-Evaluation.

Finally, the DEIS programme and research on same were critically analysed as were social class, and cultural and social reproduction of educational inequality in Ireland in Chapter Five. This chapter highlights the magnitude of the deep seated and complex challenges, arising from the societal and economic inequality, that DEIS schools, children and families face in comparison to schools with students from more affluent backgrounds. Additionally, it situates the social justice nature of the networks in the context of what DEIS schools can and cannot do to challenge inequalities of class, gender, race, and ability.

Figure 8 synthesises the policy, practice and theoretical basis to the networks that informed the revised Conceptual Framework for understanding PLUS and OSCAILT.

Figure 8. The policy, practice and theoretical base to the research

Policy	Practice	Theory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International • Educational reform, teacher professional learning, networking and collaboration • National • Cósán (2016), DEIS (2005 & 2017), School Self-Evaluation (2012 & 2016), Wellbeing Framework (2019) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key elements in analysis of networks • Composition, Structure, Purpose, Processes, Dynamics, Effectiveness, Challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Capital Theory • Bonding, bridging, linking • Social Learning Theory • Communities of Practice - Domain, Community, Practice, Learning, Identity, Boundary, Landscape of Practice • Social Theory • Social class, cultural and social reproduction of inequality in education

10.3. The Conceptual Framework

Figure 9 presents the Conceptual Framework developed throughout the research process to understand how the networks operate at the individual and collective level. This is expressed in the research findings grounded in participants’ accounts and synthesised with the policy, practice and theoretical basis. Whether school networks and CoPs are different structures is not at question in this discussion. Rather, it is evident that the TED networks and CoPs share defining properties and features and various dimensions of social capital as demonstrated in Figure 9 below. The Conceptual Framework illustrates one of the key contributions of this research, delineating how the micro level of the site of DEIS schools can be connected to the macro level of national educational policy through the mediating meso layer in the centralised Irish education system.

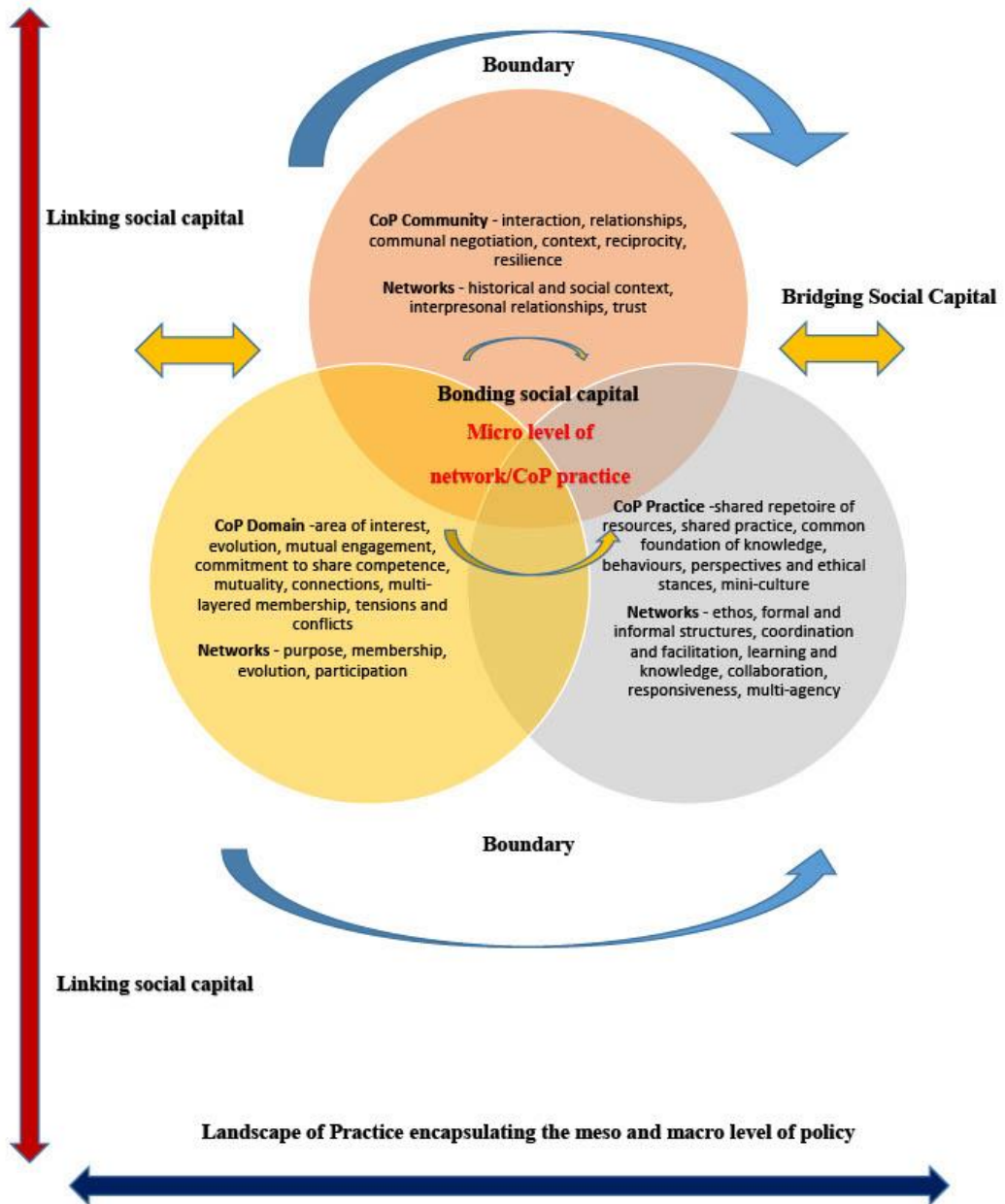
Firstly, the three spheres in the diagram in Figure 9 map the overlap between the three CoP dimensions of domain, community and practice and key elements of the model of the TED school networks drawn from literature and the data. The contention is that the networks can co-exist with CoPs in this instance because the ‘mutually negotiated competence’ of the domain (Farnsworth et al. 2016, p. 143) of each network aligns with the concept of purpose drawn from the literature on school networks. Additionally, the focus on communal negotiation, interaction, relationships and reciprocity in the

dimension of community in CoPs echoes the emphasis on the intangible or ‘soft’ structures in networks i.e., interpersonal relationships and trust. Finally, the dimension of practice which encapsulates the perspectives and culture of the CoP as well as the shared repertoires and resources, and foundational knowledge of members about their roles in DEIS schools correlates with the ethos, formal and informal structures, coordination and facilitation, collaboration, responsiveness and multi-agency aspects of the TED networks.

Moving to the very centre of the Venn diagram, and the interface between the domain, community and practice and corresponding key elements of school networks, we see bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) emphasised. As established throughout the literature review chapters, the focus on connection, the relational and mutual engagement is paramount in school networks, collaborative TPL and CoPs. As members share insight and experience, engage in dialogic ‘learning conversations’ (Stoll 2010, p. 475), reflection and ‘thinking together’ (Pyrko et al. 2017 & 2019) in the ‘safe space’ (Wenger 1998, p. 37) of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks, bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) is fostered through peer interaction, reciprocity and the development of trusting relationships. This space and the ‘mini-culture’ (Wenger 1998, p. 39) of the networks/CoPs provides the foundation for individual benefits of networking as experienced by research participants i.e., access to the information relevant to their roles and DEIS schools, experience and knowledge of others working in similar contexts, supporting individual wellbeing of staff in DEIS schools, supporting professional learning and the formation of their professional identity, sense of self-efficacy and capacity to fulfil their roles. These are important given the inequalities experienced by children and families in DEIS schools, and as a result, the challenges principals, HSCLs and other school staff face in their roles. Locating bonding social capital at the nexus of the spheres reflects an internal view of social capital formation (Adler and Kwon 2002; Leana and Pil 2006) and simultaneously represents the micro level (Bronfenbrenner 1979) of the individual practice of each network. It is also here in this interface that the development of bonding social capital between individual members in PLUS and OSCAILT fosters solidarity, cohesion, shared purpose and shared vision around the ‘communally negotiated’ (Wenger 1998, p. 78) agenda of each network in order pursue collective goals. Those who are excluded from the networks, however, or who cannot participate, miss out on the opportunity to develop bonding social capital with others in similar roles in DEIS schools and the associated benefits at the individual and collective level.

Shifting our gaze to the outer perimeter of the spheres, we see the boundary periphery of the networks/CoPs with the wider Landscape of Practice (Wenger et al. 2015) in which they are located. The LoP incorporates the macro societal level of economic and education policy where decisions are made that impact on the inequalities that are experienced on the ground by students and staff in DEIS schools i.e., resourcing of DEIS schools, curriculum and assessment, school admissions policies etc. This reflects an external view of social capital formation (Adler and Kwon 2002) in PLUS and OSCAILT with bridging social capital (Putnam 2000) represented by the yellow horizontal arrows. Bridging social capital is the vehicle through which network members connect with multiple external stakeholders in the meso and macro levels of the Landscape of Practice enabling them to access information, expertise and resources for their schools, as well as to advocate and raise awareness about the concerns of DEIS schools locally and nationally with those in positions of power and decision makers in the education system. These were the collective benefits of school networking as expressed by the research participants. Essentially, bridging social capital connects the internal, micro level of the network/CoP and the meso level of the wider educational landscape and macro level of the educational policy sphere, or Landscape of Practice (Wenger et al. 2015) delineated by the blue arrow in the diagram. In doing so, the priorities and concerns of network members from DEIS schools become linked to those of stakeholders in other organisations through a process of ‘double-loop learning’ (Kools and Stoll 2016, p.21). Connections are not only made laterally in the education system, but also vertically through linking social capital (Grootaert et al. 2004), represented by the red arrow on the left, which can facilitate communication between those at different levels of the system, i.e., between those on the ground in DEIS schools and those in government departments. Other DEIS schools not participating or excluded from the networks are located in the meso-level. A limitation of the networks with regards to ‘double loop learning’ and lateral connections is that the specific concerns of those who are not members are not communicated through these particular platforms which can create a narrow focus on the interests of a small group of DEIS schools, which in this case are primarily DEIS Band 1 primary schools.

Figure 9 Conceptual Framework - Domain, Community and Practice overlap with key elements of TED networks



10.4. Propositions based on the research findings and literature

1. The networks enhance the social capital of members through the process of networking;
2. The networks are Communities of Practice that enhance the learning, professional growth and development and leadership skills of network members;
3. The networks support key policy areas for DEIS schools including wellbeing, DEIS plans and School Self-Evaluation;
4. There are challenges to networking and limitations to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks.

Each of these propositions will now be considered in detail.

10.5. Proposition 1 – The PLUS and OSCAILT networks enhance social capital of members through the process of networking

Drawing on the lens of social capital theory helps to understand the individual and collective impact of opportunities for members of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks to interact and engage with those in similar roles in DEIS schools. Social capital theory views the interactions and relationships between individuals in their social networks as assets or resources (Bourdieu 1997; Coleman 1997; Lin 1999; Putnam 2000; Field 2003). Through *bonding social capital* (Putnam 2000), members of PLUS and OSCAILT formed trusting relationships with others in similar roles who have become an important source of information, advice and peer support. This has involved openness, vulnerability and a willingness to share with others. The networks have also enhanced the professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) of members through a process of social learning in which members share vital knowledge and experience that helps to build capacity to fulfil their roles. In this sense, it can be argued that they are Communities of Practice (Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger 2010; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) and this will be discussed in detail under proposition 2.

Both networks have also played an important role in the enhancement of *bridging social capital* (Putnam 2000). Bringing members of staff from different DEIS schools together with other organisations such as MIC and the DoE, is in itself a source of bridging social capital for members. This can enhance learning through co-construction of knowledge, sharing of experience and practice and support a ‘divergent approach’ (Stoll 2010, p. 472) to the knowledge base required to meet diverse needs of students in a complex, changing world (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Fullan 2019; Brown and Flood 2020) and build lateral capacity (Fullan 2006) by disseminating ideas and good practice around schools. The networks have also created relationships and connections with other stakeholders in the wider community to access support, expertise and leverage resources for DEIS schools (Díaz-Gibson et al. 2016; Rincón-Gallardo 2020). Collectively, the networks have developed a shared sense of purpose and solidarity that has enabled collaboration on joint funding proposals and collective advocacy on behalf of DEIS schools, thereby serving an important function in the promotion of social justice for children in DEIS schools. Social capital theory also illuminates how the networks have been a source of *linking social capital* (Grootaert et al. 2004) for OSCAILT members by creating connections with those ‘higher up the food chain’ (OSCPT35), and how the networks

have linked the micro level of the DEIS school, to the meso level of the broader educational landscape and macro level of national policy (Hopkins 2003; OECD 2015).

Let us now examine how social capital is formed within the networks.

10.5.1. Bonding social capital

10.5.1.1. Developing trusting relationships between members through bonding social capital

Upon review of the PLUS and OSCAILT case study reports it is evident that the networks play an important role in building bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) between members through the development of relationships and experience of peer support. Field's (2003, p. 3) claim that bonding social capital fosters solidarity, group loyalty and reinforces specific identities is supported by this research as it has helped to develop solidarity and trust amongst network members and schools that has facilitated them to work towards collective goals.

Perhaps one of the strongest themes arising in the analysis of the case study reports was the importance of the networks in building relationships amongst members, highlighting the significance of the 'relational' and reciprocal nature of social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Baron et al. 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002) and the 'cognitive' dimension (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Lee 2014; Moolenar et al. 2014), such as shared values, attitudes, beliefs, expectations and motivations, which are thought to affect the development of social relations.

The findings are replete with reference to the way in which these relationships have been fostered through bonding social capital between members supporting Field's (2003) assertion that 'relationships matter' and that individuals make connections with one another which are maintained over time and create a basis for social cohesion and cooperation for mutual advantage. The focus here is on the creation of 'social capital relevant behaviour' (Slegers et al. 2019) i.e., helping, information exchange, solidarity, and influence (Kwon and Adler 2014) at the individual level within a collective. From a structural perspective, the connections between network members are viewed as a source of social capital (Portes 1998; Kwon and Adler 2014; Lee 2014) within the variety of social networks available to them from which they can access advice, ideas and support (Moolenar et al. 2012; Bridwell-Mitchell and Cooc 2016). The formation of social capital

(Lee 2014) in the networks, however, is dependent on members' capacity to mobilise or activate support through these connections.

The following discussion reflects an *internal view* of social capital mobilised through bonding social capital via situated learning and the cohesion this can create when working towards collective goals (Adler and Kwon 2002; Leana and Pil 2006).

1. The 'relational' aspects of social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Baron et al. 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002) i.e., trust, trustworthiness, respect, reciprocity, identity and identification, were paramount in the initial development of relationships founded on a shared sense of understanding about the school context in which members work. This reflects the building of trust discussed in the school networks literature which is enhanced by bringing people together based on shared values and a common understanding of the purpose and aims of the network (Lieberman 1999; Kerr et al. 2003; McLaughlin et al. 2004; Rincón-Gallardo 2020). Over time these relationships evolved into solidarity, collegiality, camaraderie, peer support and 'friendships' or more personal relationships. In OSCALIT this helped to break down barriers between the twenty two different schools, MIC and the DoE at the beginning and ease reservations that some research participants noted about the motives of the DoE at the outset. For HSCLs, PLUS was viewed as a valuable 'networking' opportunity to meet others in the same role for peer support in the absence of formal supervision. For the DEIS principals, OSCALIT was described as a support group for those 'in the front line'. They emphasised the 'isolation' experienced in their leadership role and how peer support from principals in schools with 'similar issues and similar problems' (OSCP35) helped to combat the same. In tandem, PLUS and OSCALIT participants emphasised the shared goals of working towards 'best outcomes for children' (OSCFL10) and being a 'common voice' for DEIS schools (PLUSFGPT24);
2. Influenced by such development of relationships, the networks provide members with opportunities for both 'quality and quantity' (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, p. 90) interaction and discussion in a 'friendly', 'open', 'relaxed', and 'positive' atmosphere which incorporates both formal e.g., agenda, timekeeping and informal aspects e.g., tea/coffee, chatting, freedom to bring something to the discussion. These interactions impact, as Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) assert, on

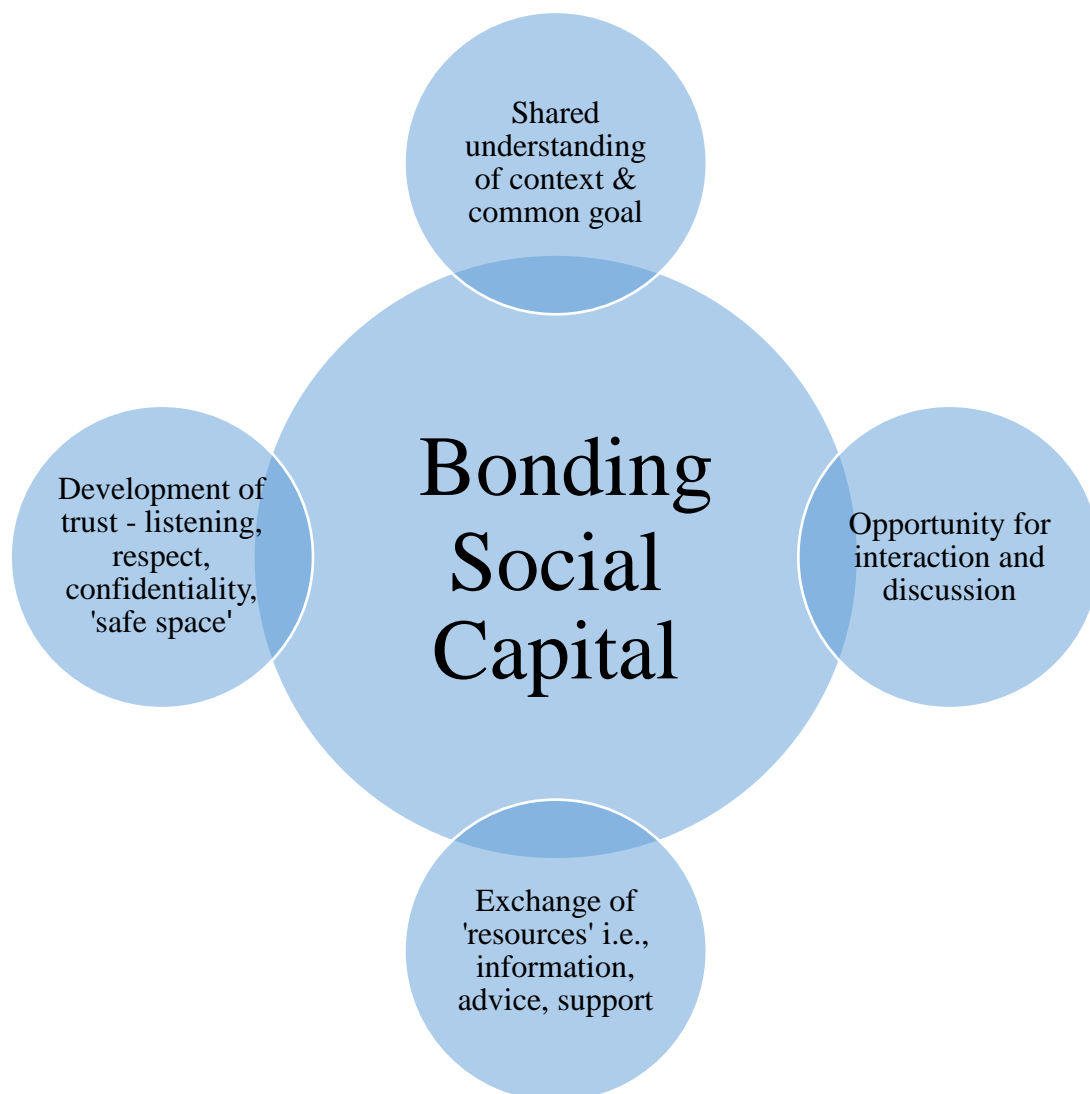
access to information and knowledge and this will be discussed in greater detail under CoPs.

3. The networks have become a platform for the ‘exchange of resources’ (Adler and Kwon 2002; Coburn and Russell 2008) with others ‘in the same boat’ (PLUSPT79 & OSCFGPT64) in the form of sharing of information, advice, feedback, ideas, best practice, problem solving, guidance, reassurance and support. This extends to communication between members outside of meetings.
4. Social capital needs maintenance so that bonds continue to be effective (Adler and Kwon 2002) and the networks have fostered the development of trust embedded in relationships (Slegers et al. 2019) through ‘facilitative and supportive structures’ (Mulford 2010, p. 198) i.e., what research participants described as ‘good facilitation’, ‘listening’, ‘respect’, confidentiality, creation of a ‘safe space’, being non-judgemental, the role of the neutral or ‘objective’ facilitator in OSCAILT and follow through on issues of concern. Such trust allows for greater social exchange and cooperation (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998) as detailed in item 3, as well as exchange of more valuable or sensitive information (Leana and Pil 2006).

In OSCAILT, the significance of trust was more prominent in participants’ accounts due to members’ leadership role and the challenges they deal with arising from the complex social issues and inequalities that non DEIS counterparts in other professional organisations or support groups do not understand. Additionally, members may not have equal access to a group of peers in the same role with whom to share advice in the same way that class teachers or HSCLs have. Participants acknowledged that there was an element of ‘competition’ between schools for enrolments and that trust took time to build as people ‘came out of their silos’ (OSCFGFL64) to work towards a common goal. We can see evidence in the case study report that, despite this element of competition, positive social interaction and dialogue within a climate of trust and respect (Stoll 2010) helped the evolution of reciprocal, trusting relationships (Muijs et al. 2011; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016 ; Slegers et al. 2019). OSCAILT participants also revealed that they feel they can vent, let rip and be honest about ‘what the reality is on the ground’ (OSCPT51) within their ‘safe space’, which indicates their willingness to ‘be vulnerable’ based on their confidence in the good intentions of other members (Misztal 1996) and a

reduced sense of uncertainty about other members based on prior interaction (Slegers et al. 2019). Figure 10 depicts the building of bonding social capital within both networks.

Figure 10. How bonding social capital is built in PLUS and OSCAILT



10.5.1.2. Bonding social capital enhances cohesion, cooperation, collaboration and collective action in the networks

As detailed in the case study report, trust or 'internal accountability' (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p.10) in the OSCAILT network grew initially as members developed relationships and in turn came to realise that they were all working towards a common goal. Over the years, in both networks, the relationships developed between members, founded on commonality and solidarity, have given them a sense of cooperation and cohesion (Field 2003; Muijs et al. 2011; Slegers et al. 2019) and more effective

collective action (Field 2003; Leana and Pil 2006). Cohesion and cooperation have also been fostered through the development of trust which ‘lubricates cooperation’ (Nahapiet and Goshal 1998, p.255) and a strong sense of ownership of the ‘communally negotiated’ (Wenger 1998, p.78) network agenda and of the networks themselves, as evident in the case study reports. Meeting agendas, discussion, and guest speakers were cited by participants as being ‘relevant’, ‘meaningful’ and founded on the needs, interests and concerns of members and their schools and this is also discussed under CoPs (section 10.6).

Over time, cohesion, buttressed by bonding social capital, reciprocal relationships and trust, has facilitated the networks to collaborate and collectively work towards common goals (Slegers et al. 2019) and developed ‘networked agency’ (Hadfield and Chapman 2009, p. 6). We can clearly see from the case study reports the impact of ‘social capital relevant behaviour’ (Slegers et al. 2019) at the collective as well as individual level. Collectively, the networks have accessed resources for DEIS schools and advocated on many issues affecting DEIS schools. Therefore, PLUS and OSCAILT have been of benefit to individual members i.e., peer support and professional learning, and collectively i.e., support for DEIS schools and access to resources and expertise, confirming Muijs et al.’s (2011, p. 22) assertion that ‘social capital is both an individual and a collective good’. Bridging social capital has played an important role in harnessing support at the collective level for schools, and this will be discussed under section 10.5.2.1.

PLUS participants expressed their common goal to address societal and systemic challenges around inequality of education. Document analysis revealed that, in the early days, PLUS members prioritised issues of behaviour, absenteeism and a three year infant cycle and advocated and developed responses to the same for member schools. In the context of educational policy, economic inequality and funding for ‘disadvantaged’ schools, and in relation to the initial aims of the network outlined in Appendix 12, these efforts can be viewed as an attempt by the schools to critique the inadequacy of the resources allocated and raise awareness of the impact of deeper societal issues on children’s lives and educational experiences. More recently, PLUS has focused on changing and emerging needs in schools and supporting staff to respond through workshops and seminars open to all staff or guest speakers at network meetings or discussion of new policies for schools, joint funding applications and supporting the DEIS school remit of promoting positive experiences of a third level campus through curricular

initiatives and activities such as the MIC Children's Choir, the Studio Classroom and League of Legends soccer tournament. While the overt advocacy role has diminished over the years, the approach recognises the inequalities experienced by children and the limited capacity of DEIS schools to raise much needed funds for facilities and extra-curricular activities often funded through parental contributions in non DEIS schools.

Similarly, OSCAILT participants indicated that the network initially had a specific remit to maximise the use of school facilities for the wider community as a direct result of recommendations within the FitzGerald (2007) report and the socio-economic climate in the city at the time. Over time, the sense of cohesion around their purpose and ethos of 'making a difference in children's lives' (OSCFL44) was reinforced by bonding social capital. This led to the schools advocating collectively at various stages on issues affecting members and for resources to address same i.e., cultural and linguistic diversity in the school population and the urgent need for resources in schools to respond to same e.g., additional EAL hours, the development of EDNIP to promote integration and TEAL to support teachers to respond to cultural and linguistic diversity. Here we also see evidence that not only are the networks building and maintaining trust, they are also responding to the changing needs of members and the environment (Kools and Stoll 2016) such as the greater levels of cultural and ethnic diversity in DEIS schools in Limerick city.

10.5.1.3. Bonding social capital supports the development of professional capital in the networks

Bonding social capital has played a significant role in professional learning (Kools and Stoll 2016) and development of professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) in both networks. As observed above, relationships between network members provide opportunities for interaction and exchange of resources (Adler and Kwon 2002; Coburn and Russell 2008) in the form of information, advice, feedback, ideas, best practice, problem solving, guidance, reassurance and support (Lima 2010; Kools and Stoll 2016; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). Such interactions not only increase members' prospects of tapping into the human capital (knowledge and skills) and intellectual capital (knowledge and knowing capability) (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Leana and Pil 2006) of others, it also enhances their 'decisional capital' (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) or capacity to make professional judgements grounded in practice, experience and reflection.

Accessing the ‘insight and experiences’ (ibid, p. 93) of colleagues was cited in the PLUS case study report as helping members to learn about different initiatives and supports that their school or families can avail of, to solve problems or concerns, to seek feedback or suggestions on particular issues, and to learn about what is working for others so that ‘you can bring that back to the table in your school’ (PLUSPT81). Sharing practice and experience with colleagues in this way can ‘set off some lightbulbs in your head’ (PLUSPT78) about how things might be applied in their own school. PLUS participants emphasised the relevance of this type of learning for teachers who don’t often get the opportunity to meet others outside their class, never mind their school and for HSCLs who don’t often get the chance to network with each other.

OSCAILT participants detailed how bonding social capital had contributed to their professional capital in the form of advice on different issues from other members, sharing of information about funding or supports for schools, problem solving, bouncing ideas off colleagues, access to ‘little pockets of knowledge’ (OSCPT51) that they can tap into and insights or ‘nuggets’ from other principals. Due to the insular nature of the leadership role and the level of responsibility they hold, as well as the context of being a leader in a DEIS school, this type of ‘insight and experience’ (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, p. 93) from colleagues was perceived as very beneficial particularly as principals are often expected to ‘have the answer to every issue’ (OSCPT36) in their own school. OSCAILT participants indicated that this learning through sharing of experience with others in similar contexts was an important way to develop their leadership style by drawing on the experience of others i.e., ‘what worked, what didn’t work and what they did’ (OSCPT56), as they navigate the role of principal. It helped them ‘to know what to expect’ with experiences they have never dealt with before i.e., a DEIS inspection. It also inspired ‘confidence’ in others to try things out in their school, ‘they tried that, I might give it a shot’ (OSCPT51).

The enhancement of professional capital in PLUS and OSCAILT through the sharing of insights and experiences and bonding social capital, is similar to learning in CoPs through ‘thinking together’ (Pyrko et al. 2017 and 2019) and the articulation and exploration of tacit knowledge through dialogic ‘learning conversations’ (Stoll 2010, p.475), whereby such knowledge is explored and assumptions are challenged. This type of exchange of resources creates an environment that supports professional learning (Coburn and Russell 2008; Johnson et al. 2011) and will be explored further under the second proposition and CoPs.

10.5.2. Bridging and linking social capital

In addition to relationships built between members via bonding social capital, PLUS and OSCAILT promoted the development of connections and relationships with other stakeholders through bridging (Putnam 2000; Field 2003) and linking social capital (Grootaert et al. 2004). Not only does this strengthen connections in the ‘middle tier’ (OECD 2015) or the meso level in our centralised education system, the impact for individual members and their schools has included access to support and resources, the creation of information flows and feedback loops, advocacy on behalf of children and families in DEIS schools and contribution to the wider educational landscape in the city and connection between the micro, meso and macro level.

10.5.2.1. Bridging social capital, access to resources, expertise and information flows

Bridging social capital is also rooted in the ‘relational’ aspect of social capital and focuses on the connections that ‘generate broader identities and reciprocity’ (Putnam 2000 pp. 22-23; Field 2003) and the way in which information, influence and solidarity accrue to individuals and collectives in relation to external actors (Kwon and Adler 2014). Essentially, bridging social capital illuminates the way in which the networks have leveraged support and resources for DEIS schools through links with external stakeholders, and represents an external view of social capital (Adler and Kwon 2002; Leana and Pil 2006). Such links with multiple stakeholders are a key way through which educational reform can be enhanced by networking and collaboration (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Hargreaves and O’Connor 2018; Harris et al. 2018; Azorín 2020), as discussed in Chapter Two.

Findings in the case study reports indicate that PLUS and OSCAILT have fostered bridging social capital between schools and other stakeholders in a number of ways and the following discussion explores the manner in which this has occurred.

1. PLUS and OSCAILT have supported the development of bridging social capital by creating connections with other stakeholders such as staff in educational organisations and statutory and community organisations with a remit to support children and families. The networks have also played an important role in the flow of information (Lin 1999) and ‘double-loop learning’ (Kools and Stoll 2016, p. 21) between members and other staff in stakeholder organisations. PLUS

representatives highlighted that ‘face to face’ interaction at meetings with MIC lecturers involved in DEIS and LEGO Education electives gives them the opportunity to directly feedback on how the electives are going in schools, and also to TED staff about their initiatives and what is happening on the ground in DEIS schools. Various HSCLs have also provided inputs to elective students over the years, raising awareness for MIC students about the work they do. The network was also viewed as an important platform for HSCLs, particularly those new to the role, to make links and ‘build relationships’ (PLUSPT13) with support agencies that are vital to their role.

Over the years, OSCAILT has developed ‘strong links’ with a variety of agencies and initiatives described as ‘big players’ including Limerick Education Centre, Limerick Regeneration Agency, Limerick DEIS Literacy Initiative, Limerick CYPSC, Music Generation, and ABC Start Right. OSCAILT also has representatives on LCYPSC, Music Generation and ABC Start Right. Such ‘multiagency’ links were perceived as beneficial because they improved communication with other stakeholders, provided an opportunity for schools to raise ‘our concerns’ (OSCFG55) and discuss the impact of processes and procedures for children and schools. Information from those various sources was also brought to the attention of principals via OSCAILT, raising awareness for members of ‘what’s going on in the wider world’ (OSCPT35) and creating an avenue for schools to access supports and funding, which due to the lack of capacity to fundraise through voluntary contributions from financially strained parents, is essential to offer students extra-curricular activities or to access assessments and therapeutic supports for children OSCAILT facilitators indicated that their participation in OSCAILT made them more knowledgeable and ‘better informed’ about issues on the ground in schools and that this insight informed their work in their respective organisations and interactions with other stakeholders, particularly when trying to ‘open doors’ (OSCFL64) with different agencies. As facilitator of PLUS over a number of years, I completely concur that my knowledge of DEIS schools has been enhanced in this way and that it has informed my perspective in my interactions with others both in MIC and with other stakeholders. While this a positive finding in relation to OSCAILT, it highlights the difficulties that DEIS schools encounter in trying to access

resources and supports to meet the needs of their students from oftentimes hierarchical and inflexible institutions.

Essentially, the networks act as boundary spanners (Burt 1992) bridging structural holes or disconnections in people's social ties i.e., between network representatives/their schools and other stakeholders, helping to access important information for schools and avoiding the 'echo chamber' (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). As observed by a PLUS participant, the network was like a 'tunnel' or 'train station bringing all the tracks together' through a 'central point of contact' (PLUSPT30). This supports the assertion of Muijs et al. (2011) that the significance of school networks lies in their capacity to span structural holes and access information, knowledge and skills.

2. Supported by the TED Project, the networks have facilitated DEIS schools to access resources in the form of research and intervention projects focussed on the concerns of schools at particular points in time. For example, through PLUS, external funding was secured for the WTP (Atlantic Philanthropies and HEA Targeted Initiatives Scheme) and FSCEP (SIF and Dormant Accounts Scheme). More recently, TED secured funding to deliver EDNIP (Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Philanthropic Trust) and TEAL (Philanthropic Trust). OSCAILT itself was established to support schools in the roll out of the Dormant Accounts funded initiative. Through PLUS, schools have also availed of TED funded initiatives such as League of Legends, Studio Classroom and MIC Children's Choir (also funded by Creative Ireland) which have involved making the facilities of MIC and staff expertise available to DEIS schools. Additionally, MIC DEIS elective and LEGO Education elective students were viewed by PLUS participants as a resource available to schools who bring 'new ways of doing things' (PLUSPT30) and 'new ideas' (PLUSFGPT81) into classrooms, with LEGO Education also involving upskilling of teachers the loan of equipment which schools may not be able to purchase. This highlights the role that PLUS plays in fostering bridging social capital between MIC and DEIS schools. In addition to facilitating school to school interaction, the initiatives were perceived as contributing to positive experiences for children of visiting a third level campus and supporting 'breaking the cycle' (PLUSPT13) of lower progression rates of children from DEIS schools to higher education. They also provided opportunities for children to engage in activities they 'might not otherwise be able to avail of'

(PLUSPT65). Elective students were perceived as ‘building up relationships’ (PLUSPT25) with children that made the placements enjoyable for both as well as increasing MIC students’ awareness and understanding of the complexity of challenges faced by DEIS schools and challenging any assumptions they may have.

3. The networks have created a platform for members to access expertise of guest speakers and external stakeholders in the wider community (McLaughlin et al. 2004; Kools and Stoll 2016; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). Members of both networks detailed the variety of guest speakers at meetings including MIC lecturers in education, and staff from statutory agencies e.g., DoE Inspectorate, and community and voluntary organisations that support children and/or parents. This expertise is largely based on what members feel is ‘meaningful and helpful and relevant for our schools at that time’ (OSCPT51) and viewed as ‘hugely beneficial’ (PLUSPT79) and essential to access ‘professionals and experienced people’ (PLUSPT30) to support schools, children and families in the context of increasing demand for social supports for families in areas such as wellbeing and mental health, addiction, imprisonment, bereavement and homelessness (see section 7.9 for more information). Greater knowledge of supports available to families and how to access them was cited by PLUS participants as particularly important for HSCLs to provide information to parents about an appropriate support agency ‘at the relevant time’ (PLUSPT49). Additionally, access to expertise in this way was important for raising members’ awareness about ‘best practice’ (PLUSFGPT81) and ‘new methodologies’ (PLUSPT79) in teaching and learning. In this sense, creating connections with external stakeholders enhances members’ decisional and professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). OSCAILT participants also highlighted how the network had created capacity to access expertise within MIC in making the EDNIP funding application.
4. The networks are an important source of information about resources and supports available to schools through connections created with external stakeholders and guest speakers. PLUS participants indicated that this information is not only brought back to their respective schools and colleagues but also shared within other support networks e.g., HSCL clusters, indicating that network representatives also act like boundary spanners (Burt 1992) bridging information

gaps between their different social networks and also broker new knowledge (Brown and Flood 2020) gained from the network in their school or HSCL cluster.

Leana and Pil (2006) assert that schools can enhance their performance by bringing new resources into schools and having effective representation of schools with parents, community organisations, potential funders and other stakeholders. Indeed, we can see this embedded in the ethos and mission of the OSCAILT network which actively aims to open schools to the wider community or ‘the community outside the school’ (OSCPT56) and it is also echoed in PLUS participants’ accounts. Bridging social capital, as developed in the networks, fosters these type of connections for the schools involved, and supports schools in their goals under their DEIS plans and School Self-Evaluation and also to enhance whole school wellbeing, as set out in the Wellbeing Framework (2019) and this will be discussed in more detail under proposition three.

Figure 11. How bridging social capital is created in PLUS and OSCAILT



10.5.2.2. Bridging social capital, advocacy on behalf of DEIS schools, the wider educational landscape and connection between the micro, meso and macro

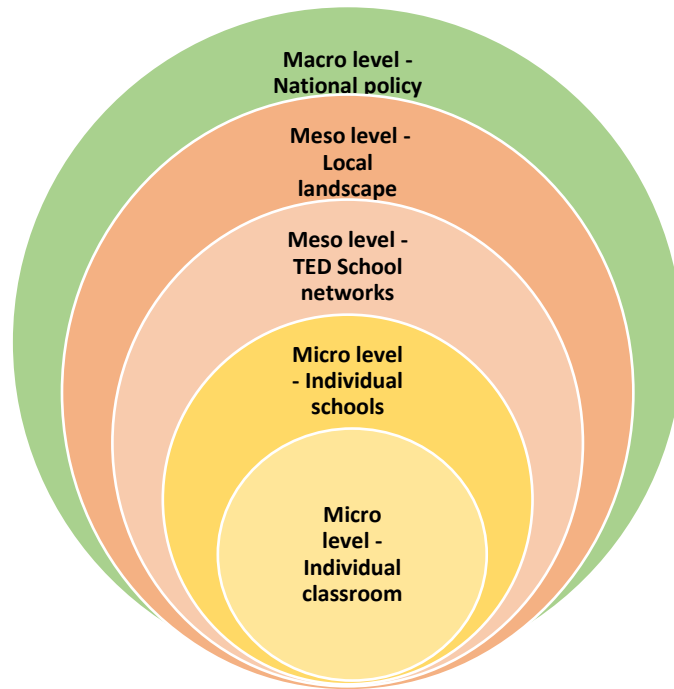
Participants from both PLUS and OSCAILT indicated their perceptions that advocacy on behalf of DEIS schools was a core element of the purpose of the networks. Bridging and linking social capital play an important role in this advocacy work. The discussion has already established that the agenda of the networks is rooted in what members identify as their needs, the needs of their schools and what is of relevance to them and that bonding social capital has helped to foster a ‘united voice’ based on shared understanding, solidarity and trust. In tandem, as discussed in the previous section, bridging social capital creates links between members, their schools and external organisations and groups that are working towards similar goals to the networks i.e., supporting families and children, educational equality or teacher professional development. In OSCAILT, members have had the opportunity to raise concerns directly with staff from statutory agencies which was perceived as helping to raise awareness and access resources to support children. The link with the local DoE office was viewed as providing verification or ‘weight’ for other sections of the DoE that schools concerns around the ‘EAL crisis’ for example, were ‘very real’ (OSCPT55), supporting Lin’s (1999) claim that social capital can enhance capacity to harness resources through social networks by acting as ‘social credentials’ or kudos. OSCAILT members have also written to relevant government departments and the Minister for Education on a number of occasions to highlight particular issues, as the PLUS network also did in the early years, although this role has diminished more recently. For example, PLUS advocated on the highly contentious issue of the transfer to post primary in Limerick as highlighted in Chapter Seven and in the newspaper article in Appendix 15, illustrating that the network was a platform for schools to challenge the accepted practice of middle class post primary schools ‘cherry picking’ students from middle class primary schools and more affluent backgrounds.

OSCAILT was perceived as ‘feeding into national policy’ (OSCFGPT55) and being a ‘united’ and ‘collective’ voice for schools involved. Bridging social capital creates ‘systemic extension’ (Stoll 2010, p. 472) to collectively leverage support from ties between the networks and the broader group of stakeholders (Adler and Kwon 2002), therefore they can exert greater influence on the social and political landscape than if member or schools acted in isolation (Lin 1999; Muijs et al. 2011; Jones and Harris 2014). Additionally, with OSCAILT we see evidence in participants’ accounts that the network

has created connections between network members with those in positions of authority. Such links bridge ‘power differentials’ (Grootaert et al. 2004) vertically with those ‘higher up the food chain’ (OSCPT35) to raise awareness of issues in DEIS schools within political institutions i.e., within the DoE and DCYA, exercising what Grootaert et al. (2004) term ‘linking social capital’.

Bridging and linking social capital not only connect the networks to the wider educational landscape or Landscape of Practice (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015), they also serve to illuminate the connections between the micro, meso and macro levels of policy (Hopkins 2003; Chapman and Aspin 2003), as depicted in Figure 12. The networks have created a platform for staff from DEIS schools to bring practices, concerns or queries from individual classrooms and schools (micro level – yellow spheres), to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks (meso level – red spheres) where interaction between members i.e., school representative, MIC and DoE and school to school interaction occurs. This platform also facilitates interaction with other stakeholders in the local landscape that are involved in supporting children and families from DEIS schools i.e., statutory agencies, community and voluntary groups, as well as those involved in teacher education/professional development. As discussed above, bridging and linking social capital create connections so that the concerns that filtered through from the micro level of the classrooms and schools, to the meso level of the school networks, are raised with a variety of local stakeholders and where relevant, raised at the national macro level via statutory agencies or with the appropriate Minister. This process also supports the assertion that networks hold potential to create change by ‘leading from the middle’ (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016) or from the ‘middle tier’ (OECD 2015).

Figure 12. How PLUS and OSCAILT connect the micro level of individual schools, to meso, to macro



10.5.3. Considering Proposition One in relation to the literature

This thesis illuminates the development of the relational and cognitive dimensions of social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Baron et al. 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002; Lee 2014) in the PLUS and OSCAILT networks through a detailed analysis of how bonding, bridging and linking social capital are developed and clearly resonates with the literature on same in Chapter Four. In contrast, much of the literature on school networks, teacher social networks (Daly 2010; Lima 2010; Moolenaar and Slegers 2010; Bridwell-Mitchell and Crooc 2014; Bridwell-Mitchell and Crooc 2016) and PLNs (Brown and Flood 2019; Brown and Flood 2020) adopts a structural perspective to the analysis of network structures and dynamics that focuses on issues of centrality, density, connectedness and how they impact on the diffusion of teachers' instructional and pedagogic practices or explore the relationship between network data and variables expected to be linked to student achievement, such as teacher efficacy, satisfaction or school climate (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). Such research tends to give primacy to a more 'static' perspective that emphasises structure (Lima 2010) rather than agency of network members, as highlighted in this research. The findings about how social capital is

developed through these networks can be directly correlated to the purpose of PLUS and OSCAILT and their categorisation as teacher professional learning and support networks (Azorín 2020). They add to the existing literature on school networks and CoPs by delineating how the processes and interactions involved in these networks build ‘hidden’ or informal relationships, trust or internal accountability (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016) and commitment to a common goal and the potential, as evidenced in OSCAILT, to connect the priorities of the micro level of DEIS schools, to the meso and macro layers of education in the centralised Irish education system by building lateral capacity (Fullan 2006) and strengthening the middle tier (OECD 2015). Lima (2010) and Azorín and Muijs (2017) stress the importance of empirical research to understand the processes and interactions of school networks with Lima highlighting the particular importance of understanding how trust is built, as well as the limits of same in a competitive educational landscape. Unfortunately, the findings do not reveal the parameters of trust, although it is evident that greater importance was placed on same by principals in OSCAILT, with one participant expressing concern about confidentiality.

There is some evidence that through the building of the three forms of social capital, OSCAILT has created alignment between various layers of the system for systemic change (Stoll 2010) in the local environment, for example, in its response to the Fitzgerald report, through the involvement of the DoE in a local school network, through the development of circular 0039/2012 (DoE 2012) to maximise the use of schools for the wider community and the development of EDNIP in response to increasing diversity in city centre schools and promotion of the school as a site to foster integration in the local community. This confirms that building social capital through school networks can support DEIS schools to deal with uncertainty and complexity in their environment (Muijs et al 2011; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016) and that networks can become more than the sum of their parts by developing into something new (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016) e.g., the development of EDNIP and TEAL. Additionally, the findings illustrate how OSCAILT network members became ‘system players’ (ibid, p. 18) and exhibit ‘systemness’ as they moved from individualism to collaboration and thinking in terms of all the children across their schools as opposed to just in ‘my school’. Building lateral capacity (Fullan 2006) through the development of social capital in these networks also creates a greater repertoire of choices for DEIS schools by circulating practice around the system. The significance of these findings is that they add to the literature to provide a deeper understanding of how the three forms of social capital are fostered through

networking to support DEIS schools in Ireland. The cognitive and social resources harnessed form the basis for building relationships between members and with external organisations that lead to TPL, accessing resources and expertise and advocacy for DEIS schools. While other research and literature detailed in Chapter Five highlight the many challenges that DEIS schools face, class based and other differentials between DEIS and non DEIS schools (Smyth and McCoy 2009; Cahill 2015; Smyth et al. 2015; Weir et al. 2017; Gilleece et al. 2020; Fleming and Hartford 2021; Jeffers and Lillis 2021), this research illustrates how the collective agency of DEIS schools can be harnessed through networking and how staff in DEIS schools can challenge the ‘doxas of their own educational trade’ (Lynch 2019, p. 530) by giving them a platform and a voice in a centralised system where teachers and school leaders have very limited access to policy makers to raise awareness of inequality on the ground in their schools and advocate for policy change and greater resourcing to respond to same. However, the capacity of two networks of DEIS schools alone to challenge endemic societal and economic inequity is severely limited and the transformative potential of both networks will be further discussed under Propositions 2, 3 and 4.

Finally, the findings reveal a lack of reference by participants to the negative consequences of social capital as detailed in the literature (Baron et al. 2000; Brown and Lauder 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002; Borgatti and Foster 2003; Field 2003; Kwon and Adler 2014) such as exclusion and who subsequently benefits from the advantages of social capital in these networks. In contrast, other pertinent literature on school networks and learning communities (Lima 2010; Mulford 2010; Stoll 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín and Muijs 2017) emphasises the development of partnerships with students, parents, school staff and the wider school community for more inclusive practice. While there is some evidence that this has happened through specific TED projects, and a commitment to same in the ethos of the networks, partnership with children, parents and the broader schools staff is not embedded in the model of either PLUS or OSCAILT and reveals a limitation of both networks, particularly in relation to their stated aims and given the nature of the TED Project work. This will be discussed under Proposition 4.

10.6. Proposition 2 – The networks are Communities of Practice that enhance the learning, professional growth and development and leadership skills of members

Application of social learning theory through the lens of Communities of Practice to the research findings highlights that, in addition to the key elements of networks, both networks clearly function as Communities of Practice that enhance the learning, professional growth and development and leadership skills of members and this has been discussed under the Conceptual Framework (see section 10.1).

Both networks display evidence of Wenger’s (1998, p. 124-5) range of indicators for the existence of CoPs (Table 42), the definitions of CoPs presented in the literature review resonate with both and the three elements of domain, community and practice are also distinctly present. Wenger’s social learning theory also offers a lens through which to comprehend the way in which learning takes place and directly answer the research questions related to knowledge creation and sharing within and beyond the networks. The perspective of learning as the creation of an identity, of becoming and belonging echoes with the research participants accounts of their engagement in the networks and the concepts of boundary and Landscape of Practice capture the multiagency approach of the networks and connections across different groups and stakeholders in the local micro landscape as well as the meso and macro level. Let us now consider each of these claims in turn.

Table 43. Indicators for the existence of Communities of Practice

1. Sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual
2. Shared ways of engaging in doing things together
3. Rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
4. Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
5. Very quick set up of a problem to be discussed
6. Substantial overlap in participant’s descriptions of who belongs
7. Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
8. Mutually defining identities
9. The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products

10. Specific tools, representations, and other artifacts
11. Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
12. Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
13. Certain styles recognised as displaying membership
14. A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world

10.6.1. Definition of Communities of Practice

As presented in the literature review, the definitions of CoPs drawn from the work of Wenger (1998), Wenger et al. (2002) and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) clearly resonate with the PLUS and OSCAILT networks. Both comprise of individuals who share deep ‘concern’ and ‘passion’ for what they do in their everyday practice, as well as a desire to ‘deepen their knowledge and expertise’ about the same through regular interaction. Parallels can be drawn between the purpose of both networks and these definitions. OSCAILT members patently described their purpose as a forum for principals of DEIS schools who are ‘in the front line’, (OSCPT76) to support each other, to share practice and to work towards ‘best outcomes’ for their students. PLUS members articulated a strong sense of commitment towards a common goal of advocacy for DEIS schools as well as opportunities to share and discuss best practice and to network and interact regularly.

10.6.2. Domain

For PLUS and OSCAILT the domain is to support DEIS schools and this area of interest delineates the ‘shared competence’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p. 2) of members. It also functions as the parameter and foundation for subsequent mutual engagement, participation and negotiation around building competence of members that in turn contributes to the dimensions of community and practice, as well as learning and identity formation in both networks. The domain also shapes the Boundary of each CoP and the nature of relationships with the wider Landscape of Practice.

PLUS members’ descriptions indicate that the network provides them with valuable networking opportunities, peer support, opportunity for discussion on policy affecting DEIS schools and a forum to explore common issues and share best practice, as well as

for advocacy on behalf of DEIS schools. OSCAILT members emphasised the similar contexts in which they work, opportunity for discussion of ‘topical’ issues, sharing of practice, reassurance, collaboration and advocacy. They also reflected on the role of the network in providing ‘CPD’ on leadership related issues. From the perspective of CoPs, this suggests that both networks support Wenger’s (1998, p.75) assertion that CoPs are a source of mutual engagement for members centred on their own competence and their capacity ‘connect meaningfully’ to the knowledge of others and develop relationships. Additionally, we see evidence here of mutuality (Printy 2008) and contribution to and benefit from membership of both networks. I would argue that the investment by members in both networks and their ‘commitment’ creates a strong sense of ownership in each network and this will be explored in more detail under identity.

The context and case study reports detail the evolution of the networks demonstrating changes in membership and purpose of both over time indicating that, as with CoPs, the domain of both has not been static (Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002). Membership in PLUS and OSCAILT has always entailed an element of fluidity as principals retired, schools amalgamated, new DEIS schools become involved in PLUS, and HSCLs rotated. A degree of fluctuation has been ever present as a given school’s or individual’s capacity to, or indeed, interest in engagement has shifted. Apart from the beginning of both, over time, membership at any one point has generally been ‘multi-layered’ (Pyrko et al. 2019) consisting of ‘oldtimers’, newcomers and peripheral members (Wenger 1998) and the implications of this will be discussed more fully under learning. The TED facilitators were described by both PLUS and OSCAILT participants as providing ‘continuity’ over the years. This is significant from a CoP perspective because stability in a particular domain supports sustainability in times of change and fluctuation (Wenger et al. 2002), and there have been many transitions in membership in both networks as well as the transitions in purpose referred to above. Such stability has also ensured network leadership and a ‘coordination process’ (Azorín et al. 2020, p. 114), an essential feature of effective networks (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Rincón-Gallardo 2020).

Wenger (1998) emphasises that ‘tensions and conflicts’ can arise in CoPs and much of the literature highlights the capacity for the same (Cox 2005; Jewson 2007; Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger 2010; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015; Pyrko et al. 2019). The ‘independent’ and ‘neutral’ nature of the OSCAILT facilitator in this regard and importance of ‘facilitation skills’ were highlighted in the case study report, as initially some members were suspicious of the goal of the DoE in rolling out the initiative and

over the years there has been an element of competition between some schools around enrolment. This confirms the importance of an external facilitator at the outset to help build relationships and collaboration and of having skilled facilitators (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). Similarly, PLUS participants emphasised the facilitator's 'collaborative' (PLUSPT30) approach and creation of a 'respectful' (PLUSPT78) environment because, as one participant noted, it can be frustrating when other schools are perceived to greater access to resources than others (PLUSPT79).

10.6.3. Community

We can clearly see from the contextual chapter that PLUS and OSCAILT emerged in very particular 'historical, social, cultural and institutional contexts' (Wenger 1998 p. 79) and that over time they created 'a common history and identity' (ibid). While it would be inaccurate to claim that OSCAILT grew in response to an 'external mandate' (Wenger 1998 p. 80), it did emerge from a specific response to the local crisis detailed in the FitzGerald (2007) report and subsequent availability of Dormant Accounts funding. The manner in which the practice developed could thus be described as the OSCAILT communities 'own response' (ibid) to the same.

A strong sense of ownership of both networks and 'communally negotiated' joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998 p. 78), 'networked agency' (Hadfield and Chapman 2009, p. 6; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 b, p.768) and empowerment (Kerr et al. 2003) permeates participants' accounts, from the evolving purpose of each network, to the opportunity to feed into meeting agendas, to flexibility within meetings to discuss issues as they arise, to selection of guest speakers, to organisation of 'relevant' and 'meaningful' (OSCPT59) CPD and the direct response of the networks to 'new needs' within schools over time. Indeed, this was an empowering aspect emphasised about the OSCAILT network as principals had the 'freedom' to set 'our priorities' (OSCPT51) in a landscape where much of the 'agenda' for schools is specified by the DoE and other agencies.

The interviews were replete with examples of how the networks have given members formal and informal opportunities to communicate and interact with each other before, during and after meetings i.e., to 'chat' with each other over tea beforehand, for discussion at meetings. These interactions have, without doubt, become the foundation for the development of supportive relationships that enable members to share and learn, and

become ‘an effective knowledge structure’ (Wenger et al. 2002) and this will be further explored under learning. Additionally, the building of relationships has contributed to the capacity of members, whose roles are very demanding, to collaborate and problem solve, as well as becoming a significant source of peer support, reassurance, solidarity, camaraderie, and collegiality for members. This was of relevance for both networks in different ways and will be discussed further under proposition 4 on wellbeing. For class teachers in PLUS who have few opportunities to ‘go outside your class, outside your school’ (PLUSPT13), these interactions were an opportunity to reduce isolation and ‘break down the walls of solo practice’ (Bryk 2015, p. 469). As detailed under proposition one, both networks have also played an important role in developing relationships with those on the periphery of each CoP, across institutional boundaries and in the Landscape of Practice and this will be explored under section 10.6.6.

Openness, reciprocity and trust have been fundamental to building relationships as detailed in the case study reports and are essential for members to learn in networks (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). Members ‘willingness’, ‘openness’, ‘generosity’ and ‘buy in’ to sharing as well as emphasis on ‘listening’ respectfully to others was emphasised across participants’ accounts and this echoes Wenger’s assertion that ‘mutual engagement’ in CoPs is essential for the formation of connections and relationships. This also highlights the reciprocal nature or mutuality (Printy 2008) of both networks and members’ contribution to and investment in the shared endeavour in recognition that such commitment benefits all members (Wenger 1998). A key outcome of both networks has been the development of a trusting ‘safe space’ (Wenger 1998, p. 37) in which members can discuss issues of concern to their roles. PLUS participants indicated that ‘there’s no fear’ (PLUSPT78) and they have ‘freedom to discuss particular concerns’ (PLUSPT30) in confidence at meetings. The creation of the ‘safe space’ was of particular significance for OSCAILT participants due to the responsibility of their roles as school leaders. They acknowledged that this trust developed gradually, and while some expressed concerns that newer members would appreciate the importance of confidentiality, it was evident that the majority of participants were confident that the meetings were confidential. Despite the element of competition highlighted earlier, recognition of the mutual benefit of the OSCAILT network for all schools and the commitment to the common goal of supporting children and families in their respective communities, was perceived as cementing trust within the network.

10.6.4. Practice

Analysis of the PLUS and OSCAILT findings through the theoretical lens of CoPs indicates that the way in which they operate or the mini-culture reflects the concept of practice as per Wenger (1998), Wenger et al. (2002) and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015). The ethos of both networks evident in participants' accounts distinctly embodies a perspective and ethical stance that views children and families from a strengths based perspective and the role of schools in supporting families from a 'holistic', ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Furthermore, a strong commitment to equality of opportunity in education, social justice and desire to address societal and systemic barriers for children accessing education pervaded, echoing level four of Hopkins (2003) typology of school networks (section 3.3.3). PLUS participants referenced the ethos of the HSCL scheme to foster strong home school relationships and the emphasis placed on networking with other stakeholders in the local community to achieve this goal. OSCAILT participants emphasised the role of the network for 'the agent' (OSCPT20) who wishes to make a difference in the lives of families and placed their ardent desire to improve outcomes for 'the invisible little boy and little girl' (OSCFL44) at the heart of their work.

It is evident from the case study reports that network members share a common basic foundation of knowledge about the domain (Wenger et al. 2002) of each network that enables them to work together. While members may have 'different ways of addressing' (PLUSPT79) matters in their schools, the commonality between school contexts and roles was cited as supporting learning in PLUS. OSCAILT participants acknowledged variation but emphasised the similarity of context and issues in schools. CoPs not only explore this existing knowledge base, they also consider developments in the field (Wenger et al. 2002). Both networks offer opportunities to share information about current practice that is directly relevant to members' roles, as well as new developments such as information from guest speakers, discussion about new policies, access to expertise and new curricular developments. OSCAILT participants indicated that the network enables members to 'keep abreast of new ideas' (OSCPT100) and 'adds huge value to the work that you're doing here [in school]' (OSCPT35). PLUS meetings were described as having 'an element of learning in each meeting' that was of particular relevance to the pace of change in schools and keeping members 'connected' with what is 'cutting edge' (PLUSPT49) in research and best practice.

The findings presented in the case study reports are replete with examples of ‘shared practice’ built over time through sustained interaction and a ‘shared repertoire of resources’ (Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). This ‘repertoire’ of practice embodies the ‘mini-culture’ (Wenger et al. 2002) of the networks, the way in which they do things, their ways of addressing recurring problems, their discourses, gestures, symbols, styles, actions or concepts. It encompasses both the tacit and explicit elements of the knowledge of both networks. Across both networks this includes formal aspects such as regular meetings, ‘focused’ agendas, standard agenda items i.e., sharing of practice, timing, and documentation of meetings and ‘governance’ of the networks. Informal aspects include flexibility to ‘veer off slightly’ (PLUSPT30) from topics or bring something new to meetings and ‘chatting’ over tea and coffee, which participants recognised as enabling learning to take place. Coordination and facilitation of the networks by a lead agency (TED/MIC) emerged as an important feature of practice in creating an atmosphere of respect and trust in which participants were willing and comfortable to share information and experiences. For OSCAILT, the ‘neutral’ role of the facilitator, positioned between schools and the DoE, was acknowledged as a significant factor in building trust at the outset. The coordination function was viewed as important in driving both the networks and maintaining continuity, which in turn, has contributed to sustaining the practice of both over the years, echoing the literature on school networks about the need for a ‘coordination process’ (Azorín et al. 2020, p. 114), ‘deliberate leadership’, ‘skilled facilitation’ and ‘flat power structures’ to sustain commitment to the common purpose of the network (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p. 10).

Coordination has also enabled the implementation of other aspects of the ‘practice’ of both networks such as initiatives in OSCAILT schools i.e., EDNIP and TEAL, and the PLUS initiatives i.e., League of Legends, MIC Children’s Choir etc.

Facilitators’ ‘style’ or approach has become an integral part of the culture and practice of both networks. Across accounts, research participants emphasised the following elements of facilitators’ styles: welcoming, approachability, non-judgemental, respectful, supportive, giving people an equal voice, flexibility, friendliness, professional, knowledgeable and experienced. This approach was perceived as creating a confidential and trusting environment, conducive to listening, sharing, learning and collaboration.

The responsive nature of both networks to ‘our needs’ and concerns raised by members in terms of a ‘communally negotiated’ (Wenger 1998) agenda has emerged as part of the model of the networks and this has undoubtedly become embedded in the culture and shared practice over the years, not just at meetings but also with funding applications and the implementation of new initiatives. As observed under community, this has contributed to strong sense of ownership of the networks or ‘networked agency’ (Hadfield and Chapman 2009, p. 6; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 b, p. 768).

A further key element of the model of the networks that has become embedded in their practice or processes and interactions, is their collaborative nature. OSCAILT participants highlighted the ways in which the network has become a forum to problem solve and bounce ideas off others, to come up with ‘a plan of action’ (OSCPT59) on topical issues, create a ‘united voice’ for schools involved and foster school to school collaboration. The PLUS network was perceived as a collaborative response to the issues in DEIS schools, supporting interaction between schools i.e., League of Legends, creating a space for dialogue MIC lecturers about DEIS and other electives and collaborate on funding proposals.

A multi-agency approach was specifically identified in the OSCAILT model and is also evident in PLUS, which has also become embedded in their culture and practice. This was discussed with relation to social capital and will be explored in greater detail under Boundary and Landscape of Practice.

Over the years, the practice of both networks has included a balance between ‘joint activities’ that have contributed to their success i.e., meetings, and the production of ‘documents or tools’ (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 39), meeting minutes, information documents for schools and resource publications for schools.

10.6.5. Learning and Identity

The social learning theory underpinning CoPs emphasises learning through social participation, nurturing relationships and shared purpose of activity (Aubrey and Fuller 2016). The previous section on the three elements of CoPs surmises how each of those aspects are palpable in PLUS and OSCAILT. Wenger (1998, p. 86) asserts that learning in CoPs is a ‘shared history of learning’ that can be characterised by continuity and discontinuity, learning in practice and practice as an emergent structure. Let us now

consider each of these aspects to illuminate how the learning that takes place in the TED networks is akin to that of CoPs.

'Discontinuity' has been experienced in the networks as membership changed or as their purpose evolved. In turn, this impacted on the shared practice of each network, as well as the 'repertoire of resources'. Such changes lead to what Wenger (1998, p. 88) terms 'generational discontinuities' and these are significant opportunities for learning, as well as reinvention and transformation of practice. At various points the membership of both networks changed and at the time of data collection there was a period of transition in OSCAILT for example, when four principals retired and new principals were appointed. At this juncture, those who were more recent members, became 'relative old timers' (ibid) and their perspectives influenced the direction of the network, as well as the participation of newer members. As one participant observed, the network had to 'start from a different base again' (OSCFL10).

After the data collection phase, in March 2020 as the discussion was being drafted, the impact of the spread of COVID-19 globally was a significant transition for the population at large, which impacted on the practice of both networks. As they moved online through the Zoom platform, meetings became more frequent due to the unfolding nature of the crisis and the focus became sharing of practice and peer support during a very turbulent time for schools and families. Such 'discontinuity' led to a complete transformation of practice overnight, learning about things members might never have imagined and doing things in completely different ways, illustrating perfectly Wenger's (1998) assertion that learning is dynamic, unfolding and multidimensional, as well as a process of engagement and participation.

Such 'discontinuity' is paralleled by 'continuity' (Wenger 1998), in this case in the organisation supporting the network at the time of COVID-19 and relative stability of membership and participation in both networks in the period leading up to the crisis. This 'engagement in practice' (ibid) prevented a complete breakdown. Earlier sections highlighted how the coordination function by TED/MIC has contributed to continuity of the networks over a twenty year period.

The elements of discontinuity and continuity highlight the evolving nature of learning in CoPs that gives them an 'emergent structure' and 'life cycles' (Wenger 1998, p. 96). These life cycles are clearly evident in both networks. For Wenger (ibid), they involve a continual process of 'negotiation of meaning' by CoP members that lends resilience to

their practice. A particular ‘generational discontinuity’ evident in the OSCAILT case study report contributing to learning in CoPs is that of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). As membership changed in OSCAILT at different points, those who were more recent members talked about how they initially sat, observed and listened to the discussion and sharing of practice, with one participant indicating it was about two years before they contributed verbally. Here we see the newer members on the ‘periphery’ (Wenger 1998) of the CoP. While taking up the role of DEIS principal gave them sufficient legitimacy to become a potential member, as Benzie (2005) observes, the move to more intensive and then full participation is a gradual process. Newer participants also described how longer serving members mentored them and modelled the culture i.e., openness, honesty and sharing, within the network. Regular interaction with more experienced peers gave them access to competence, through information, support and guidance, illustrating Wenger’s (1998) assertion that practice evolves as competence is shared with new generations and newcomers learn from old-timers. Newcomers recognised the very ‘knowledgeable practitioners’ (OSCPT35) in OSCAILT and this was perceived as helping newer principals to develop their leadership skills.

Over the years, both PLUS and OSCAILT have been a forum for acquisition and creation of knowledge relevant to members’ roles and for the member schools. They have been the source of more formal learning opportunities such as curricular inputs at PLUS meetings and workshops for OSCAILT principals or to wider staff in schools via PLUS. The networks are also an important source of informal ‘hidden’ (OSCPT100) learning or ‘knowledge deployment’ (Pyrko et al. 2019, p.489) for members on information and guidance about school policies, support services or programmes and initiatives. This type of learning was cited as important in both networks because of the pace of change in schools and as observed ‘the goalposts change all the time’ (OSCPT56) and ‘school life is so busy that it’s constantly changing’ (PLUSPT79).

The networks have become a ‘sounding board’ (Wenger et al. 2002; Boersma et al. 2010) for advice and feedback on different problems and situations or initiatives in schools. In this sense, they reflect Pyrko et al.’s (2017 and 2019) concept of ‘thinking together’, whereby tacit, personal knowledge about real life issues is indirectly shared and made more explicit through discussion and exploration of these issues, similar to Stoll’s (2010, p. 475) dialogic ‘learning conversations’. This type of learning was perceived by one OSCAILT participant as ‘refining’ of the experiences of other principals and schools by

‘reaching into each other’s schools all the time, taking the best from them’ (OSCPT56). This was a source of confidence to ‘push your boundaries’ (OSCPT56). For others, it was instrumental in their motivation for participation in the network as it ‘adds huge value’ to their work and members ‘miss out on so much’ (OSCPT35) by not attending.

Over the years, both networks have also been a source of knowledge creation for the DEIS schools involved and the wider education sector. The case study reports detail various research reports and initiatives implemented in network schools in response to needs identified by schools themselves. The OSCAILT network has also collated information on particular issues e.g., mental health and wellbeing services, diversity of student population, which have been circulated within the network and disseminated to relevant government agencies.

Wenger’s social learning theory conceives of learning as ‘an experience of an identity’ and ‘process of becoming’ (1998, p. 215) as members negotiate ‘ways of being a person’ in the context of their practice. Upon review of the PLUS and OSCAILT case study reports and network members perceptions of their roles (section 7.9) it is remarkably apparent that the networks are fundamentally concerned with what it means for members to either be a principal, HSCL or class teacher in a DEIS school. This is the core of their business and thus, Wenger’s conception of identity is deeply rooted in both networks and intertwined with their domain, community and practice. In both networks, every aspect of the community from the ‘communally negotiated’ agenda that responds to the needs and concerns of members, to the invitation of guest speakers on topics of interest, to the opportunities for discussion, interaction and relationship building, to the creation of a ‘safe space’ conducive to ‘thinking together’ (Pyrko et al. 2017 and 2019), founded on respect and trust, is focused on:

- 1) The domain of members in terms of supporting DEIS schools through building shared competence for members to fulfil their roles, and;
- 2) Their practice, in recognition of the common foundation of knowledge they share, exploration of new knowledge relevant to their roles, the ‘shared repertoire’ (Wenger 1998) they have developed and ‘mini-culture’ (ibid) of how they operate.

In this way, as CoPs, they have become a platform for a process of identity formation for members on the basis of shared experience (Printy 2008) with those who ‘are walking the

walk' (OSCPT35) and play an important role in the development of their professional identity (Hadfield and Chapman 2009).

For OSCAILT, this has contributed to the development of the identity of members as school leaders as they participate and engage with fellow DEIS principals and negotiate what it means 'be' in such a 'demanding' role and to hold the level of responsibility where 'everyone's problem is the principals problem' (OSCPT92). This 'negotiation' (Wenger 1998) occurs through the sharing of experiences, 'letting it all hang out' (OSCPT56), asking questions of each other, raising issues of concern, being able to 'unload', problem solving, seeking advice and feedback from each other in a 'caring' (OSCPT15) non-judgemental space.

For both newer and longer serving members, the learning that takes place through the negotiation of experiences with others can be conceived of as the 'formation of an identity' (Wenger 1998, p. 96). Through legitimate peripheral participation 'newbies' have gained access to the competence of longer serving members that has helped them to get to grips with their new leadership role when they felt 'overwhelmed' (OSCPT57) or 'in the trenches' (OSCPT100). For those more established in the role of DEIS principal, the network helps to sustain them in their leadership role through peer support, camaraderie, solidarity, reassurance and shared understanding and as a result supports not only their professional growth but their sense of wellbeing, as explored in section 10.7.3 below.

Similarly, participation, engagement and learning in the PLUS network can be viewed as a process of identity formation for the HSCLs and class teachers involved. Participants referenced the ethos of the HSCL scheme in the individual interviews, which is founded on the principles of networking and building relationship and this parallels the philosophy of PLUS centred on opportunities for interaction, discussion, sharing experiences and building relationships. The commonality of school context and the desire to reduce isolation in teaching and reach out to those outside the immediate microcosm of the classroom to 'break the cycle' (PLSUPT13) and share experiences has become the basis for the 'negotiation of experiences' (Wenger 1998). Through participation in PLUS, members have opportunities to chat informally, to 'make links' with each other and external agencies that support them in their role, to learn about different initiatives or 'anything that's working well within schools' (PLUSPT27), to listen, to problem solve and to have 'face to face' interaction and feedback with MIC staff involved in delivering

electives in DEIS schools, in an environment that is ‘discrete’ and ‘safe’. This engagement and ‘negotiation’ contributes to the ‘social formation’ (Pyrko et al. 2017, p. 391) of members as staff in DEIS schools in a manner that supports them in their everyday practice. For HSCLs, who are ‘the eyes and ears’ (PLUSPT13) of the principal in the community, this engagement and negotiation enhances their competence (Wenger 1998) directly through learning pertinent to their role and in their remit to make connections with the wider community to support children in the areas of attendance, progression and retention and to support parents with their children’s learning. For class teachers, it is a welcome opportunity to connect with others in a role where there is ‘little opportunity to share experiences’ (PLUSPT30). As with the OSCAILT network, the peer support experienced in PLUS was also cited as enhancing wellbeing as well as professional growth, both of which contribute to the ‘shaping of an identity’ (Wenger 1998, p. 149) and coming to terms with what it means for members to be in their respective roles. This ‘social formation’ (Pyrko et al. 2017, p. 391) can also be viewed as ‘transformative’ in that learning is not merely centred on acquisition of knowledge but also creating spaces where ‘new ways of knowing can be realised (Wenger 1998, p. 215).

The process of identity formation (Printy 2008) in OSCAILT also encompassed a shared identity amongst members that is recognised beyond the network itself, in the broader Landscape of Practice. Participants acknowledged that the network has become a ‘voice’ for DEIS principals that holds weight and that has helped to advocate on behalf of DEIS schools as discussed in section under social capital. Similarly, in PLUS, a shared sense of identity extended beyond the members themselves to a ‘common voice’ (PLUSFGPT24) for DEIS schools.

10.6.6. Boundaries and Landscape of Practice

Wenger’s concept of boundaries in CoPs and LoP resonated strongly with the research findings about PLUS and OSCAILT. The capacity of the networks to create connections that enabled learning and new insights to take place and for members to access outside agencies permeated participants’ accounts across focus groups and individual interviews. Connections between members i.e., bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) and connections with other stakeholders on the ‘boundary periphery’ (Wenger 2010 and 1998) via bridging social capital (Putnam 2000) and the implications of this have been considered in detail under the discussion of how social capital is developed through the networks.

From the perspective of CoPs, these connections are not just important due to the insularity of teaching and schools but have, as Wenger argued (1998, p. 125) provided learning opportunities and new insights for members as the competence, experience and perspectives of different communities tend to diverge. This resonates with the literature on networks for professional learning and the need for teachers to access a more diverse knowledge base (Stoll 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2015; Fullan 2019; Brown and Flood 2020).

For both networks a feedback loop or ‘double-loop learning’ (Kools and Stoll 2016, p.21) was identified as being formed through the creation of connections between members, other stakeholders and support agencies. In OSCAILT, this was perceived as ‘mutually beneficial’ as it enabled other ‘big players’ to learn about the ‘reality on the ground’ (OSCPT55) for DEIS schools and to become more aware of the concerns of DEIS schools and for schools to ‘tap into’ (OSCPT51) expertise, avail of support and programmes. In PLUS, it was also identified as an opportunity for schools to feedback to the college about the TED initiatives and the electives delivered in DEIS schools. Boundaries can also be a source of tension or conflict (Wenger 2010), and tension between some individual schools was recognised by participants as evidenced in the expression of competition between ‘neighbouring’ schools for enrolments in OSCAILT or for resources as identified in PLUS.

Through the lens of CoPs, the network facilitators can be viewed as ‘brokers’. Indeed, the description of OSCAILT facilitators as being good at ‘communicating a message and drawing all the strands and ideas together’ (OSCPT20) was akin to Wenger’s (1998, p. 109 and 2010, p. 127) definition of a broker i.e., enabling coordination, making connections across CoPs and introducing elements of practice from one CoP into another. We also see evidence in the case study reports and under the practice section above, that the network facilitators establish a climate of trust, draw together different types of information, provide shared focus to discussion and align and interpret experience (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015), echoing the literature on leadership and coordination of school networks (Azorín et al. 2020). Wenger (1998) also contends that individuals can participate in more than one CoP simultaneously, span boundaries and bring practice from one community to another and we see this illustrated in participants accounts of disseminating what they have learned in PLUS or OSCAILT with colleagues in their school or in another group such as the HSCL cluster.

10.6.7. Considering Proposition Two in relation to the literature

The findings from this research add to the extant literature on school networks and CoPs by demonstrating how they can co-exist on the basis of the correlation between the CoP domain and the purpose of the networks and how the CoP model can be applied to understand the informal learning (Teaching Council 2016; Evans 2019; OECD 2020), knowledge creation and sharing that takes place in school networks categorised as teacher professional learning and support networks (Azorín 2020). In contrast, research and literature on PLNs (Brown and Flood 2019; Brown and Flood 2020) and teacher social networks often adopt a structural perspective on the types of connections that lead to TPL and improved student outcomes or innovation (Pil and Leana 2009; Daly 2010; Lima 2010; Moolenaar and Slegars 2010; Moolenaar 2012; Coburn et al. 2013; Bridwell-Mitchell and Cooc 2016) or research on school networks focuses on tentative evidence on the links between improved teacher quality and impact on student outcomes (Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín and Muijs 2017). This research, however, illustrates how connections and building of relationships between CoP or network members develops the domain, culture and practice of the group, leads to informal learning relevant to the roles of those working in DEIS schools, legitimate peripheral participation, the sharing of tacit and explicit knowledge and ultimately the development of professional capital that enhances the capacity of staff in DEIS schools to do their job. As such, it extends the literature on the processes and interactions involved in teacher professional learning and support networks as well as that on informal TPL.

The discussion on how the networks also function as CoPs reveals conflicting views in the literature on the transformative capacity of TPL, effective school networks, and that of CoPs. The literature on school networks, PLCs and PLNs specify collaborative inquiry and reflective practice (Mulford 2010; Stoll 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Brown and Flood 2019 & 2020) to improve teacher quality, content knowledge and instructional practice for the diffusion of innovation, elements that are not features of the PLUS or OSCAILT models. In CoPs, learning ‘as the experience of an identity’, a ‘process of becoming’ (Wenger 1998, p. 215) and ‘social formation’ (Pyrko et al. 2019, p. 390) of members is conceived of as transformative in and of itself, as are the ‘emergent structure’ and lifecycles of the CoP. Similarly, Evans (2019) advocates for recognition of the importance of informal TPL for practitioners in its own right as an alternative to that which prioritises effectiveness of teacher learning activity related to student learning

outcomes. However, under the models of CPD identified by Kennedy (2005; 2014) neither these particular school networks nor CoPs would be categorised as transformative as they do not fall within the collaborative professional inquiry models. This begs the question, to what extent is learning in the PLUS and OSCAILT transformative for members, for schools and for students? According to Wenger's assertion, learning in PLUS and OSCAILT is transformative at the individual level in developing members' professional identity, supporting them to engage in their roles in DEIS schools and developing professional capital and capacity (Stoll 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). This does not necessarily lead to capacity building and transformation in learning at school or system level (Stoll 2010) and in the absence of collaborative inquiry in the model of the networks, the findings do not show evidence that that this learning is transformative for schools and students in the manner of emancipatory or liberatory education (Freire 1970; Apple 2013; Lynch 2019) for example, as discussed in Chapter Five. That said, the networks could be regarded as supporting teachers in DEIS schools to challenge the 'doxas' of the profession (Lynch 2019, p. 530) and interrupt the politics of recognition and redistribution (Apple 2013, p. 165) and as referenced above, there is some evidence that OSCAILT in particular has created alignment for system level change (see 10.5.3) . The homogenous nature of both networks, the lack of strategic focus on collaborative inquiry and reflective practice and the exclusionary aspect limit capacity for transformational learning, and highlights the danger that the networks are maintaining the status quo and circulating existing practice as opposed to introducing new and innovative practice (Jewson 2007; Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Brown and Flood 2020). However, as many have pointed out (Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo 2016; Azorín 2020), the evidence base regarding the impact of school networks focused on improving student outcomes is underdeveloped and 'remains thin' (Azorín 2020, p. 108). Additionally, professional development that demonstrates characteristics found to be effective in improving student outcomes does not always lead to same (Boeskens et al. 2020) so adopting a more strategic focus in this regard would not necessarily equate to improved student outcomes.

10.7. Proposition 3 – The networks support key policy areas for DEIS schools including wellbeing, DEIS plans and School Self-Evaluation

10.7.1. How the networks support wellbeing in schools

The literature review section on wellbeing established that TPL in the form of professional support networks and PLCs are an important strategy to support teacher wellbeing (Owen 2016; McCallum et al. 2017; Cann 2019). Essentially, these professional learning opportunities can enhance competency and self-efficacy of teachers through bonding social capital, as discussed above, through the connections and relationships established between members, the sharing of experience and information, advice and peer support. This section will explore how the PLUS and OSCAILT networks support the wellbeing of individual members based on the findings presented in the case study reports. Additionally, this section argues that both networks have supported whole school wellbeing over the years, particularly through the development of relationships and partnerships at the local community level, or bridging social capital and also by responding to issues and concerns of members as they have arisen over time.

10.7.2. How the networks support whole school wellbeing

The ecological approach to wellbeing outlined in Chapter Two (Bronfenbrenner 1979; O'Brien and O'Shea 2017; Government of Ireland 2019) recognises the significance of schools adopting a holistic approach to wellbeing in order to support positive academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development of children (Government of Ireland 2019). Such an approach acknowledges the impact of the wider family, community and societal context of children's lives on their wellbeing as well the various protective factors inherent in school life that can promote positive wellbeing in children. The original aim of OSCAILT emerged from the need for greater support for families in Limerick, including 'teaching/psychological support' and recommendation that schools be supported to provide 'a comprehensive range of services' both in and after school time (FitzGerald 2007, p. 6). Participants emphasised the focus of the network on achieving 'best outcomes for children' and the 'holistic' approach to caring for the whole school community and the 'mental health' of the wider community. While PLUS participants did not explicitly express concern for wellbeing as part of the mission or purpose of the network, they did emphasise the focus on specific concerns of DEIS schools and addressing issues of inequality. In recent years, the representatives are primarily HSCLs

and as the focus of their work is building partnerships with parents and the community, my personal observation is that this has influenced the nature of discussion and sharing of practice.

A review of the breadth of agenda items and guest speakers at both network meetings over twenty years (Appendices 15 & 18) reveals that a concern for the wellbeing of the wider school community has long been intrinsic to both, ever before wellbeing was even a term in Irish educational discourse or became a discrete strand of School Self-Evaluation in 2019. At different stages, OSCAILT network meetings have had guest speakers on child protection, various support services available to children and families or referral systems for services and mindfulness for teachers and children. Similarly, we can see that PLUS has also had guest speakers on various support services for children and families and organised workshops for schools on the impact of parental trauma on children, mindfulness and principal self-care. Such a breadth of topics and discussion items as well as the various intervention initiatives that grew from concerns identified by both networks indicates that both networks acknowledge the ‘multidimensional’ and ‘complex’ nature of wellbeing (O’Brien and O’Shea 2017; Cann 2019; Government of Ireland 2019; Nohilly and Tynan 2019; Viac and Fraser 2020).

A further way in which the networks have supported whole school wellbeing is through the development of bridging social capital and section 10.5.2 above clearly details how the networks support the schools and members involved to make connections and build relationships with the wider school community in order to meet their aims and leverage support for the schools involved. Such efforts may not always have been explicitly designed to foster whole school wellbeing by developing relationships and partnerships with other stakeholders (Government of Ireland 2019), although I would argue that at times they have. Nonetheless, it is evident from the contextual chapter and the case study reports that they have fundamentally been rooted in an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner 1979; O’Brien and O’Shea 2017; Government of Ireland 2019) to children and families and a strong desire for them to ‘flourish’ academically, socially, emotionally and physically, to ‘realise their potential’, to build resilience to cope with stress or adversity in their lives and for them to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to their school and their community (NCCA 2017; O’Brien and O’Shea 2017; Government of Ireland 2019).

10.7.3. How the networks support wellbeing of individual network members

Analysis of the case study reports indicates that the networks support the individual occupational wellbeing (Viac and Fraser 2020) of network members. Firstly, it is evident that the networks positively contribute to the key dimensions of teacher occupational wellbeing as set out in the OECD framework on teacher wellbeing i.e., cognitive, subjective, physical and mental, and social (Viac and Fraser 2020). The detailed discussion above on bonding social capital, the development of professional capital and learning in the networks from the perspective of CoPs, clearly illustrates that the networks help to build competency of members to fulfil their roles through a social process of learning founded on exchange and interaction of resources in the form of ‘insight and experience’ (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, p. 93), information, advice, best practice problem solving and so forth. The fostering and development of competency through ‘thinking together’ (Pyrko et al. 2017 and 2019) or dialogic ‘learning conversations’ (Stoll 2010, p. 475) supports the ‘cognitive dimension’ of members’ wellbeing by enhancing their skills and abilities to effectively fulfil their roles in the form of knowledge, problem solving and capacity to make professional judgements and decisions (Viac and Fraser 2020) or their professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) also enhances competency, particularly in OSCAILT, when the leadership skills and knowledge of newer principals are enhanced through access to the competence of longer serving members or ‘old timers’ (ibid). This dimension also encompasses members’ sense of self-efficacy, which Cann (2019) asserts supports positive teacher wellbeing along with a positive sense of identity. OSCAILT participants cited learning from others as a source of reassurance and confidence in their own skills and capacity and as motivational in trying new strategies and approaches. Additionally, for newer principals, the network helped to change their outlook when they felt ‘overwhelmed’ (OSCPT57) or ‘in the trenches’ (OSCPT100) and helped them to ‘feel level again’ (OSCPT15). Viewing the networks from the perspective of CoPs and exploring learning as the ‘shaping of an identity’ (Wenger 1998) or social formation (Pyrko et al. 2019, p. 390) enables us to see the contribution that the networks make regarding the self-efficacy and identity of members as they navigate what it means to ‘be’ in their roles in the context of their practice, on the basis of sharing experiences.

The OSCAILT case study report specifically discusses members’ perceptions of the positive impact of the networks in relation to the ‘physical and mental’ dimension of

wellbeing, with some participants identifying the benefits for their ‘mental health’ to deal with the ‘stressful’ nature of the DEIS principal role and isolation they can feel as the leader of a school facing challenging circumstances. Indeed, some participants highlighted the importance of maintaining their own wellbeing in order to support the wellbeing of the whole school. Similarly, HSCLs in the PLUS network spoke of the role that the network plays for them in terms of peer support in the absence of formal supervision in their roles and the variety of complex social issues they encounter in their job. This brings us to the ‘social dimension’ of teacher wellbeing, and the importance of relationships and the ‘quality and depth of social interactions’ (Viac and Fraser 2020, p. 27) that PLUS and OSCAILT members experience with each other as delineated under propositions one and two. Affirmative and supportive relationships with colleagues, as expressed by the research participants, have been found to have a positive association with teacher wellbeing and to enhance social capital (ibid).

Secondly, the networks can be viewed in accordance with the OECD Framework on teacher wellbeing (Viac and Fraser 2020) as enhancing the ‘job resources’ of members in the form of both professional learning opportunities and social support. Such ‘job resources’ are identified by Viac and Fraser (2020, p.33) as conditions at both system and school level that are associated with teacher’s occupational wellbeing. Cann (2019) and McCallum et al.’s (2017) reviews of factors that support and enable teacher wellbeing also identify teacher learning, particularly in supportive contexts and actively building professional support networks as key strategies. The PLUS and OSCAILT case study reports and the first two propositions above are replete with examples of how the networks have provided a variety of formal and informal professional learning opportunities for members and how the ‘relational’ aspect of bonding social capital is an important source of social support for members in the form of peer support, reassurance, solidarity, camaraderie and collegiality. Professional learning in the networks, underpinned by the social learning theory of CoPs (Wenger 1998) and bonding social capital (Putnam 2020), reveals that social participation, a sense of shared purpose, mutual engagement, sharing of experiences, connecting meaningfully to the to the knowledge of others, negotiation of meaning and identity, and nurturing relationships as set forth in Wenger (1998) helps to reduce isolation by building trust, creating safe spaces and breaking down barriers of ‘solo practice’ (Bryk 2015, p. 469).

10.7.4. The networks support DEIS plans and School Self-Evaluation

Chapter Two identifies key policy areas that the TED networks support including School Self-Evaluation and DEIS planning for the purpose of the same. The case study reports and propositions that the networks enhance social capital and professional learning through CoPs indicate that PLUS and OSCAILT both support Teaching and Learning as set out in the quality framework of the SSE Guidelines (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a& b) and accompanying LAOS Frameworks (DoE Inspectorate 2016 c&d) and that OSCAILT specifically supports Leadership and Management. They do so by providing a forum for members to network, engage in reflection and dialogue, ‘thinking together’ (Pyrko et al. 2017 and 2019) and share best practice. Adopting the perspective of schools as ‘dynamic learning organisations’, the SSE Guidelines and LAOS Frameworks advise that ‘professional reflection’ between teachers is a valuable source of gathering evidence for SSE, as are collaborative practices among teachers. The LAOS Framework aims to promote professional development of teachers and school leaders at all levels of the system, involving various stakeholders such as the DoE support agencies and third level institutions. The regular sharing of practice between network members about ‘what works’ in their schools, or otherwise, is a key mechanism through which ‘professional reflection’ about the same takes place. In both networks members regularly share information and experience of the various programmes and initiatives that are delivered in their schools under the DEIS programme or by support agencies. These initiatives support key actions under the DEIS plans, for example in the areas of literacy, numeracy, partnership with parents and partnership with others. Additionally, both networks provide professional learning opportunities for members, with OSCAILT supporting the development of leadership capacity of DEIS principals. The following sections discuss the ways in which the networks support the quality framework for SSE in more detail.

10.7.5. How PLUS and OSCAILT support Teaching and Learning in DEIS schools

The PLUS and OSCAILT case study reports and propositions one and two are replete with examples of how the networks support Teaching and Learning under the School Self-Evaluation Guidelines (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b) and a review of all four domains indicates the networks contribute across all as Table 43 demonstrates, highlighting the specific strands that the networks broadly support.

In terms of 1) Learner Outcomes, the TED initiatives delivered via PLUS i.e., the MIC Children’s Choir, Studio Classroom and League of Legends Soccer Tournament, were

cited by participants as not only meeting ‘the objectives of the curriculum’ (PLUSPT13) and being welcomed by teachers for their ‘educational’ (PLUSPT78) focus but also ‘ticking the boxes’ (PLUSPT13) because children enjoy them. These initiatives can therefore be viewed as enabling pupils to enjoy learning and motivating them to learn. Indeed, feedback about the League of Legends Soccer Tournament in particular indicates that it is used as a motivation or ‘carrot’ for children to engage in learning towards the end of the school year. Furthermore, access to the facilities and resources of the MIC campus such as the Lime Tree Theatre for Choir rehearsals and performance, Tailteann Sports Complex for the League of Legends, the Art Studio for the Studio Classroom or visiting the college for Science Week and access to equipment for the LEGO Education elective creates opportunities that can motivate students and make learning enjoyable.

The PLUS activities can also be viewed as supporting 2) Learner experiences, by creating opportunities for children to ‘develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning’ (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b, p. 17), as feedback reveals that visits to the MIC campus were perceived as supporting children’s aspirations for third level through positive experiences of a third level campus and greater knowledge of third level opportunities. As a result, these initiatives were also cited as directly supporting the PLUS schools in the implementation of their DEIS plans, as part of the SSE process, in the areas of attendance, retention and progression because in addition to supporting third level aspirations, they provide educational opportunities children may not otherwise have had, they support learning ‘outside of the classroom’ (PLUSPT79) and incentivise students to engage with learning.

A review of PLUS agenda items, guest speakers and workshops for school staffs, reveals that the network has supported 3) Teacher’s individual practice, specifically regarding teacher subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and classroom management and knowledge of ‘teaching approaches appropriate to the learning objectives and to pupil’s learning needs’ (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b, p. 17). The PLUS network had a specific focus on the primary curriculum over the years and on behaviour management in the early years, as evidenced in the development of the WTP directly in response to issues raised at the network (Lyons et al. 2006). Various curricular inputs have been given by lecturers in MIC at network meetings over the twenty year period and workshops have been organised for school staff for example, on literacy, oral language development and Special Education Needs. The placement of B.Ed. students participating in elective modules in DEIS schools i.e., Teaching in a DEIS school and LEGO Education elective,

was perceived by research participants as bringing expertise, skills and new teaching methodologies into classrooms. For example, the LEGO Education elective was cited as supporting STEM through the teaching of coding, which more recently has included a CPD element for class teachers involved. The flexibility of the Teaching in a DEIS school elective students was perceived as supporting learning in the classroom through one to one and small group support for children in a variety of curricular areas, including literacy and numeracy, depending on the needs of the children or the teacher.

Additionally, two important ‘offshoots’ of OSCAILT in recent years have been the EDNIP and TEAL initiatives which grew directly out of issues raised at network meetings. Both of these directly support teaching and learning in the DEIS schools by responding to the changing cultural and linguistic diversity (Higgins et al. 2020) and by supporting teachers to respond to the needs of learners through a variety of ways such as CPD, a Community of Practice for teachers involved in TEAL and whole staff inputs as part of EDNIP. EDNIP has also implemented a number of in school and out of school activities with a curricular focus as well as furnished schools involved with a wide variety of multilingual and intercultural resources.

Finally, with regards to 4) Teachers’ collective/collaborative practice, it is clearly evident that the networks provide opportunities for members to ‘value and engage in professional development and professional collaboration’ (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b, p. 17), that PLUS and OSCAILT network activity creates learning opportunities for pupils ‘across and beyond the curriculum’ (ibid). Additionally, the perspective of the networks as providing informal and formal learning opportunities across school staff, and as CoPs for the network representatives, can be viewed as building whole staff capacity by sharing their expertise.

Table 44. Teaching and Learning Domains and Standards supported by PLUS and OSCAILT

Domains	Standards
Learner outcomes	<p>Pupils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>enjoy their learning, are motivated to learn, and expect to achieve as learners</i> • have the necessary knowledge and skills to understand themselves and their relationships • demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the primary curriculum • achieve the stated learning objectives for the term and year
Learner experiences	<p>Pupils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities • grow as learners through respectful interactions and experiences that are challenging and supportive • reflect on their progress as learners and develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning • <i>experience opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning</i>
Teachers' individual practice	<p>The teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>has the requisite subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and classroom management skills</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selects and uses planning, preparation and assessment practices that progress pupils' learning • <i>selects and uses teaching approaches appropriate to the learning objectives and to pupils' learning needs</i> • responds to individual learning needs and differentiates teaching and learning activities as necessary
<p>Teachers' collective / collaborative practice</p>	<p>Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>value and engage in professional development and professional collaboration</i> • <i>work together to devise learning opportunities for pupils across and beyond the curriculum</i> • collectively develop and implement consistent and dependable formative and summative assessment practices • <i>contribute to building whole-staff capacity by sharing their expertise</i>

(DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b, p. 17)

10.7.6. How OSCAILT supports Leadership and Management in DEIS schools

The evolution of OSCAILT into a principal support network has supported Leadership and Management in DEIS schools, as set out in the Quality Framework for Primary schools in the School Self-Evaluation Guidelines (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b), through the creation of a forum in which members can access information, share experiences and advice about various aspects of their leadership role and develop their leadership capacity.

A review of Leadership and Management under the SSE guidelines very quickly reveals that OSCAILT contributes across all the domains and a number of broad standards contained therein. Table 44 highlights the specific standards.

Under 1) Leading Teaching and Learning, the case study reports and propositions detailed above have clearly established that both networks ‘foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each pupil’ (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b, p. 17).

In terms of 2) Managing the Organisation, a review of the agenda items and guest speakers (Appendix 18) shows that the network facilitated inputs and discussion at various stages about the ‘human, physical and financial resources’ (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b, p. 17) of schools. Participants emphasised that these inputs and discussion have always been identified through dialogue and reflection and grounded in the needs, interests and priorities of OSCAILT members. OSCAILT has also supported the DEIS schools involved to advocate and raise concerns about ‘human, physical and financial resources’ required to meet the needs of their students with relevant government departments and agencies. Additionally, discussion and sharing of practice at meetings has, as participants’ accounts demonstrate, helped them as school leaders to ‘manage challenging and complex situations’ (ibid) as evidenced in discussions for example about Child Protection policy or managing the changing demographics and cultural and linguistic diversity in schools.

OSCAILT has also facilitated discussion and organised CPD for principals on DEIS Action planning, thereby contributing to 3) Leading School Development and principals’ remit to lead the process of self-evaluation. In the words of one participant, the network has ‘added value’ (OSCPT35) to and supported the schools with the ‘key pillars’ of their DEIS plans and it is indisputable from the previous discussion and the case study reports that the ‘multi-agency’ approach of OSCAILT has played an instrumental role in building and maintaining relationships with schools and the wider community in Limerick or the Landscape of Practice (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015). From the early days of a sense of ‘suspicion’ held by some of the motives of the DoE in setting up the forum to support the Dormant Accounts initiative, to members moving out of their silos and looking beyond local competition for enrolments to the shared purpose of attaining ‘best outcomes’ for children across all the schools, the network has undoubtedly enhanced relationships at

community and school to school level through bonding social capital and at the meso level through bridging social capital and the enhancement of relationships with key educational stakeholders and support agencies. The original Dormant Accounts initiative also played an important role in developing relationships with parents and opening the schools involved to the wider community (OSCAILT 2013b). From then, OSCAILT evolved to ‘respond to the evolving needs of the school and changes in education’ (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b, p. 17) and developments over the years such as EDNIP and TEAL, which are direct responses to changing demographics in OSCAILT schools, indicate that the network continues to support schools and principals to respond to the same.

With regard to the final item of 4) Developing Leadership Capacity, this discussion chapter has clearly outlined the role that the network has played not only in building a professional network with other DEIS school leaders, but also through the development of a CoP which enhances their professional learning in both formal and informal ways, a forum for members to ‘critique their practice as leaders’ (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b, p. 17) and ‘develop their understanding of effective and sustainable leadership’ (ibid). The social support that helps to decrease isolation and deal with stress in the leadership role and professional learning opportunities provided in the network not only enhances members’ wellbeing, they also enhance leadership capacity through ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) and the skills and knowledge that members garner through the social learning process and participation in a CoP. Newer DEIS principals reported that they greatly benefited from the same and there was a recognition by participants of the need for support for leaders of DEIS schools as the principal role can be more challenging due to the impact of the complex nature of social issues experienced by many families in the surrounding community.

Table 45. Leadership and Management Domains and Standards supported by OSCAILT

Domains	Standards
<p>Leading learning and teaching</p>	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment • <i>foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each pupil/student</i> • manage the planning and implementation of the curriculum • foster teacher professional development that enriches teachers’ and pupils’/students’ learning
<p>Managing the organisation</p>	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish an orderly, secure and healthy learning environment, and maintain it through effective communication • <i>manage the school’s human, physical and financial resources so as to create and maintain a learning organisation</i> • <i>manage challenging and complex situations in a manner that demonstrates equality, fairness and justice</i> • develop and implement a system to promote professional responsibility and accountability

<p>Leading school development</p>	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicate the guiding vision for the school and lead its realisation • <i>lead the school's engagement in a continuous process of self-evaluation</i> • <i>build and maintain relationships with parents, with other schools, and with the wider community</i> • <i>manage, lead and mediate change to respond to the evolving needs of the school and to changes in education</i>
<p>Developing leadership capacity</p>	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>critique their practice as leaders and develop their understanding of effective and sustainable leadership</i> • empower staff to take on and carry out leadership roles • promote and facilitate the development of pupil/student voice, pupil/student participation, and pupil/student leadership • <i>build professional networks with other school leaders</i>

(DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b, p. 17)

10.7.7. Considering Proposition Three in relation to the literature

The literature on teacher wellbeing tends to focus on student teacher relationships and the impact on student achievement or teacher stress and burnout (McCallum et al. 2017; Cann 2019; Viac and Fraser 2020). The potential of more formalised TPL through PLCs is recognised as supporting changes in teachers' beliefs and practices (Owen 2016; McCallum et al. 2017) as well as supporting wellbeing. In comparison, the focus in this research on the relational and the processes and interactions of the two networks extends the literature on how teacher professional learning and support networks and CoPs can support individual teacher wellbeing through a more informal, social process of learning that builds social and professional capital to enhance capacity and self-efficacy. The knowledge base on the wellbeing of staff in DEIS schools is extended by providing insight to the professional support and wellbeing needs of HSCLs and DEIS principals as they grapple with the impact of the myriad of intractable social issues that are a direct result of the societal and economic inequity outlined in Chapter Five, including increasing diversity, a further area in which there is a lacuna nationally in terms of the literature (O'Sullivan et al. 2019). In terms of whole school wellbeing, the findings add to the literature on the potential of school networks to build social capital to link DEIS schools with multiple stakeholders to develop partnerships and harness external supports, as per the Wellbeing Framework (2019).

While the findings indicate that the networks support these DEIS schools with key policy areas highlighted, this is done in a responsive versus strategic manner. These findings further differ from the extant literature on school networks with regards to the explicit measurement of impact (Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín 2020; Azorín et al. 2020), a feature that is not prevalent in the PLUS and OSCAILT model and operation. While this is related to their classification and purpose, the discussion on the role these networks play in supporting key policy areas does raise the issue of whether the networks could be more strategic in how they support same i.e., should there be more explicit aims and objectives regarding the way in which the networks support individual and whole school wellbeing, teaching and learning and leadership in the DEIS schools involved and how outcomes for children and staff might be measured? Or as to how the networks might potentially encourage change at school or systemic level through a more nuanced understanding of inequality that analyses a diverse range of outcomes, not just achievement (Lynch and Baker 2005) and adopts a transformative or liberatory approach (Freire 1970; Apple 2013; Lynch 2019)? Or, should they, as Evans (2019) advocates, be

recognised for the valuable role they play in the informal and implicit learning of members related to their professional roles? Ultimately, this is a decision for network members to make, and this will be considered in relation to the implications and recommendations made in Chapter Eleven.

10.8. Proposition 4 - There are challenges to networking and limitations to PLUS and OSCAILT

The literature review discusses various challenges of participating in schools networks and CoPs and the downside of social capital. The importance of questioning a benevolent portrayal of networks and CoPs and presenting a more rigorous and judicious analysis is emphasised throughout (McLaughlin et al. 2004; Cox 2005; O'Brien et al. 2006; Hughes et al. 2007; Lima 2010). To this end, as detailed in 6.9.2, participants were specifically asked about the challenges of networking and these have been outlined in the case study reports. However, responses were primarily related to the role of network members as principal in OSCAILT or HSCL and class teacher in PLUS and the difficulty of leaving the school to attend meetings due to the 'cut and thrust' (OSCPT100) of school life. For a principal, attendance at a meeting could entail a whole morning out of the school building and they often may not be able to leave the building on a given day if an issue arises. For HSCLs, being available for a parent took primacy, and they may have other duties or even training to attend. For class teachers, it is even more difficult, and dependent on another member of staff being able to fill in for them. Participants did not recount any limitations of the networks, and as such the discussion draws on the literature, as well as the review of the mission and aims of the networks in the case study reports, to discuss same.

Exclusion is a particular shortcoming of social capital and restricting membership to a particular role i.e., DEIS principal, HSCL or class teacher, excludes the voices and perspectives of those who do not participate i.e., children, parents and other school staff, prevents them from benefitting from the various advantages of social capital arising from the networks, leads to a greater degree of homogeneity in network membership and can create power imbalances (Baron et al. 2000; Brown and Lauder 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002; Kwon and Adler 2014). The teaching principal role at primary level was clearly identified as a 'missing voice and a missing experience' (OSCPT36) in the OSCAILT network. Participation of post-primary schools was also identified as a challenge, but it was recognised that in Limerick, they had a very strong network of their own under the

National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals. Unfortunately, I was unable to secure an interview with a teaching primary principal, presumably due to their workload and lack of availability and only managed to interview one post-primary principal. In both networks, participants recognised that attendance and participation was critical to ensure sustainability and longevity. This raises the issue of whether the networks should entail voluntary participation or an element of coercion (Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a). It was suggested by participants in relation to PLUS that only schools who participate in the network should be able to participate in the TED initiatives and PLUS activity. OSCAILT network facilitators were clear that they could not ‘force’ participants to attend meetings. Chapman and Hadfield (2010 a) caution against employing a coercive approach to school networks as it can result in reduced likelihood of sustainability beyond incentives or inducement. Others advise against ‘contrived collegiality’ in which teachers are forced by educational administrators to participate in collaborative activity (Hargreaves 1994; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Hargreaves and O’ Connor 2018; Hargreaves 2019). The literature on CoPs also refutes a ‘managerialist’ commodification of social learning theory (Cox 2005; Hughes et al. 2007) into a ‘top down’ approach advocating instead, as do Hargreaves and O’ Connor (2018), for more collaborative approaches, involving professional dialogue and reflection. Broadening membership i.e., including deputy principals in OSCAILT or other school staff in PLUS, might help to garner greater participation in meetings.

While there was a strong sense of cohesion within each network, a gap highlighted by PLUS participants was a lack of interaction and cohesion between the two networks. Despite an overlap of 12 primary schools, they were perceived as ‘two separate entities’ (PLUSPT78), and potential for greater dialogue between the two was highlighted. It was felt that greater interaction would be beneficial so that primary HSCLs and principals would have a greater understanding of each other’s perspectives. This would support Lima’s (2010) claim that networks comprised solely of school leaders tend to adopt a more ‘managerial perspective’ to teaching and learning. While a ‘principals only’ network for a specific group of schools i.e., DEIS Band 1 primary and DEIS post-primary in Limerick city only, has without doubt had many benefits in terms of enhancing social capital and professional learning, it does reinforce issues of exclusivity (Lieberman 1999; Lima 2010) as raised above and creates a narrow focus on the issues and concerns of principals and of those schools. As the DoE was still a member of the OSCAILT network until after the data collection period, the schools involved had a direct link to the regional

office that other DEIS and non-DEIS schools may not have had as well as a direct link with MIC. This becomes problematic if perceived by those who are not involved as enhancing access to or monopolising resources (Lima 2010) or other benefits associated with social capital i.e., information, influence and solidarity (Adler and Kwon 2002). Similarly, in PLUS, that HSCLs primarily represented schools was perceived as creating a narrow focus on their role to the exclusion of other members of school staff and a broader focus on teaching and learning echoing Lima's (2010, p. 17) assertion that 'tightly knit' networks run the risk of becoming too 'insular' or lead to 'groupthink'.

Issues of exclusivity highlight other potential challenges for the PLUS and OSCAILT networks. While not mentioned in participants' accounts, the literature on networks and CoPs highlights the challenge of whether they can lead to innovative practice or merely transmission of existing practice (Jewson 2007) and the need to maintain connection to the knowledge base of other stakeholders to avoid the 'echo chamber' and regurgitation of outdated ideas and practice (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). It is clear from the findings that the networks are responsive to the issues and concerns of members and have developed innovative responses to the same. However, a lack of diversity in membership of both networks in terms of school representative, as identified in the challenges for PLUS with a perceived over-representation of HSCLs, or indeed other stakeholders from the school community, limits diffusion of more innovative practice. This is a weakness of school networks, CoPs and PLNs recognised in the literature (Jewson 2007; Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Brown and Flood 2020). The homogenous nature of membership and the absence of collaborative inquiry and reflective practice in the PLUS and OSCAILT models increases the risk of reinforcing the status quo (ibid) rather than changing or transforming practice and also limits capacity to create systemic change (Stoll 2010).

As mentioned above, sustainability of the networks into the future was raised as a challenge with both PLUS and OSCAILT participants expressing concern that low attendance by some could potentially have a negative effect. OSCAILT participants in particular highlighted retirements at the time of data collection as a potential challenge if new principals were not committed and expressed fear that unless all DEIS principals were involved, the network would 'lose its effect' (OSCPT55) in terms of advocacy. After data collection was completed, the DoE withdrew as a member of the network in December 2019. While the network has been very active since, the impact on sustainability into the future remains unclear as does the impact on the relationship

established with the DoE due to the temporal nature of social capital (Baron et al. 2000; Kwon and Adler 2014). Finally, the possibility for a potential breach of trust was emphasised as a challenge for OSCAILT, indicating that while it can take a long time to build trust, it could potentially be undermined very quickly (Baron et al. 2000).

10.8.1. Considering Proposition Four in relation to the literature

The challenges and limitations of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks are clearly consistent with the literature on social capital, school networks and CoPs. Where these findings refute or differ from the literature is that although there are gaps in relation to the identified features of effective networks, i.e., collaborative inquiry and reflective practice, focus on student learning outcomes, and partnerships with children, parents and wider school community (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín and Muijs 2017), and questions over the transformative potential of the networks in relation to their mission and aims, they are effective as teacher professional learning and support networks (Azorín 2020). Therefore, they extend the literature on the models and processes and interactions involved in same. Despite their limitations, the case reports provide some evidence of positive outcomes and benefits for individual members, schools, children, parents and school staff. The findings suggest that there is scope for the networks to be more strategic in terms of their aims and mission and in the measurement of impact and that there are gaps, particularly regarding the perspectives, experiences and participation of children, parents and other school staff and these will be considered under the implications in Chapter Eleven.

10.9. Limitations of the research

A key limitation of this research has been that the teaching primary principal voice, experience of and perspective on OSCAILT has not been included in participants' accounts and subsequent analysis and discussion. Similarly, only one post primary principal took part in the interviews. There is, therefore, a gap in the analysis as to why those who are not regular network participants do not participate to the same extent as other members. Given the extent of the benefits of participation as expressed in terms of solidarity, peer support, individual wellbeing, building competency and leadership skills for DEIS contexts, professional learning, making connections with wider education stakeholders and in terms of supporting actions of their DEIS plans and SSE, it would be

very valuable to ascertain the reasons why some principals do not participate and whether they experience similar benefits from other sources, such as the local National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals group for post primary principals, as suggested in the OSCAILT focus group, or the Irish Primary Principals Network, for example, for teaching primary principals. The findings also reveal a gap in the perspectives of children, parents, staff and the wider school community in relation to PLUS and OSCAILT activity and section 6.2 in the methodology addresses same regarding the focus of the research.

The original research design proposed to conduct observations of PLUS and OSCAILT network meetings, however permission was not granted for the same. Such observations would have served to compliment and triangulate (Robson 2011) the accounts of participants about their experiences of the networks, particularly regarding group dynamics and relationships and permitted the inclusion of vignettes of typical meetings to illustrate how the networks function in practice as CoPs or how bonding social capital is developed through interactions at meetings. Observations would also have provided greater insight into any tensions and conflicts between network members which were referenced in some of the individual interviews, and which I personally have witnessed in practice over the years, and would have added to the literature on interactions in networks of schools and CoPs.

The lengthy timeframe over which the data was collected resulted in attrition of research participants between the interviews and survey as there was some change in network representatives, and therefore possibly different perspectives. However, given the rich detail and depth of data collected in the focus groups and individual interviews, in addition to the layers of rigorous and systematic analysis of the data conducted (see Chapter Six), the propositions outlined in this chapter are well grounded in the data and research findings.

Methodologically, the main limitation of the research approach i.e., qualitative case study, is that of generalisation and extrapolation of the findings, conclusions and recommendations (Stake 1995; Punch 2009; Yin 2009; Robson 2011) beyond the two cases in question to the wider population of DEIS schools and collaborative initiatives in the form of networks or clusters in which they participate. However, given that the approach was instrumental (Stake 1995), I would argue that the unique nature of these networks and the dearth of research on networking and collaboration between DEIS

schools nationally, the insights, ‘naturalistic generalizations’ (Stake 1995) and ‘analytic generalization’ (Yin 2009) gained from this research will be highly relevant and beneficial in the wider context. Researcher bias is a further limitation for qualitative case study research and in order to address the same, I have outlined my own position vis-à-vis the networks in Chapter One (section 1.6), discussed insider research and bias in detail in the methodology (section 6.9.2), addressed any arising ethical considerations and outlined the steps that were taken to reduce my personal bias (section 6.11). .

10.10. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research findings with specific reference to the literature on policy, practice and theory as delineated in the literature review chapters and Conceptual Framework. A detailed analysis of the two case study reports as presented in the format of key elements in the analysis of school networks, from the vantage point of social capital theory, CoPs and policy on wellbeing and School Self-Evaluation, revealed four main propositions about how the PLUS and OSCAILT networks support the DEIS schools involved. It is evident from the discussion that the networks support the schools by enhancing bonding, bridging and linking social capital through a process of social learning that builds relationships and connections between members and with other key stakeholders. The networks also function as CoPs and the Conceptual Framework (section 10.3) has mapped the key elements of the networks onto the domain, community and practice of CoPs to illustrate that they can, as Farnsworth et al. 2016 argue, coexist as structures. As CoPs, the networks enhance professional learning, growth and development of members as well as supporting individual wellbeing of members through the ‘job resources’ (Viac and Fraser 2020) of social support and professional learning. The networks also promote whole school wellbeing through bridging social capital, a key element of the various wellbeing policy documents, as well as supporting schools with the actions of their DEIS plans and the domains and standards of School Self-Evaluation, as per the Inspectorate guidelines (DoE Inspectorate 2016 a&b). The discussion adopts a judicious approach to the networks, considering also the challenges as expressed by participants themselves and challenges when considered in relation to the literature. Finally, the limitations of the study have also been considered in the final section.

Chapter 11 - Conclusion and Recommendations

11.1. Introduction

The final chapter reflects on and summarises the key findings of this research, drawing conclusions about the same in relation to the research questions. The second section outlines the original contribution this research makes to the body of knowledge on school networks and finally, implications and recommendations for practice, policy and further research are discussed.

11.2. Summary of key findings and conclusions from the research in relation to the research questions

This research set out to understand how the two networks of DEIS schools facilitated by the TED Project i.e., PLUS and OSCAILT, support the schools involved. The research approach adopted to best answer these questions was instrumental case study (Stake 1995) involving focus groups, individual interviews, a survey and documentary analysis. A thorough analysis of the data included exploration of the challenges and limitations of the two networks to present a multidimensional account rather than representing them as unilaterally benign entities. The following section will synthesise the findings highlighting the conclusions in relation to the specific research questions (see section 1.5.4).

11.2.1. Development of the networks and sustainability

Firstly, this research was concerned with the development of the networks over time, how they grew, built commitment to a shared purpose and what helped to sustain them over a twenty year period.

It is evident from the findings and discussion that the networks display both properties of school networks (Lieberman 1999; Church et al. 2002; Hopkins 2003; Kerr et al. 2003; McLaughlin et al. 2004; Lieberman and Grolnick 2005; Katz et al. 2008; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a & b; Lima 2010; Muijs et al. 2011; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín and Muijs 2017) and Communities of Practice (Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002; Printy 2008; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner

2015; Pyrko et al. 2017 and 2019) as presented in the Conceptual Framework (section 10.3).

Networks and CoPs can adapt and evolve over time (Wenger 1998; Hadfield and Chapman 2009) and the changes experienced by both networks have been documented in Chapter Seven. Learning in CoPs is related to their ‘emergent structure’ which gives them life cycles as ‘stabilising’ and ‘destabilising’ events occur (Wenger 1998, p. 96). Stabilising events sustain the CoP despite fluctuation in the domain, community or practice. The continuous coordination and facilitation of the networks by the TED Project has created stability and contributed to the longevity of both despite various ‘destabilising’ events such as the end of the DA funding for OSCAILT, significant changes in membership due to retirements or amalgamations or indeed, the impact of COVID-19 in 2020. These events can be significant opportunities for learning, reinvention or transformation of practice (Wenger 1998) as illustrated by COVID-19 when there was a complete transformation of practice by moving activity online in response to the crisis.

The continuity in facilitation has also contributed to building a shared sense of purpose and commitment to the ‘communally negotiated agenda’ (Wenger 1998, p. 78). This ‘coordination process’ (Azorín et al. 2020, p. 114) involves brokering relationships and resources, creating space for interaction, learning and collaboration and alignment between different institutional goals. The ‘deliberate leadership’ (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p. 15) approach adopted and ‘flat’ power structures evident in PLUS and OSCAILT, with emphasis on responding to needs and interests of members has built commitment to the shared purpose and a strong sense of ‘networked agency’ (Hadfield and Chapman 2009, p. 6; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 b, p.768) because the purpose of each network is deeply rooted in and responsive to the predominant concerns of members as clearly illustrated by participants’ accounts. The ‘initial stock of trust’ (Muijs et al. 2011, p. 22) built through each network has contributed to their sustainability, with the relationships established between MIC and the primary schools in PLUS facilitating the development of relationships at the outset of OSCAILT.

The challenges identified by participants, the gaps in the network models in relation to the literature on effective schools networks i.e., partnership with students, parents, school staff and the wider community, collaborative inquiry and reflective practice and measurement of impact, and limitations of the networks as discussed under 10.8 and 10.9

i.e., exclusion of stakeholders outside of current representatives and subsequent homogenous nature of membership of PLUS and OSCAILT, are potential threats to sustainability of the networks into the future and are therefore considered under the implications and recommendations of this research (11.4).

11.2.2. Understanding the features, attributes, form, function, operation and role of the networks

Understanding the features and attributes of the networks, including their form, function and role, how they operate, the structures and processes involved and network dynamics, was the focus of the second research question. The Conceptual Framework (Appendix 1 and section 10.3) draws on the literature on school networks and CoPs (see 11.2.1.) to illustrate how PLUS and OSCAILT can be categorised as both and maps the overlap between them to develop the model of these networks. In addition, elements of the model that emerged inductively from participants' accounts i.e., background and context and the multi-agency approach are considered, along with social capital and how it is developed in the networks. The Conceptual Framework draws on social theory to demonstrate the importance of support for DEIS schools due to complex, deep seated issues that children, families and staff in DEIS schools face arising from societal and economic inequity and in light of the social and cultural reproduction of inequality in education. This Conceptual Framework will be of significance for the networks going forward in terms of supporting their ongoing development. The insight provided by the internal and external view of social capital development (Adler and Kwon 2002) in the networks, as well as the role that they play in supporting individual members and schools collectively within the Landscape of Practice will help to guide practice by highlighting areas that may need attention as well as aspects that can be further developed e.g., the participation and inclusion of perspectives of children, parents and wider school staff in the operation of the networks.

Synthesised with the research findings presented in the thesis, Chapter Ten examines the challenges to networking experienced in PLUS and OSCAILT and sets out three core propositions that summarise the role they have played in supporting members and DEIS schools over the years. Clearly the purpose of the networks varies from school networks purely focused on improving teaching, learning and student outcomes. Rather, they are more akin to networks for teacher professional learning and support (Azorín 2020) as they enhance social capital for members and schools, enhance professional learning,

professional growth and development and leadership skills of members and support key policy areas for DEIS schools namely wellbeing, DEIS plans and School Self-Evaluation. The conclusions in relation to each of these will be addressed here with reference to the specific research questions.

11.2.3. The significance of connection in the networks

Connection was at the heart of the third research question which sought a greater understanding of how connected members were to the network, to each other, and to their respective schools. My understanding of connections evolved as the research progressed moving from a 'structural' perspective as per Social Network Theory (Borgatti and Foster 2003; Lima 2010; Scott and Carrington 2011), towards a focus on the nature of connections between individuals and organisations i.e., the relational, and the outcomes of the same. Indeed, the importance participants attached to connections and relationships made via the networks was one of the strongest findings that emerged from the research from an early stage and warranted an exploration of social capital theory in the literature review to provide greater insight into the way in which social capital is built through networking and TPL. What has emerged is that the networks are undoubtedly a platform for the development of relationships and connections with peers and facilitators through bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) and with multiple stakeholders in the Landscape of Practice (Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015) through bridging (Putnam 2000) and linking social capital (Grootaert et al. 2004).

The networks create opportunities for PLUS and OSCAILT members to develop bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) through interaction and the formation of trusting relationships with those in a similar role. Bonding social capital enhances cohesion, cooperation, collaboration and collective action within the networks (Nahapiet and Ghosal 1998; Field 2003; Leana and Pil 2006; Muijs et al. 2011; Slegers et al. 2019). The interactions and exchange of resources (Adler and Kwon 2002; Coburn and Russell 2008) in the form of information, advice, feedback, ideas, best practice, problem solving, guidance, reassurance and support contribute to the development of members' professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012).

While the importance of connections and relationships was anticipated to some extent as a finding in this research, the significance of bonding social capital, formed via peer interaction and support in the 'safe space' of the networks, in supporting network

members' occupational wellbeing in the form of 'job resources' (Viac and Fraser 2020) was less expected. The social process of learning, sharing of 'insight and experience' (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, p .93), 'thinking together' (Pyrko et al. 2017 and 2019), legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) and perspective of learning as 'social formation' (Pyrko et al. 2017, p. 391) and identity formation (Wenger 1998) indicate that the networks build competency and self-efficacy. Additionally, participants relayed the way in which involvement supports their own mental health, with OSCAILT being specifically identified as a positive support in dealing with the 'stressful' nature of the DEIS principal role and PLUS being recognised as an important source of peer support due to the lack of formal supervision for HSCLs in their role. Essentially, the networks support members' occupational wellbeing by providing professional learning opportunities in a supportive context and through the creation of a professional support network (McCallum et al. 2017; Cann 2019).

Bridging social capital (Putnam 2000) is also fostered in the networks through the connections and relationships developed with external stakeholders. This is significant because it helps network members to leverage support and resources and access information and expertise to meet the needs of children and parents in their schools (Adler and Kwon 2002; Leana and Pil 2006) and also creates 'double-loop learning' (Kools and Stoll 2016, p. 21) between staff in stakeholder organisations. Bridging social capital and linking social capital (Grootaert et al. 2004) have played an important role in helping network members to advocate on behalf of their schools as evident in the findings, particularly through the link that OSCAILT had with the local DoE office until 2019. Such advocacy has led to securing funding and the development of various initiatives over the years to support DEIS schools with issues of concern i.e., WTP, FSCEP, EDNIP and TEAL. In tandem with an ecological approach to children and families (Bronfenbrenner 1979; O' Brien and O' Shea 2017; Government of Ireland 2019) and emphasis in the agenda of both networks on issues or guest speakers of relevance to members, bridging social capital has also helped the networks to support the development of whole school wellbeing through the building of relationships and partnerships with relevant stakeholders at the local community level (Government of Ireland 2019).

Arguably a key contribution of the Conceptual Framework for this research is that in addition to illustrating how the networks connect DEIS schools with the wider educational landscape or Landscape of Practice (Wenger-Trayner et. al 2015), it demonstrates how bridging and linking social capital have created links in the centralised

Irish education system between the micro level of what's happening 'on the ground' in DEIS schools, to the meso and macro levels of educational policy thereby by raising awareness of key issues for DEIS schools locally and nationally. Because educational disadvantage is primarily viewed in isolation (Cahill 2015) and as a school based issue in Irish educational policy (Fleming and Hartford 2021) rather than a broader societal concern, DEIS schools desperately need support to raise awareness about the impact of social and economic inequity in their schools and the multidimensional and multidisciplinary interventions required to support children and families with the many challenges they experience. Although DEIS schools receive much needed additional funding from government through the 'positive discrimination' (Weir et al. 2017) of the School Support Programme, they have very limited capacity to raise funds through voluntary contributions from their less affluent parents, a policy which constitutes a reinforcement of existing inequalities in education (Lynch and Crean 2018). Funding for initiatives in DEIS schools is greatly needed and very welcome, but the short term nature of many sources of funding is detrimental to tackling long term endemic inequality. In addition the level of paperwork required is exhausting for DEIS principals who have many challenges to deal with and who are 'constantly trying to make money happen' (OSCPT51) for everything from light and heat in old school buildings, to extra-curricular activities, to therapeutic support for children. In contrast, Irish educational policy continues to favour more affluent and privileged children and parents through the ideology of meritocracy (Drudy and Lynch 1993; Kennedy and Power 2010; Lynch and Crean 2018; Lynch 2019). In short, DEIS schools cannot, nor should they have to, work alone to address the challenges they face.

Rincón-Gallardo (2020) maintains that the appeal of school networks is their capacity to leverage resources and knowledge to improve outcomes for students. This, as illustrated in this research, is achieved by harnessing the power of relationships within the networks (internal perspective) (Adler and Kwon 2002; Leana and Pil 2006) and connections between schools and other stakeholders (external perspective) (ibid). As revealed in this research, the benefits can be experienced at both the level of individual network member i.e., professional learning or peer support, and at the collective level of the network itself i.e., advocacy on behalf of DEIS schools or increased access to resources, illustrating that social capital is both an individual and collective good for the networks (Muijs et al. 2011; Slegers et al. 2019). However, the research findings indicate that the impact for children from these two networks is unclear and highlights gaps in the model of the

networks regarding the perspectives and participation of children, parents and the wider school community and the measurement of impact. While this research was not designed to evaluate, the case study reports reflect on the impact of the networks regarding their mission and aims, showing some evidence that children, parents and other school staff have benefitted from specific initiatives and PLUS network activity. As there has been no formal measurement of impact, apart from research on the specific initiatives detailed in the case reports, there is little evidence that children, parents and other school staff gain directly from the individual and collective social capital and associated benefits harnessed through the networks. This highlights the need to encompass more formal evaluation of initiatives that would include children's learning or other benefits for them, their families and school staff. These gaps will be addressed under the implications and recommendations.

11.2.4. Understanding knowledge creation and sharing in the networks

The way in which knowledge creation and sharing occur within and beyond the networks and what enables this to happen were the focus of the fourth and fifth questions. Social capital theory helped to understand how teachers social connections provide access to resources in the form of information, advice, support and knowledge (Johnson et al. 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Moolenaar et al. 2012; Bridwell-Mitchell and Cooc 2016) that enhances their professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). The literature on school networks and the findings indicated that learning and knowledge creation are integral aspects of the processes and interactions (McLaughlin et al. 2004; Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016) of PLUS and OSCALIT and are enabled by facilitation, openness, the willingness to share and trust. However, Communities of Practice (Wenger 1998) permitted a more nuanced understanding of how knowledge creation and sharing take place. Learning in the networks pivots on the opportunity for members to connect meaningfully and engage with one another about their domain or shared competence (Wenger 1998) in the 'safe space' (ibid, p. 37) of the CoP where relationships of trust are formed. Trust is an essential condition for learning and knowledge creation as members must 'let down their guard', reveal their vulnerabilities and admit they do not know the answer to everything in order to share and learn from one another (Wenger 1998; Bryk and Schneider 2003; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín et al. 2020). This helps to break down the walls of 'solo practice' and in turn reduce isolation (Bryk 2015, p. 469).

Pyrko et al. (2017 and 2019) apply the concept of ‘thinking together’ to elucidate learning in CoPs as members indirectly share tacit knowledge which becomes more explicit through discussion and exploration. Similarly, Stoll (2010, p. 475) adopts the term ‘learning conversations’ to express the sharing of knowledge in this way. Legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) is an important feature of learning in PLUS and OSCAILT. Essentially, newer members gradually become introduced to the culture and practice, moving from the periphery to full membership as older members model and share their practice in addition to their ‘competence’ (Wenger 1998). This research indicates that the role and skill of network facilitators is a key factor in enabling learning and knowledge creation to take place as part of the ‘coordination process’ (Azorín et al. 2020, p. 114) detailed above. It involves creating an atmosphere conducive to sharing and learning, paying attention to the development of relationships and trust, communication, shared focus to discussion, aligning and interpreting experience and, as evident in this research, recognition that competition and at times conflict may exist between schools in the networks (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015; Azorín et al. 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020).

CoPs also illuminate the way that the networks contribute to the professional growth and development and leadership skills of members. At a very practical level, the networks keep members informed and abreast of relevant recent developments (Wenger et al. 2002) through discussion and guest speakers and are a source of guidance, advice and the ‘refining’ (OSCPT56) of each other’s experiences. As such they support development of professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) and TPL that although primarily informal, has also included formal elements, and is also professional, collaborative and external to the school (Teaching Council 2016).

Wenger’s assertion that learning is a ‘process of becoming’ and ‘experience of an identity’ (1998, p. 215) echoes participants accounts of how learning in the ‘safe space’ of the networks on the basis of shared experiences (Printy 2008) has contributed to their competence by enhancing their professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012), their occupational wellbeing (Viac and Fraser 2020) and, therefore, I would argue, their capacity to fulfil their roles and professional identity (Hadfield and Chapman 2009). Arising from these findings, these networks can be considered teacher professional learning and support networks (Azorín 2020) that enhance professional capital of members through a social learning process that can be categorised as informal TPL (Teaching Council 2016; OECD 2020) and that some would argue should be recognised

as significant in its own right for teacher growth and development rather than being deemed inferior to TPL to improve student learning outcomes (Evans 2019).

Proposition three in Chapter Ten discussed the way in which the networks broadly support key policy areas for DEIS schools i.e., whole school wellbeing and the following aspects of School Self-Evaluation (DoE 2016 a & b):

1. Teaching and Learning domains- teacher's individual practice and teacher's collective/collaborative practice and;
2. Specific to OSCAILT - Leadership and Management domains – leading teaching and learning, managing the organisation, leading school development and developing leadership capacity.

This discussion highlights the informal and responsive manner in which the networks provide support in these areas and identifies the potential for more a strategic approach that would involve more specific aims developed by each network regarding the relevant policy areas and measurement of impact for children and school staff that would align with the literature and research on effective school networks (Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). This will be further considered under implications and recommendations.

11.2.5. Changes in thinking and practice for schools and other stakeholders

Finally, question six asks whether the networks contributed to any changes in thinking and practice for the schools and other stakeholders and in what ways.

It is evident from the findings and discussion chapter that participation in PLUS and OSCAILT has led to the development of relationships of trust between individual network members, the schools and organisations involved, particularly as relayed about OSCAILT, when members moved away from their individual 'silos' or direct competition for enrolments in some cases, and started to work more collaboratively towards a common goal of improving outcomes for children. In addition to relationship building, for network facilitators and other stakeholders, this also meant becoming more informed of and more aware of what's happening in DEIS schools via 'double-loop learning' (Kools and Stoll 2016, p. 21), which in turn impacted on their practice.

Greater cohesion and collaboration between the DEIS schools involved around key issues of concern, supported by the development of bonding, bridging and linking social capital, is the most discernible change in practice across the data, from the early years of PLUS when attendance, behaviour and a three year infant cycle were identified as priority issues right through to the development of EDNIP in 2017 and TEAL in 2019 in response to greater cultural and linguistic diversity in the schools. Undoubtedly, each of the aforementioned projects specifically developed by the networks in response to members' concerns resulted in changes in practice within schools and between members. For example, the OSCAILT report (OSCAILT 2013b) found that school cultures were enhanced, that extending school opening hours provided opportunities for staff to build positive relationships with parents, adult learners and the broader community and that opportunities for inter-agency and community collaboration were provided. In addition to improved facilities and equipment, schools were able to offer a variety of activities to all children 'irrespective of family financial circumstances' (ibid, p. 7). Research on EDNIP (Higgins et al. 2020) found that it had a positive impact on school ethos and practice around integration including home/school relationships, and on staff through building their leadership, skills, knowledge and confidence.

Ultimately, the greater cohesion and collaboration between network schools, TED and the DoE (regarding OSCAILT) has enhanced the capacity of network members over the years to come up with innovative responses to complex problems (Rincón-Gallardo 2020). However, the findings also indicate that the homogenous nature of membership and absence of collaborative inquiry and reflective practice as a core element in the design of school networks to effect change in thinking and practice (Mulford 2010; Stoll 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Brown and Flood 2019 & 2020) limits the networks potential and raises concerns that existing practice is continually being circulated or that the 'status quo' is being maintained (Jewson 2007; Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Brown and Flood 2020). Given the nomenclature of the TED Project to 'Transform Education through Dialogue' and the mission of OSCAILT (section 9.5), the mission and aims of PLUS (Appendices 12 and 13) to support DEIS schools and improve and enhance educational outcomes for children, the transformative capacity of the networks regarding TPL and to create school level and systemic change are discussed regarding the propositions in Chapter Ten. As a model of informal TPL, these networks are not deemed transformative by the literature as they do not intentionally incorporate

collaborative inquiry and reflective practice with the expressed aim of enhancing teacher practice to improve student outcomes (Kennedy 2005 and 2014; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). That said, they can be viewed as transformative in the ‘social formation’ (Pyrko et al. 2017, p. 351) of individual network members and development of their professional identity through participation in the networks/CoPs (Wenger 1998; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a&b). Additionally, the role of the networks in supporting members’ occupational wellbeing (Viac and Fraser 2020) highlights their transformative potential with regard to individual teacher and whole school wellbeing. As the NCCA (2017, p. 29) observe, ‘Wellbeing in school starts with staff’. Mechanisms such as PLCs, and I would argue networks, are important means of support for teacher wellbeing (McCallum et al. 2017; Cann 2019; O’Sullivan et al. 2019). This thesis has also argued that OSCAILT in particular has supported staff in DEIS schools to challenge the ‘doxas of their educational trade’ (Lynch 2019, p. 530) by developing ‘networked agency’ (Hadfield and Chapman 2009, p. 6; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 b, p.768) and creating a platform that has connected the concerns of staff on the ground about the impact of inequality in education to those in stakeholders organisations and at policy level through the meso layer in the centralised system where teachers have little voice in or power over the development of educational policy. While the literature on social and cultural reproduction of inequality in education corroborates the limitations of these two networks to challenge inequity, it also highlights from a liberatory and transformative perspective (Freire 1970; Apple 2013; Lynch 2019) what schools and teachers can do to challenge inequalities of class, race, gender and ability that underpin unequal outcomes and ‘interrupt’ the politics of redistribution and representation (Apple 2013, p. 165) and there is scope for the networks to be more intentional in this regard.

11.3. Key contribution of this research to the knowledge base

Internationally, there has been a proliferation of networks in education over the last two decades and much literature has been written on the models, processes and interactions involved (Azorín and Muijs 2017; Azorín 2020; Azorín et al. 2020; Brown and Flood 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020). In the Irish context, this is an original piece of research that has problematized two unique networks theoretically, practically and from a policy perspective rather than taking an instrumental and normative view (Lima 2010) and

developed a Conceptual Framework to understand them. This thesis documents their development and presents the model of each to illustrate how they operate, exploring the impact they have had on the professional learning of members as well as for the DEIS schools involved. The findings from this case study research on the PLUS and OSCAILT networks of DEIS schools in addition to the Conceptual Framework developed to deepen understanding about them, are therefore significant for a number of reasons.

11.3.1. Contribution to theory on school networks and CoPs

In endeavouring to answer the research questions, this research is unique in the literature on school networks and CoPs in the manner in which these two particular networks are problematised conceptually from a variety of theoretical underpinnings. The Conceptual Framework (10.3) draws on literature on Social Theory (Bourdieu 1979; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Drudy and Lynch 1993; Bourdieu 1997; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Lynch and Baker 2005; Kennedy and Power 2010; Lareau 2011; Apple 2013; Apple 2015; Lareau 2015; Lynch and Crean 2018; Lynch 2019), Social Capital (Granovetter 1973; Burt 1992; Bourdieu 1997; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Portes 1998; Lin 1999; Baron et al. 2000; Putnam 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002; Field 2003; Grootaert et al. 2004; Leana and Pil 2006; Kwon and Adler 2014; Lee 2014; Slegers et al. 2019), the social learning theory of Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002; Cox 2005; Benzie 2005; Jewson et al. 2007; Printy 2008; Boersma et al. 2010; Omidvar and Kislov 2014; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015; Aubrey and Riley 2016; Cox and MacDonald 2017; Pyrko et al 2017 and 2019) and the literature on networking and collaboration in education and school networks (Lieberman 1999; Hopkins 2003; Church et al. 2002; Kerr et al. 2003; McLaughlin et al. 2004; Lieberman and Grolnick 2005; Katz et al. 2008; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a & b; Lima 2010; Muijs et al. 2011; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín and Muijs 2017; Azorín 2020; Azorín et al. 2020) to recognise the complexity of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks and match them with conceptual tools that do not, in Lima's words (2010, p. 2), 'oversimplify'. Rather, the Conceptual Framework maps the overlap between networks and CoPs illustrating how they can co-exist and demonstrates how social capital is built internally through bonding social capital and externally through bridging and linking social capital to support DEIS schools in the face of societal and economic inequity and social and cultural reproduction of inequality in education. In doing so, the research captures and analyses the multifaceted nature of the networks and

illuminates the structures, processes and interactions through which the aims of the networks and outcomes from participants' perspectives are realised at the individual level (i.e., professional learning, growth and development of leadership skills and occupation wellbeing of members), and collective level (i.e., mobilising resources and support for DEIS school in a variety of areas, advocacy and raising awareness of the concerns of DEIS schools). The Conceptual Framework also recognises and illuminates the challenges and limitations of these networks theoretically, practically and in terms of policy. This approach will be of benefit to other researchers who wish to situate school networks or indeed, other collaborative professional learning within practice, policy and theory.

11.3.2. Contribution to the evidence base on school networks

In the first instance, to the researcher's knowledge, this is the first piece of research available on networks of DEIS schools in Ireland up to the point that this thesis was submitted in spring 2021 and therefore provides new knowledge nationally about school networks. While a limitation of qualitative and case study research is that generalisation beyond the case is problematic, 'grand generalisations' (Stake 1995) or 'analytic generalisation' (Yin 2009) can be made to other similar contexts. The learning and insight about how these networks of DEIS schools operate, the individual and collective benefits of the same from supporting professional learning and occupational wellbeing of members, to building links with wider stakeholders and leveraging support for DEIS schools, as well as their limitations, will undoubtedly be of benefit to a wide variety of stakeholders nationally and locally including the schools involved, MIC, the DoE, other HEIs, schools and educational and support organisations. Clearly PLUS and OSCAILT are different in nature to networks specifically focused on teaching, learning, improved student outcomes and effective pedagogy but the findings indicate that they embody many of the identified features of effective networks such as developing strong relationships of trust and internal accountability, deliberate leadership and skilled facilitation with flat power structures, frequently interacting and learning inwards, connecting outwards to learn from others, forming new partnerships and securing adequate resources to sustain their work (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p. 10).

As discussed in Chapter Two, school networking is an emerging area of practice and various Irish educational policy documents in recent years have started to promote networking and collaboration amongst schools e.g., the DEIS Plan 2017 (DoE 2017). As

they are likely two of the longest standing networks of DEIS schools in Ireland, the insights from this research about the PLUS and OSCAILT networks and the Conceptual Framework developed to deepen understanding about them, are therefore significant from a policy and practice perspective. The importance of having this evidence base to draw from is directly related to the exponential growth of networking and collaboration internationally over the last twenty years, which (as discussed in Chapter One) has become widespread as a policy for educational change and reform, far more quickly than the evidence about their effectiveness has been developed (Azorín and Muijs 2017; Harris et al. 2018; Azorín 2020; Azorín et al. 2020; Brown and Flood 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020) and as Hargreaves and O' Connor (2018) observe, not all forms of collaboration are equal or desirable. This thesis contributes to the research and knowledge base about the model, processes, interactions, benefits and challenges of school networking and collaboration both in Ireland and internationally. These networks have stood the test of time over a twenty year period and at the time of submission are as strong as ever. This indicates that, despite the limitations identified, they are effective to some degree at meeting the support needs of the DEIS schools arising from social and economic inequity and raising awareness of same, which as discussed in Chapter Five, are exacerbated by existing educational policies, such as the government funding of elite schools and promotion of the ideology of meritocracy (Kennedy and Power 2010; Lynch and Crean 2018; Lynch 2019), that serve to reinforce the social and cultural reproduction of inequality. As such the learning from this research about how the processes and interactions involved in school networks can potentially support DEIS schools to effect systemic change are of significance nationally.

Internationally, this research is significant as it demonstrates the potential for school networks to contribute to building lateral capacity and professional capital for systemic change in centralised education systems, such as that in Ireland, where there are no local or regional education agencies or departments and the middle tier is comprised of clusters of schools (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p. 19). The growth of school networks globally has been motivated by educational reform efforts, influenced by results from large scale assessments, such as PISA and TALIS (OECD 2017; OECD 2019), which promote collaborative TPL in order to raise achievement scores. There is some debate, however, as to whether top-down or bottom-up approaches are more successful, with some claiming that the former can lead to contrived collegiality and others advocating for a combined approach that builds lateral capacity and improves communication between

government departments and school leaders as well as teachers on the ground (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Hargreaves and O' Connor 2018; Harris et al. 2018; Azorín 2020). Such an approach is considered to contribute to systemic and more sustainable change in education systems. The move to more decentralised government systems has also heavily influenced the development of school networks internationally, as has recognition of the complex challenges facing education systems and school leaders in the 21st century and the need to equip teachers with the necessary skills to respond to the same (Stoll 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Fullan 2019; Brown and Flood 2020). Much of the existing evidence base on school networks has emerged from countries with decentralised education systems i.e., the U.K. and North America. While PLUS and OSCAILT grew organically, their development over time indicates that OSCAILT in particular managed to link the priorities of staff on the ground in DEIS schools and those in stakeholder organisations, such as MIC and the DoE, through bridging social capital. The advantage of this lies not only in 'double-loop learning' (Kools and Stoll 2016, p. 21) between stakeholder organisations and capacity to leverage support for DEIS schools but in greater communication 'upwards to the state, and downwards to their local schools and communities' (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016, p.7). This learning and the Conceptual Framework developed in the process, is arguably a key contribution of this research which will be of relevance to other contexts internationally, and nationally, such as the School Excellence Fund – DEIS and those seeking to build leadership capacity in DEIS schools.

11.3.3. Contribution to practice

PLUS and OSCAILT have become an integral element of a 'divergent approach' (Stoll 2010, p. 472) and response to support professional learning of staff in DEIS schools as they endeavour to respond to a myriad of complex social issues arising from social and economic inequity, as outlined in Chapters Five and Seven (section 7.5), including changing demographics and the urgent need for teachers to develop their knowledge, capacity and skills to respond to the same (Schleicer 2016). The schools involved in these networks can be viewed as a microcosm of society and the intractable social issues facing 21st century educators and policymakers (Stoll 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Fullan 2019; Brown and Flood 2020). This 'divergent approach' (Stoll 2010, p. 472) also includes the various initiatives developed over the years directly in response to schools' concerns i.e., WTP, FSCEP, EDNIP and TEAL, as well as the role that each of the

networks play in supporting the professional learning and occupational wellbeing of members, particularly principals and HSCLs, to build capacity to respond to such complexity. As detailed in the Conceptual Framework, the approach also incorporates the capacity of the networks to link the micro level of life in DEIS schools and classrooms to the wider Landscape of Practice (Wenger 1998) and the meso and macro level of educational policy, through bridging social capital (Putnam 2000) to advocate for resources and leverage support for the schools involved. This thesis has documented not only the model and impact of the approach but also developed a Conceptual Framework to further understand the same, contributing to a body of knowledge nationally on initiatives to support DEIS schools (Weir et al. 2005; Smyth et al. 2015; Weir et al. 2017; Weir et al. 2018) and internationally on how networks can support schools in challenging circumstances (Harris 2010; Chapman et al. 2016; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín 2020; Herrera-Pastor et al. 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020).

Finally, this research and the Conceptual Framework diverge from what is already well established in the research on school networks by focusing on the relational and cognitive (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Baron et al. 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002; Lee 2014) rather than the structural (Lima 2010; Daly 2010; Moolenaar and Slegers 2010; Bridwell-Mitchell and Crooc 2014; Bridwell-Mitchell and Crooc 2016; Brown and Flood 2019; Brown and Flood 2020) dimensions of connection in networks. In doing so, they add to the knowledge base on teacher professional learning and support networks (Azorín 2020) and how informal TPL can support the professional identity formation (Wenger 1998; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a&b) and individual wellbeing of members through a process of social learning. Much of the literature on school networks draws on research on larger networking initiatives which are often policy led and focus on issues of effectiveness in terms of professional development and capacity to improve student learning outcomes (Earl et al. 2006; Earl and Katz 2007; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Chapman and Hadfield 2010 a & b; Muijs et al. 2011; Chapman and Muijs 2014; Townsend 2015; Chapman et al. 2018; Chapman 2019; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Azorín and Muijs 2017). The findings from this research are significant because of the insight provided on more organic forms of school networks. The literature base on school networks tends to draw heavily on Professional Learning Communities, Professional Learning Networks or Social Network Analysis (Lieberman 2000; Lieberman and Grolnick 2005; Earl et al. 2006; Earl and Katz 2007; Lima 2010; Mulford

2010; Stoll 2010; Brown and Flood 2019; Brown and Flood 2020) to understand how learning and sharing of information takes place via connections between members. Due to the primacy placed on relationships by participants, this research drew from Communities of Practice (Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002; Printy 2008; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015; Pyrko et al. 2017 and 2019) and social capital to illuminate how the relationships embedded in connections are formed internally and externally (Putnam 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002; Lean and Pil 2006) via the networks in order to leverage resources at the individual and collective level, and the impact of the same including informal TPL.

11.4. Implications of the research and recommendations

There are a number of implications and recommendations arising from this research for practice, policy and further research.

11.4.1. Practice implications and recommendations

11.4.1.1. Supporting participation of network members and other stakeholders

It was apparent from the findings of this research that a key challenge for the DEIS principals and HSCLs in participating in the network is the demanding nature of their roles. How best to facilitate them to attend meetings needs to be given further consideration. Interestingly, since March 2020, all network meetings have moved online and generally attendance is consistent. A dual approach of facilitating meetings online and face to face should be considered as we move to a post-COVID society. Holding meetings in schools, as has been done on occasion, was also cited in the research as a means for members to learn more about other school context. A gap identified through the research was the participation and perspectives of children, parents and school staff in the networks and this should be considered by each network in light of their mission and aims.

11.4.1.2. The importance of ‘skilled facilitation’ and coordination

It is clear from the findings that both networks require a dedicated and skilled facilitator to execute the ‘coordination process’ (Azorín 2020, p. 114) involved in school networks and to ensure sustainability. This is important because of the demanding nature of members’ roles but also because the ‘deliberate leadership’ (Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan

2016, p.15) required to lead ‘effective’ networks involves capacity to deliver on varied and complex tasks such as building relationships and trust, brokering between different stakeholders, facilitating ‘dialogic’ discussion and learning in a ‘safe space’ and developing commitment to a ‘communally negotiated agenda’ (Wenger 1998, p. 78). The role of an ‘independent’ or neutral stakeholder in fulfilling this function has been highlighted as critical to building trust, particularly when school leaders are involved (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016).

11.4.1.3. The voluntary nature of participation

A question about whether participation in PLUS activities should be dependent on the extent of involvement in meetings was mooted in the data collection. This raises the issue of voluntary or coercive participation in networks. The literature would suggest that voluntary participation is preferable (Chapman and Hadfield 2012 a) particularly in networks supported by educational policy to create systemic change, otherwise they run the risk of ‘contrived collegiality’ (Hargreaves 1994; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012).

11.4.1.4. The involvement of the DoE in OSCAILT

Participants’ accounts indicate that having the Department of Education involved in OSCAILT from the outset was a major incentive for them to continue their participation, particularly after the Dormant Accounts funding ceased. The involvement of the Department has also been crucial in terms of building lateral capacity as detailed above, and developing bridging and linking social capital with other important stakeholders. It is difficult to tell at the time of thesis submission what the impact of their withdrawal from OSCAILT in December 2019 will be in the long term, particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic fall out started within a short time of the same. In the context of building lateral capacity systemically, this will also be addressed under policy implications.

11.4.1.5. Greater understanding of participation in OSCAILT

It is clear from the findings that not all the DEIS principals actively participate in the network. Teaching principals in particular have been identified as a ‘missing voice’ and this will be addressed under policy implications. Regarding post-primary principals, a greater understanding of why the majority do not regularly participate would be very beneficial, given that I was only successful in securing an interview with one such

principal for the purpose of the research. The issue of exclusion of other DEIS schools in Limerick should also be considered.

11.4.1.6. The role of PLUS and OSCAILT in supporting wellbeing and SSE

The findings clearly demonstrate that the networks play a role in supporting whole school wellbeing and occupational wellbeing of network members. Although the data was collected prior to COVID-19, it is not possible to separate the thesis findings from current practice at the time of submission, especially as they can inform the same. As an established forum to support whole school and member wellbeing, consideration should be given to maximising this potential to respond to ‘current’ situations on an ongoing basis. The findings indicate that the networks broadly support the schools in Teaching and Learning and Leadership and Management as per the SSE Guidelines and LAOS Framework. The networks should consider whether a more strategic approach with the development of aims and the measurement of impact for children, parents and school staff should be adopted in line with more formalised and effective school networks as per the literature (Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016).

11.4.1.7. Cohesion between PLUS and OSCAILT

Finally, greater cohesion between PLUS and OSCAILT was identified as a gap in practice in this research. The potential for the perspectives of the members of each network to inform the work of each other should be given consideration. The opportunity for PLUS and OSCAILT members to share experiences and knowledge across the boundary periphery within the Landscape of Practice could be facilitated by the TED Project in the role of broker, thereby preventing insularity and creating greater potential for new possibilities, sharing of insights and perspectives, and the diffusion of innovation across both CoPs (Wenger 2010). Greater cohesion between the networks might also involve a review of the aims and mission of the networks, with particular consideration given to a more intentional approach regarding the transformative aspirations of each and critique of current educational policy regarding funding for DEIS schools and the reproduction of inequality in education.

11.4.2. Policy implications and recommendations

11.4.2.1. Teaching principals - the ‘missing voice’

An important finding of this research was the difficulty for teaching principals of engaging in OSCAILT. Given also the findings about the valuable nature of participation in terms of building professional capital and capacity of leaders of DEIS schools and supporting their occupational wellbeing, greater emphasis should be placed in education policy on releasing teaching principals in DEIS schools to engage in networking and collaboration with their peers. Circulars 14/01 (DoE 2001) and 0020/2019 (DoE 2019b) set out the number of days that principals may take as release time in a school year ranging from 18 to 30 depending on school size, with 4 additional days for schools with special classes. This was increased in 2020, under operational supports to schools for reopening, Circular 0045/2020 (DoE 2020), to allow all teaching principals to take one release day per week for 2020/2021 school year. A recommendation arising from this research is that this measure be retained for teaching principals beyond 2021.

11.4.2.2. The importance of involvement of key stakeholders in DEIS school networks

It is evident that the TED Project has been the driving force behind the PLUS and OSCAILT networks, in partnership with the DoE for OSCAILT until the end of 2019. As detailed in Chapter Two, the DEIS Action Plan (DoE 2017 b, p. 30) states that School Excellence Fund – DEIS ‘networking initiatives’ should include ‘partnerships with third level specialists in education and/or industry or community groups’ where appropriate. The literature on networks in education and school networks supports collaboration and partnership with other stakeholders, including students, parents, school staff and the wider school community, (Chapman and Aspin 2003; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016; Harris et al 2018; Azorín 2020) recognising that it can enhance professional learning of teachers, school leaders and other partners alike, help to diffuse innovation, contribute to sustainability, and promote the lateral connections required for systemic change or reform efforts to be effective. Being based in a HEI has facilitated the TED Project to leverage resources from within MIC to support the networks and has also strengthened the engagement between the schools involved and the college. It is also worth noting that policy makers can be partners in school networks, and do so in many contexts internationally. The involvement of the Department of Education Inspectorate in supporting the SEF-DEIS clusters is positive from this perspective, as was the involvement of the Department of Education in OSCAILT until 2019. The literature also highlights the benefit of having an external or neutral facilitator, particularly in the start-

up phase (Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016). While the purpose of this research is not to evaluate, it is worth considering at policy level, and at a practical level for PLUS and OSCAILT, the involvement of students, parents, other school staff and the wider school community, as well as the other key stakeholders from the Landscape of Practice.

11.4.2.3. Supervision for HSCLs

The findings indicate that PLUS is a source of peer support for HSCLs and the focus group member check participants highlighted the importance of the same due to the lack of formal supervision made available to them in their role. A recommendation arising from this research would be that formal supervision is made available to HSCLs to support them to support parents and families.

11.4.2.4. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continual Professional Development (CPD)

Albeit small scale, the surveys with PLUS and OSCAILT members reveal a gap in ITE and CPD for participants in working in collaboration with parents and other educational stakeholders, particularly in ITE. It is evident from the research that a significant part of both the HSCL and DEIS principal role involves engaging with parents and other stakeholders. Training they had received in the same was mainly through HSCL induction or other professional training for principals when they were well established in their teaching careers. This is in keeping with ITE programmes worldwide in which very little time (if any) is devoted to preparing educators to work with parents although there is increased activity and research in this area. This suggests that greater emphasis ought to be placed in ITE on working in partnership and collaboration with parents and other stakeholders to ensure that all new teachers entering schools are aware of how to engage with parents and other stakeholders in order to support children in their classrooms.

11.4.3. Research implications and recommendations

11.4.3.1. Observations of school networks meetings and events

A limitation of this research was that observations of meetings were not feasible. From a research perspective, observations can provide rich and insightful information on dynamics of interactions between members and the nuance of how relationships are formed or trust is built and how pertinent issues for schools are brought to the table,

discussed and negotiated and become part of the ‘communally negotiated agenda’ (Wenger 1998, p.78). Future research on school networks should include observation if feasible and appropriate to further develop the evidence base in particular on the processes and interactions as well as the challenges and limitations involved in school networks.

11.4.3.2. The impact of the PLUS and OSCAILT for the broader school community

The focus of this research has been on the impact for network members and schools as a collective rather than the impact or outcomes for other teachers in the schools involved or for children or parents. A body of research has been conducted on various TED initiatives that grew in response to concerns identified through the networks and this provides a more detailed analysis of the impact of initiatives that arose from the networks for children, parents, teachers and schools (Lyons et al. 2006; Galvin et al. 2009; Higgins et al. 2020). Much of the literature on school networks is concerned with the impact on students’ outcomes as their purpose is to enhance teaching, learning and student outcomes. This research has established that the focus of these networks is different and more related to professional learning and support (Azorín 2020), and while they broadly support teaching and learning activity as discussed in relation to SSE, attempting to ascertain the impact of PLUS and OSCAILT at the level of classrooms or the individual student would be extremely complex and questionable in terms of value. However, all school networks, regardless of purpose, should measure the impact of their practice (Kerr et al. 2003; Hadfield and Chapman 2009; Lima 2010; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan 2016) and section 11.4.1.6 has recommended same.

11.4.3.3. Research on the DEIS principal and HSCL roles

This research did not set out to explicitly explore the role of principal or HSCL of a DEIS school but it has provided some interesting insights nonetheless. While there is some research already available on the HSCL scheme (Ryan 1994; Ryan 1999 and Weir et al. 2018) and Irish principals in general (Darmody and Smyth 2011; Ummanel et al. 2016; Hynes and MacNamara 2019), further research on the HSCL and DEIS principal roles would be invaluable. In particular, research on the following is recommended: the impact of the role of HSCL and DEIS principal on individual wellbeing and how they can be supported in their roles at system level with reference to peer interaction and support, the nature of the role and workload of DEIS principals, the emphasis on supporting parents

and fostering community involvement in both roles, and the professional learning needs of principals and HSCLs in DEIS schools.

11.4.3.4. Leadership of school networks

This research did not explore the leadership of PLUS and OSCAILT networks in depth, partly due to the scope of the research questions and also the nature of my own role as facilitator of PLUS for many years, that of my colleague as facilitator of OSCAILT and an awareness of the socially desirable bias (Bryman 2008; Creswell 2014) inherent in explicitly asking participants to comment in detail on the same in interviews and focus groups. More recent research on school networks has started to examine leadership in networks and the relationship between leadership and professional collaboration (Azorín, Harris and Jones 2020; Rincón-Gallardo 2020). This is an area that should be examined in further research on school networks in Ireland, particularly the type of leadership that can create wider cultural and systemic change in education. The Conceptual Framework developed in this research will be particularly salient in this regard.

11.5. Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter summarised the main findings in relation to the research questions and considered the contribution this thesis makes to the wider body of knowledge on school networks. PLUS and OSCAILT are unique networks of DEIS schools that have grown organically since 1998. The findings from this research indicate that they have made a significant contribution to individual members in terms of professional learning and support, as well as for the DEIS schools involved by enhancing capacity to advocate and leverage support and resources. Documenting the model and outcomes of these networks of DEIS schools, based on the perspectives of members, with reference to the literature on school networks, social capital, CoPs and social theory and reproduction of inequality in education has culminated in a piece of research that is both original in the Irish context and contributes to the literature on school networks internationally. The development of a Conceptual Framework that draws on the practice, policy and theoretical bases of the PLUS and OSCAILT networks will be pertinent in the development of future models of networks of DEIS schools. The implications of and recommendations from the research will be of benefit to the network members as well as to other stakeholders involved in networking and collaboration involving DEIS schools

or that seek to engender systemic change in education policy and practice through the same.

Bibliography

- Adler, P.S. and Kwon, S.-W. (2002) 'Social Capital: Prospects for a New Concept', *The Academy of Management Review*, 27(1), 17-40, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/4134367>.
- Adler, P.S., Kwon, S.-W. and Heckscher, C. (2008) 'Professional Work: The Emergence of Collaborative Community', *Organization Science (Providence, R.I.)*, 19(2), 359-376, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1070.0293>.
- Ainscow, M. (2016) 'Collaboration as a strategy for promoting equity in education: possibilities and barriers', *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1(2), available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JPCCC-12-2015-0013>.
- Andersson, K. and Liljenberg, M. (2020) '“Tell us what, but not how” – Understanding intra-organisational trust among principals and LEA officials in a decentralised school system', *School Leadership & Management*, 1-18, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1832980>.
- Apple, M.W. (2013) *Can education change society?*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Apple, M.W. (2015) 'Reframing the Question of Whether Education Can Change Society', *Educational theory*, 65(3), 299-315, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/edth.12114>
- Archer, P. and Shortt, F. (2003) *Review of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Aubrey, K. and Riley, A. (2016) *Understanding and Using Educational Theories*, Los Angeles: Sage.
- Azorín, C. (2020) 'Leading Networks', *School Leadership & Management*, 40(2-3), 105-110, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1745396>.
- Azorín, C., Harris, A. and Jones, M. (2020) 'Taking a distributed perspective on leading professional learning networks', *School Leadership & Management*, 40(2-3), 111-127, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1647418>.
- Azorín, C.M. and Muijs, D. (2017) 'Networks and collaboration in Spanish education policy', *Educational Research*, 59(3), 273-296, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2017.1341817>.
- Baker, J., Lynch, K., Cantillon, S., Walsh, J. (2004) *Equality: From Theory to Action*, 2nd ed., London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Bandurra, A. (1977) *Social Learning Theory*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Baron, S., Field, J. and Schuller, T. (2000) *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Bassey, M. (1999) *Case Study Research in Educational Settings*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Benzie, D., Mavers, D., Somekh, B. and Ciscernos-Cohernour, E. (2005) 'Communities of Practice' in Somekh, B. and Lewin, C., eds., *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, UK: Sage.
- Boersma, A., ten Dam, G., Volman, M. and Wardekker, W. (2010) "'This baby: it isn't alive.'" Towards a community of learners for vocational orientation', *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(1), 3-25, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411920802642355>.
- Boeskens, L., Nusche, D. and Makito, Y. (2020) *Policies to Support Teachers' Continuing Professional Learning: A Conceptual Framework and Mapping of OECD Data. OECD Education Working Paper No. 235*, Paris: OECD.
- Borgatti, S. and Foster, P. (2003) 'The Network Paradigm in Organizational Research: A Review and Typology', *Journal of Management*, 29(6), 991-1013, available: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0149-2063\(03\)00087-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0149-2063(03)00087-4).
- Borko, H. (2004) 'Professional Development and Teacher Learning: Mapping the Terrain', *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 3-15, available: www.jstor.org/stable/3699979 [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Bourdieu, P. (1979) *Algeria 1960. The disenchantment of the world, the sense of honour, the world reversed*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Practical reason: on the theory of action*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1999) *The logic of practice*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. Bourdieu, P. (1997) 'The Forms of Capital' in Halsey, A. H., Lauder, H., Brown, P. and Stuart Wells, A., eds., *Education: Culture, Economy, and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 46-58.
- Bourdieu, P. and Clough, L.C. (1998) *The state nobility: elite schools in the field of power*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. and Nice, R. (1977) *Outline of a theory of practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1979) *Inheritors: French students and their relation to culture*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1990) *Reproduction in education, society and culture*, London: SAGE Publications, Incorporated
- Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L.J.D. (1992) *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press

- Bourke, R. and Higgins, A. (2016) *Evaluation of the Doodle Families Literacy Programme Pilot*, Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.
- Boylan, M. (2010) 'Ecologies of participation in school classrooms', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(1), 61-70, available: <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.08.005>.
- Bridwell-Mitchell, E.N. (2017) 'Them That's Got: How Tie Formation in Partnership Networks Gives High Schools Differential Access to Social Capital', *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(6), 1221-1255, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0002831217717815>.
- Bridwell-Mitchell, E.N. and Cooc, N. (2016) 'The Ties That Bind How Social Capital Is Forged and Forfeited in Teacher Communities', *Educational Researcher*, 0013189X16632191, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189X16632191>.
- Briscoe, P., Pollock, K., Campbell, C. and Carr-Harris, S. (2016) 'Finding the Sweet Spot: Network Structures and Processes for Increased Knowledge Mobilization', *Brock Education*, 25(1), available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.26522/brocked.v25i1.432>.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, London: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, C. and Flood, J. (2019) *Formalise, Prioritise and Mobilise: How School Leaders Secure the Benefits of Professional Learning Networks*, UK: Emerald Publishing.
- Brown, C. and Flood, J. (2020) 'Conquering the professional learning network labyrinth: what is required from the networked school leader?', *School Leadership & Management*, 40(2-3), 128-145, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1731684>.
- Brown, M., McNamara, G., O'Hara, J. and Shevlin, P. (2019) 'Polycentric inspection: A catalyst for sparking positive interactions in educational networks', *Evaluation*, 26(1), 76-97, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1356389019895031> .
- Brown, P. and Lauder, H. (2000) 'Human Capital, Social Capital and Collective Intelligence' in Baron, S., Field, J. and Schuller, T., eds., *Social Capital Critical Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 226-242.
- Bruner, J. (1960) *The Process of Education*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bryk, A.S. (2015) '2014 AERA Distinguished Lecture: Accelerating How We Learn to Improve', *Educational Researcher*, 44(9), 467-477, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189X15621543> .
- Bryk, A.S. and Schneider, B. (2003) 'Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform', *Educational Leadership*, 60(6), 40 available: <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9212468&site=ehost-live> [accessed 1 March 2021].

- Bryman, A. (2008) *Social Research Methods*, 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burns, T. and Koster, F. (2016) *Governing Education in a Complex World*, Paris: OECD.
- Burt, R. (1992) *Structural Holes: The Social Nature of Competition*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Burt, Ronald S. (2004) 'Structural Holes and Good Ideas', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 110(2), 349-399, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/421787> .
- Cahill, K. (2015) 'Seeing the Wood from the Trees: A Critical Policy Analysis of Intersections between Social Class Inequality and Education in Twenty-first Century Ireland', *International electronic journal of elementary education*, 8(2), 301-316, available at: <https://www-proquest-com.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/docview/1753204936?pq-origsite=summon> [accessed 7 December 2012].
- Calhoun, C.J., LiPuma, E. and Postone, M. (1993) *Bourdieu: critical perspectives*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Campbell, C., Pollock, K., Briscoe, P., Carr-Harris, S. and Tuters, S. (2017) 'Developing a knowledge network for applied education research to mobilise evidence in and for educational practice', *Educational Research (Windsor)*, 59(2), 209-227, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2017.1310364>.
- Cann, R. (2019) *The Importance of Teacher Wellbeing*, New Zealand: Education Hub.
- Castells, M. and Cardoso, G. (2005) *The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy*, Washington DC: John Hopkins Centre for Transatlantic Relations.
- Chapman, C. (2019) 'From hierarchies to networks', *Journal of Educational Administration*, 57(5), 554-570, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JEA-12-2018-0222> .
- Chapman, C., Chestnutt, H., Friel, N., Hall, S. and Lowden, K. (2016) 'Professional capital and collaborative inquiry networks for educational equity and improvement?', *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1(3), 178-197, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JPC-03-2016-0007> .
- Chapman, C. and Fullan, M. (2007) 'Collaboration and partnership for equitable improvement: towards a networked learning system?' *School Leadership & Management*, 27(3), 207-211, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632430701379354> .
- Chapman, C. and Hadfield, M. (2010a) 'Realising the potential of school-based networks', *Educational Research*, 52(3), 309-323, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2010.504066> .
- Chapman, C. and Hadfield, M. (2010b) 'School-Based Networking for Educational Change' in Hargreaves, A., Lieberman, A., Fullan, M. and Hopkins, D., eds.,

- Chapman, C., Lindsay, G., Muijs, D., Harris, A., Arweck, E. and Goodall, J. (2010) 'Governance, leadership, and management in federations of schools', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 21(1), 53-74, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09243450903569734> .
- Chapman, C. and Muijs, D. (2014) 'Does school-to-school collaboration promote school improvement? A study of the impact of school federations on student outcomes', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 25(3), 351-393, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2013.840319>.
- Chapman, J. and Aspin, D. (2003) 'Networks of learning: a new construct for educational provision and a new strategy for reform.' in Davies, B. and West-Burnham, J., eds., *Handbook of Educational Leadership and Management*, London: Pearson Education, 653-659.
- Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*, London: SAGE.
- Charmaz, K. (2017) 'Constructivist grounded theory', *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 299-300, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262612> .
- Church, M., Bitel, M., Armstrong, K., Fernando, P., Gould, H., Joss, S., Marwaha-Diedrich, M., de la Torre, A.L. and Vouhé, C. (2002) *Participation, relationships and dynamic change: new thinking on evaluating the work of international networks*, Development Planning Unit, University College London.
- Coburn, C.E., Mata, W.S. and Choi, L. (2013) 'The Embeddedness of Teachers' Social Networks: Evidence from a Study of Mathematics Reform', *Sociology of Education*, 86(4), 311-342, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0038040713501147> .
- Coburn, C.E. and Russell, J.L. (2008) 'District Policy and Teachers' Social Networks', *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 30(3), 203-235, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0162373708321829> .
- Coburn, C.E. and Russell, J.L. (2017) 'District Policy and Teachers' Social Networks', *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 30(3), 203-235, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0162373708321829> .
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*, 6th ed., London: Routledge.
- Coleman, J. (1997) 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital' in Halsey, A. H., Lauder, H., Brown, P. and Stuart Wells, A., eds., *Education: Culture, Economy and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 80-95.

- Connolly, M., Eddy-Spicer, D., James, C. and Kruse, S. eds. (2018) *The Sage Handbook of School Organization*, Sage Publishing, available: <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/the-sage-handbook-of-school-organization/book256513> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Conway, P.F. (2002) 'Learning in communities of practice: Rethinking teaching and learning in disadvantaged contexts', *Irish Educational Studies*, 21(3), 61-91, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0332331020210308> .
- Courtois, A. (2015) 'Thousands waiting at our gates': moral character, legitimacy and social justice in Irish elite schools', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36 (1), 53-70, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2014.967840>.
- Courtois, A. (2018) *Elite Schooling and Social Inequality. Power and Privilege in Ireland's Top Private Schools*, London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cox, A. (2005) 'What are communities of practice? A comparative review of four seminal works', *Journal of Information Science*, 31(6), 527-540, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0165551505057016> .
- Cox, M.D. and McDonald, M. (2017) 'Faculty Learning Communities and Communities of Practice. Dreamers, Schemers and Seamers.' in McDonald, J. and Cater-Steel, A., eds., *Communities of Practice: Facilitating Social Learning in Higher Education*, Springer, available: <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789811028779> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Creswell, J.W. (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd. ed., London: SAGE.
- Creswell, J.W. (2014) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed., London: SAGE.
- Darmody, M. and Smyth, E. (2011) *Job Satisfaction and Occupational Stress among Primary School Principals*, Dublin: Teaching Council and ESRI.
- Davies, B. and West-Burnham, J. (2003) *Handbook of Educational Leadership and Management*, London: Pearson Education.
- Denzin, N. (2001) *Interpretive Interactionism*, 2nd ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (2005) *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed., USA: SAGE.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, California London: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2000) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed., Thousand Oaks, California London: Sage Publications.

- Department of Children and Youth Affairs, TUSLA and Department of Education and Skills (2019) *Information Booklet for DEIS schools participating in the Home School Community Liaison Scheme*, Dublin: DCYA, TUSLA and DoE.
- Department of Education (2001) *Circular 0014/2001. Release Time for Principal Teachers in Primary Schools*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education (2012) *Circular 0039/2012. Implementation of School Self-Evaluation*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education (2016a) *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*, Dublin: DoE
- Department of Education (2016b) *Circular 0039 /2016: Continuing Implementation of School Self-Evaluation 2016-2020*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education (2016c) *Minister Bruton announces Action Plan for Disadvantaged schools to be developed* [press release], available: <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2016-Press-Releases/PR20162016-06-13.html> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Department of Education (2017a) *Action Plan for Education 2017*, Dublin: DoE
- Department of Education (2017b) *DEIS Plan 2017*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education (2017c) *Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools: 2010 Entry Cohort*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education (2018) *Circular 0016 /2018. Re - engaging with the School Self - Evaluation (SSE) process in primary schools Amendments to requirements of Circular 0039/2016*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education (2019a) *Circular 0016/2019. Home School Community Liaison Scheme: Assignment of Home School Community Liaison Coordinators within DEIS schools*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education (2019b) *Circular 0020/2019. Release Time for Principals Teachers in Primary Schools*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education (2019c) *Circular 0045/2019. Primary Language Curriculum Stages 1-4. Support and Implementation*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education (2020) *Circular 0045/2020. COVID-19 Operational Supports for the Full Return to School*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education, Inspectorate (2009) *Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices in DEIS Schools*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education, Inspectorate (2011) *An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Post-Primary Schools*, Dublin: DoE.

- Department of Education, Inspectorate (2015) *Looking at Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS primary schools*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education, Inspectorate (2016a) *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020 Primary*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education, Inspectorate (2016b) *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020 Post-Primary*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education, Inspectorate (201c) *Looking at Our Schools 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education, Inspectorate (2016 d) *Looking at Our Schools 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*, Dublin: DoE.
- Department of Education, Limerick Education Centre and Mary Immaculate College (2017) *Limerick DEIS Primary Schools Literacy Initiative: Promoting Communities of Effective Practice. Executive Summary*, Dublin: DoE.
- Dhillon, J.K. (2009) 'The role of social capital in sustaining partnership', *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(5), 687-704, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411920802642348> .
- Díaz-Gibson, J., Civís-Zaragoza, M. and Guàrdia-Olmos, J. (2014) 'Strengthening education through collaborative networks: leading the cultural change', *School Leadership & Management*, 34(2), 179-200, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2013.856296> .
- Díaz-Gibson, J., Zaragoza, M.C., Daly, A.J., Mayayo, J.L. and Romaní, J.R. (2016) 'Networked leadership in Educational Collaborative Networks', *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, 45(6), 1040-1059, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1741143216628532> .
- Doyle, G. and Keane, E. (2019) 'Education comes second to surviving': parental perspectives on their child/ren's early school leaving in an area challenged by marginalisation', *Irish Educational Studies*, 38(1), 71-88, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2018.1512888>.
- Drudy, S. and Lynch, K. (1993) *Schools and Society in Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and MacMillan.
- Earl, L. and Katz, S. (2007) 'Leadership in networked learning communities: defining the terrain', *School Leadership & Management*, 27(3), 239-258, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632430701379503> .
- Earl, L., Katz, S., Elgie, S., Jafaar, S.B. and Foster, L. (2006) *How Networked Learning Communities Work, Vol 1*, Aporia Consulting.
- Ehren, M. and Perryman, J. (2018) 'Accountability of school networks: Who is accountable to whom and for what?', *Educational Management Administration*

& *Leadership*, 46(6), 942-959, available:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1741143217717272> .

- Eraut, M. (2004) 'Informal Learning in the Workplace', *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26(2), 26.
- Evans, L. (2014) 'Leadership for professional development and learning: enhancing our understanding of how teachers develop', *Cambridge journal of education*, 44(2), 179-198, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2013.860083>.
- Evans, L. (2019) 'Implicit and informal professional development: what it 'looks like', how it occurs, and why we need to research it', *Professional development in education*, 45(1), 3-16, available:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2018.1441172>.
- Farnsworth, V., Kleanthous, I. and Wenger-Trayner, E. (2016) 'Communities of Practice as a Social Theory of Learning: a Conversation with Etienne Wenger', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 64(2), 139-160, available:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1133799> .
- Field, J. (2003) *Social Capital*, London New York: Routledge.
- Finneran, M. (2001) *Empty Desks*, Limerick: Mary Immaculate College.
- Fitzgerald, J. (2007) *Addressing issues of Social Exclusion in Moyross and other Disadvantaged Areas in Limerick City. Report to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion*, Dublin, available:
<http://www.limerickregeneration.org/MoyrossReptApr07.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Fleming, B. and Harford, J. (2021) 'The DEIS programme as a policy aimed at combating educational disadvantage: fit for purpose?', *Irish educational studies*, 1-19, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2021.1964568> .
- Fleming, J. (2018) 'Recognizing and resolving the challenges of being an insider researcher in work-integrated learning', *International journal of work-integrated learning*, 19(3), 311, available: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1196753> [accessed 7 December 2021].
- Frawley, D. (2014) 'Combating educational disadvantage through early years and primary school investment', *Irish educational studies*, 33(2), 155-171, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2014.920608>.
- Freire, P. (1970 and 1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin.
- Fullan, M. (1995) 'The school as a learning organization: Distant dreams', *Theory Into Practice*, 34(4), 230-235, available:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00405849509543685> .
- Fullan, M. (2006) *Turnaround Leadership*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Fullan, M. (2019) *Nuance: Why Some Leaders Succeed and Others Fail*, USA: Corwin.
- Fuller, A. (2007) 'Critiquing Theories of Learning and Communities of Practice' in Hughes, J., Jewson, N. and Unwin, L., eds., *Communities of Practice: Critical Perspectives*, Routledge, available: <https://www.routledge.com/Communities-of-Practice-Critical-Perspectives/Hughes-Jewson-Unwin/p/book/9780415364744> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Fuller, A., Hodkinson, H., Hodkinson, P. and Unwin, L. (2005) 'Learning as Peripheral Participation in Communities of Practice: A Reassessment of Key Concepts in Workplace Learning', *British Educational Research Journal*, 31(1), 49-68, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0141192052000310029> .
- Galvin, J., Higgins, A. and Mahony, K. (2009) *Family, School, Community Educational Partnership: academic report*, Limerick: Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College.
- Geertz, C. (1993) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, London: Fontana Press.
- Gilleece, L., Neils, S., Fitzgerald, C. and Cosgrove, J. (2020) *Reading, mathematics and science achievement in DEIS schools: Evidence from PISA 2018*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1999) *The discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Government of Ireland (1998) *Education Act*, s. 32.
- Government of Ireland (2019) *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023. Revised October 2019*, DoE.
- Granovetter, M.S. (1973) 'The Strength of Weak Ties', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/225469> .
- Grenfell, M. (2012) *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, 2nd ed., Durham: Acumen.
- Griffin, A. (2016) *Professional Learning, Collaboration and Building Self-Efficacy: A case-study of members' experiences of literacy professional learning communities in an urban DEIS band 1 primary school*, unpublished thesis, M.Ed., Mary Immaculate College.
- Grootaert, C., Narayan, D., Nyhan Jones, V. and Woolcock, W. (2004) *Measuring Social Capital: An Integrated Questionnaire*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- Grootaert, C. and van Bastelaer, T. (2001) *Understanding and Measuring Social Capital: A Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations form the Social Capital Initiative.*, Washington D.C.

- Guskey, T.R. (2000) *Evaluating Professional Development*, Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.
- Hadar, L. and Brody, D. (2010) 'From isolation to symphonic harmony: Building a professional development community among teacher educators', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(8), 1641-1651, available: <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.06.015> .
- Hadfield, M. (2007) 'Co-leaders and middle leaders: the dynamic between leaders and followers in networks of schools', *School Leadership & Management*, 27(3), 259-283, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632430701379552> .
- Hadfield, M. and Chapman, C. (2009) *Leading School-based Networks*, Oxon: Routledge.
- Hadfield, M. and Jopling, M. (2012) 'How might better network theories support school leadership research?' *School Leadership & Management*, 32(2), 109-121, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2012.670115> .
- Hadfield, M., Joplin, M., Noden, C., O' Leary, D. and Stott, A. (2006) *What Does the Existing Knowledge Base Tell Us about the Impact of Networking and Collaboration? A Review of Network-Based Innovations in Education in the UK*, Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
- Halbert, J. and Kaser, L. (2019) *A Focus on Equity and Excellence in Networks of Inquiry*, Queensland: The Queensland Principal.
- Halsey, A.H. (1997) *Education: Culture, Economy, and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hanson, J. (2013) 'Educational developers as researchers: the contribution of insider research to enhancing understanding of role, identity and practice', *Innovations in education and teaching international*, 50(4), 388-398, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2013.806220>.
- Hargreaves, A. (1994) *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers' Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age.*, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (2016) 'The place for professional capital and community', *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1(1), available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-11-2015-0010> .
- Hargreaves, A. (2017) 'Cultures of professional collaboration: their origins and opponents', *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 2(2), 74-85, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-02-2017-0004> .
- Hargreaves, A. (2019) 'Teacher collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations and effects', *Teachers and Teaching*, 25(5), 603-621, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1639499> .

- Hargreaves, A. and Fullan, M. (2012) *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A., Lieberman, A., Fullan, M. and Hopkins, D. (2010) *Second International Handbook of Educational Change*, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Hargreaves, A. and O' Connor, M. (2018) *Collaborative Professionalism: When Teaching Together means Learning for All*, Thousand Oaks California: Corwin.
- Hargreaves, A. and O'Connor, M.T. (2018) 'Solidarity with solidity: The case for collaborative professionalism', *Phi Delta Kappa*, 100(1), 20-24, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0031721718797116> .
- Hargreaves, A., Parsley, D. and Cox, E.K. (2015) 'Designing Rural School Improvement Networks: Aspirations and Actualities', *Peabody Journal of Education*, 90(2), 306-321, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2015.1022391> .
- Hargreaves, A. and Shirley, D. (2009) *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*, Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin.
- Hargreaves, D. (1999) 'The Knowledge-Creating School', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 47(2), 122-144, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8527.00107> .
- Hargreaves, D. (2003) *Education Epidemic: Transforming Secondary Schools through Innovation Networks*, London: Demos.
- Hargreaves, D. (2003) *Working Laterally*, UK: Demos and NCSL.
- Hargreaves, D. (2004) *Learning for Life*, London: Policy Press.
- Hargreaves, D. (2006) *Education Epidemic: Transforming Secondary Schools through Innovation networks*, London: Demos.
- Hargreaves, D. (2011) 'System redesign for system capacity building', *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(6), 685-700, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09578231111174820> .
- Harker, R.K. (1984) 'On Reproduction, habitus and education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 5(2), 117-127, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0142569840050202>.
- Harris, A. (2010) 'Improving Schools in Challenging Contexts' in Hargreaves, A., Lieberman, A., Fullan, M. and Hopkins, D., eds., *Second International Handbook of Educational Change*, London, New York: Springer Science+Business Media B.V, 693-706.

- Harris, A. (2017) 'Disciplined collaboration and inquiry: evaluating the impact of professional learning', *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 2(4), 200-214, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-05-2017-0011> .
- Harris, A., Chapman, C., Muijs, D., Reynolds, D., Campbell, C., Creemers, B., Earl, L., Kyriakides, L., Munoz, G., Stoll, L., Stringfield, S., van Velzen, B. and Weinstein, J. (2013) 'Getting lost in translation? An analysis of the international engagement of practitioners and policy-makers with the educational effectiveness research base', *School Leadership & Management*, 33(1), 3-19, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2012.723622> .
- Harris, A. and Jones, M. (2018) 'Leading schools as learning organizations', *School Leadership & Management*, 38(4), 351-354, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1483553> .
- Harris, A., Jones, M. and Huffman, J.B. eds. (2018) *Teachers Leading Educational Reform: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*, New York: Routledge.
- Hartford, J. and Lee, J. (2018) *Education for all? The legacy of free post-primary education in Ireland*, 1st ed., Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Herrera-Pastor, D., Juárez, J. and Ruiz-Román, C. (2020) 'Collaborative leadership to subvert marginalisation: the workings of a socio-educational network in Los Asperones, Spain', *School Leadership & Management*, 40(2-3), 203-220, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1699525> .
- Higgins, A. and Bourke, R. (2017) *Bedford Row Family Project: Holding the Suffering*, Limerick: Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College, available: <https://www.mic.ul.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/21/BEDFORD%20ROW%20RESEARCH%20REPORT%202017-reduced-compressed.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Higgins, A., Lyne, A., Power, S. and Murphy, M. (2021) *Embracing Diversity Nurturing Integration Programme (EDNIP): Sharing the Story, Evolution, Model and Outcomes of a Research and Intervention Project in 5 DEIS Band 1 primary schools in Limerick 2017-2019*, Limerick: Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College.
- Higher Education Authority (2015) *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019*, Dublin: HEA.
- Higher Education Authority (2018) *Progress on the National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021*, Dublin: HEA.
- hooks, b. (1984) *Feminist Theory: From Margins to Centre*, Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Hopkins, D. (2003) 'Understanding Networks for Innovation in Policy and Practice' in OECD, *Schooling for Tomorrow. Networks of Innovation: Towards New Models of Managing Schools and Systems*, Paris: OECD, 153-161.

- Hord, S.M. and Sommers, W.A. (2008) *Leading professional learning communities: voices from research and practice*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Hourigan, M. and Leavy, A.M. (2019) 'Learning from teaching: pre-service primary teachers' perceived learning from engaging in formal Lesson Study', *Irish Educational Studies*, 38(3), 283-308, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2019.1613252> .
- Hourigan, N., ed. (2011) *Understanding Limerick, Social Exclusion and Change*, Cork: Cork University Press.
- Hughes, J., Jewson, N. and Unwin, L. (2007) *Communities of Practice: Critical Perspectives*, Routledge, available: <https://www.routledge.com/Communities-of-Practice-Critical-Perspectives/Hughes-Jewson-Unwin/p/book/9780415364744> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Humphreys, E., McCafferty, D. and Higgins, A. (2012) *How Are Our Kids? Experiences and Needs of Children and Families in Limerick City with a Particular Emphasis on Limerick's Regeneration Areas*, Limerick: Limerick City Children's Services Committee.
- Jarvis, P. (2004) *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed., London and New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Jewson, N. (2007) 'Cultivating Network Analysis: Rethinking the Concept of 'Community' within 'Communities of Practice' in Hughes, J., Jewson, N. and Unwin, L., eds., *Communities of Practice: Critical Perspectives*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, W. (2012) 'Never Underestimate the Value of Connections: Social Capital's Strength Lies in Expertise, Reciprocity, and Relevance', *The Journal of Staff Development*, 33(1), 38-41, available: <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=73368809&site=ehost-live> [accessed: 1 March 2021].
- Johnson, W., Lustick, D. and Kim, M. (2011) 'Teacher Professional Learning as the Growth of Social Capital', *Current Issues in Education*, 14(3), 1-16, available: <file:///C:/Users/RUTH~1/BOU/AppData/Local/Temp/781-Article%20Text-4365-1-10-20121005-1.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Jones, M. and Harris, A. (2014) 'Principals leading successful organisational change: Building social capital through disciplined professional collaboration', *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 27(3), 473-485, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-07-2013-0116> .
- Kaser, L. and Halbert, J. (2014) 'Creating and Sustaining Inquiry Spaces for Teacher Learning and System Transformation', *European Journal of Education Research, Development and Policy*, 49(2), available: <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/doi/full/10.1111/ejed.12079> [accessed 1 March 2021].

- Katz, S., Earl, L., Jaafar, S.B., Elgie, S., Foster, L., Halbert, J. and Kaser, L. (2008) 'Learning networks of schools: The key enablers of successful knowledge communities', *McGill Journal of Education/Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, 43(2) 111-137.
- Kavanagh, L., Weir, S. and Moran, E. (2017) *The evaluation of DEIS: Monitoring achievement and attitudes among urban primary school pupils from 2007 to 2016. Report to the Department of Education and Skills*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Kellaghan, T. (2001) 'Towards a Definition of Educational Disadvantage', *The Irish Journal of Education*, 32, 3-22.
- Kellaghan, T. (1995) *Educational disadvantage in Ireland*, Dublin: DoE and Combat Poverty Agency.
- Kennedy, A. (2005) 'Models of Continuing Professional Development: a framework for analysis', *Journal of In-Service Education*, 31(2), 235-250, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13674580500200277> .
- Kennedy, A. (2014) 'Understanding Continuing Professional Development: the need for theory to impact on policy and practice', *Professional Development in Education*, 40(5), 668-697, available: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.955122> .
- Kennedy, M. and Power, M. (2010) "The Smokescreen of meritocracy": Elite Education in Ireland and the reproduction of class privilege', *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 8 (2), 26, available: <http://www.jceps.com/wp-content/uploads/PDFs/08-2-08.pdf> [accessed 7 December 2021].
- Kenny, A. (2016) *Communities of Musical Practice*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Kenny, A., Bourke, R. and Ní Chondúin, M. (2016) *All Together Now: A Review of the Mary Immaculate College Children's Choir*, Limerick: Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College, available: <https://www.mic.ul.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/21/All%20Together%20Now%202016.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Kerr, D., Aiston, S., White, K., Holland, M. and Grayson, H. (2003) *Review of Networked Learning Communities*, England: National Foundation for Educational Research.
- King, F. (2014) 'Evaluating the impact of teacher professional development: an evidence-based framework', *Professional Development in Education*, 40(1), 89-111, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2013.823099> .
- King, F. (2019) 'Professional Learning: empowering teachers?', *Professional Development in Education*, 45(2), 169-172, available: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1580849> .

- Kirpitchenko, L. and Voloder, L. (2014) *Insider Research Method: The Significance of Identities in the Field*, London: SAGE Publications, Ltd, available: <https://go.exlibris.link/N1CN3qXM> [accessed 7 December 2021].
- Knowles, M., Holton III, E. and Swanson, R. (2005) *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classis in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 6th ed., Oxford: Elsiver.
- Kools, M. and Stoll, L. (2016) *What Makes a School a Learning Organisation? OECD Education Working Papers No. 137*, Paris: OECD.
- Kwon, S.W. and Adler, P.S. (2014) 'Social Capital: Maturation of a Field of Research', *The Academy of Management Review*, 39(4), 412-422, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/amr.2014.0210> .
- Lareau, A. (2011) *Unequal childhoods: class, race, and family life*, 2nd ed., Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lareau, A. (2015) 'Cultural Knowledge and Social Inequality', *American sociological review*, 80(1), 1-27, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0003122414565814>.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leana, C.R. and Pil, F.K. (2006) 'Social Capital and Organizational Performance: Evidence from Urban Public Schools', *Organization Science*, 17(3), 353-366, available: www.jstor.org/stable/25146039 [accessed 1 March 2021].
- LeCompte, M.D. and Preissle, J. (1993) *Ethnography and Qualitative Research Design in Educational Research*, 2nd ed., New York: Academic Press.
- Lee, M. (2010) 'Researching social capital in education: some conceptual considerations relating to the contribution of network analysis', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31(6), 779-792, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2010.515111> .
- Lee, M. (2014) 'Bringing the Best of Two Worlds Together for Social Capital Research in Education: Social Network Analysis and Symbolic Interactionism', *Educational Researcher*, 43(9), 454-464, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189X14557889> .
- Leithwood, K.A. (2002) *Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration*, Dordrecht Boston: Kluwer Academic.
- Li, Y. (2015) *Handbook of Research Methods and Applications in Social Capital*, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Lieberman, A. (1999) 'Networks', *Journal of Staff Development*, 20(3), 43-44, available: <https://search-ebsohost-com.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ofm&AN=507642407&site=e-host-live> [accessed 1 March 2021].

- Lieberman, A. (2000) 'Networks as Learning Communities: Shaping the Future of Teacher Development', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 221-227, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487100051003010> .
- Lieberman, A. and Grolnick, M. (2005) 'Educational Reform Networks: Changes in the Forms of Reform' in Fullan, M., ed., *Fundamental Change* Springer Netherlands, 40-59, available: https://link-springer-com.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/chapter/10.1007/1-4020-4454-2_4 [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Lima, J.Á. (2010) 'Thinking more deeply about networks in education', *Journal of Educational Change*, 11(1), 1-21, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10833-008-9099-1> .
- Lin, N. (1999) 'Building a Network Theory of Social Capital', *Connections*, 22(1), 28-51, available: <http://faculty.washington.edu/matsueda/courses/590/Readings/Lin%20Network%20Theory%201999.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Little, J. (2005) 'Professional Learning and School-Network Ties: Prospects for School Improvement1', *Journal of Educational Change*, 6(3), 277-284, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10833-005-8254-1> .
- Lofland, J., Snow, D., Anderson, L. and Lofland, L.H. (2006) *Analysing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. 4th ed., Belmont California: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Lynch, K. (1999) *Equality in Education*, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.
- Lynch, K. (2002) *Equality and Power in Schools: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Lynch, K. (2019) 'Inequality in Education: What Educators Can and Cannot Change' in James, C., Eddy-Spicer, D., Connelly, M. and Kruse, S., eds., *The Sage Handbook of School Organisation*, Sage, available: <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/the-sage-handbook-of-school-organization/book256513> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Lynch, K. and Baker, J. (2005) 'Equality in education: An equality of condition perspective', *Theory and research in education*, 3(2), 131-164, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1477878505053298>.
- Lynch, K. and Crean, M. (2018) 'Economic Inequality and Class Privilege in Education: Why Equality of Economic Condition is Essential for Equality of Opportunity' in Hartford, J., ed., *Education for All? The Legacy of Free Post-Primary Education in Ireland*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 139-160.

- Lynch, K. and Lodge, A. (2002a) *Equality and power in schools: redistribution, recognition and representation*, London, New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Lynch, K. and O' Neill, C. (1994) 'The colonisation of social class in education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, (15), 17.
- Lyons, C., Higgins, A., O' Connor, F., McSweeney, D., Bourke, R. and Barry, S. (2006) *Working Together Project: Interim Report*, Limerick: Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College.
- MacPhail, A., Patton, K., Parker, M. and Tannehill, D. (2014) 'Leading by Example: Teacher Educators' Professional Learning through Communities of Practice', *Quest*, 66(1), 39-56, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2013.826139>
- May, H. and Keay, J. (2017) 'Using Communities of Practice to Internationalise Higher Education: Practical and Strategic Considerations' in McDonald, J. and Cater-Steel, A., eds., *Communities of Practice: Facilitating Social Learning in Higher Education*, Springer, available <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789811028779> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- McCafferty, D. (2011) 'Divided City, The Social Geography of Post-Celtic Tiger Limerick' in Hourigan, N., ed., *Understanding Limerick, Social Exclusion and Change*, Cork: Cork University Press.
- McCallum, F. and Price, D. (2016) *Nurturing Wellbeing Development in Education*, New York: Routledge.
- McCallum, F., Price, D., Graham, D. and Morrison, M. (2017) *Teacher Wellbeing: A Review of the Literature*, New South Wales: Association of Independent Schools, available: <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-10/apo-nid201816.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- McCoy S., Smyth, E. and Banks, J. (2012) *The Primary Classroom: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
- McCoy, S. (2021) 'Educational Disadvantage. Evidence from two Growing Up in Ireland cohorts', *Leadership+. The professional voice of school leaders* (119), 2.
- McDonald, J. and Cater-Steer, A. (2017) *Communities of Practice: Facilitating Social Learning in Higher Education*, Springer, available <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789811028779> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- McGann, R. and Mahoney, K. (2010) *Mission Transition Evaluation Report*, Limerick: Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College, available: <https://www.mic.ul.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/21/MissionTransitionFinalReport.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- McLaughlin, C., Black-Hawkins, K. and McIntyre, D. (2004) *Researching Teachers, Researching Schools, Researching Networks: A Summary of the Literature*, University of Cambridge: National College for School Leadership.

- McLaughlin, M.W. and Talbert, J.E. (2006) *Building School-based Teacher Learning Communities: Professional Strategies to Improve Student Achievement*, Teachers College Press: New York.
- McNamara, E., Murray, A., O'Mahoney, D., O'Reilly, C., Smyth, E. and Watson, D. (2021) *Growing Up in Ireland National Longitudinal Study of Children: The Lives of 9 Year Olds of Cohort '08*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
- McNamara E., Murphy, D., Murray, A., Smyth, E. and Watson, D. (2020) *Growing Up in Ireland National Longitudinal Study of Children: The Lives of 17-18 Year Olds*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Meehan, D. and Reinhelt, C. (2012) *Leadership & Networks. New Ways of Developing Leadership in a Highly Connected World*, Oakland, California: Leadership Learning Company.
- Melanie, E. and Jane, P. (2018) 'Accountability of school networks', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(6), 942-959, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1741143217717272> .
- Merceica, B. (2017) 'What is a Community of Practice' in McDonald, J. and Cater-Steele, A., eds., *Communities of Practice: Facilitating Social Learning in Higher Education*, Springer, available <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789811028779> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Mercer, J. (2007) 'The challenges of insider research in educational institutions: Wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas', *Oxford review of education*, 33(1), 1-17, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054980601094651>.
- Merriam, S.B. (1998) *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Mertens, D.M. (2010) *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*, 3rd ed., London: SAGE.
- Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed., London: Sage.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. and Saldaña, J. (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed., London: SAGE Publications.
- Mills, C. (2008) 'Reproduction and transformation of inequalities in schooling: the transformative potential of the theoretical constructs of Bourdieu', *British journal of sociology of education*, 29(1), 79-89, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425690701737481>.

- Minckler, C.H. (2014) 'School leadership that builds teacher social capital', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 42(5), 657-679, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1741143213510502> .
- Misztal, B. (1996) *Trust in Modern Societies*, Cambridge: Policy Press.
- Moolenaar, N.M. (2012) 'A Social Network Perspective on Teacher Collaboration in Schools: Theory, Methodology, and Applications', *American Journal of Education*, 119(1), 7-39, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/667715> .
- Moolenaar, N.M., Daly, A.J., Cornelissen, F., Liou, Y.-H., Caillier, S., Riordan, R., Wilson, K. and Cohen, N.A. (2014) 'Linked to innovation: Shaping an innovative climate through network intentionality and educators' social network position', *Journal of Educational Change*, 15(2), 99-123, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10833-014-9230-4> .
- Moolenaar, N.M. and Slegers, P.J.C. (2015) 'The networked principal: Examining principals' social relationships and transformational leadership in school and district networks', *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53(1), 8-39, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JEA-02-2014-0031> .
- Muijs, D. (2010) 'A fourth phase of school improvement? Introduction to the special issue on networking and collaboration for school improvement', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 21(1), 1-3, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09243450903569676> .
- Muijs, D. (2015) 'Improving schools through collaboration: a mixed methods study of school-to-school partnerships in the primary sector', *Oxford Review of Education*, 41(5), 563-586, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2015.1047824>
- Muijs, D., Ainscow, M., Chapman, C. and West, M. (2011) *Collaboration and Networking in Education*, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Muijs, D., Harris, A., Chapman, C., Stoll, L. and Russ, J. (2004) 'Improving Schools in Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Areas? A Review of Research Evidence', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 15(2), 149-175, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1076/sesi.15.2.149.30433> .
- Muijs, D., West, M. and Ainscow, M. (2010) 'Why network? Theoretical perspectives on networking', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 21(1), 5-26, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09243450903569692> .
- Mulford, B. (2010) 'Recent Developments in the Field of Educational Leadership: The Challenge of Complexity' in Hargreaves, A., Lieberman, A., Fullan, M. and Hopkins, D., eds., *Second International Handbook of Educational Change*, Springer Netherlands, 187-208.
- Nahapiet, J. and Ghoshal, S. (1998) 'Social Capital, Intellectual Capital, and the Organizational Advantage', *The Academy of Management Review*, 23(2), 242-266, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/259373> .

- NCCA (2017) *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines*, Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- Nohilly, M. (2018) 'Becoming and being DLP: Designated Liaison Persons' experience of the role in the Irish primary school', *Irish Educational Studies*, 37(1), 19-32, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2018.1441741> .
- Nohilly, M. and Tynan, F. (2019) 'Challenges in Implementing Wellbeing in Irish Primary Schools', *Irish Teachers' Journal*, 7(1), 42-56.
- Nolan, A. and Molla, T. (2017) 'Teacher confidence and professional capital', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 62, 10-18, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.11.004> .
- Nolan, A. and Molla, T. (2018) 'Teacher professional learning as a social practice: an Australian case', *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 27(4), 352-374, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2017.1321968> .
- O' Brien, M. and O' Shea, A. (2017) *A Human Development (PSP) Framework for Orienting Education and Schools in the Space of Wellbeing*, Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- O' Connor, F. and Higgins, A. (2015) *Improving Literacy Outcomes: Bridging the Gap*, Limerick: Curriculum development Unit: Mary Immaculate College, available: <https://www.mic.ul.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/21/Improving%20Literacy%20Outcomes.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- O' Connor, F. and Mahoney, K. (2010) *Incredible Years Limerick; Summary of conclusions and recommendations*, Limerick: PAUL Partnership.
- O' Connor, F., Mahony, K., Reilly, S. and Duggan, K. (2012) *Evaluation of the Speech and Language Therapy Service in School Provision in Limerick City Schools*, available: <https://www.mic.ul.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/21/TED%20Speech-Language%20Report.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- O'Brien, J. and Jones, K. (2014) 'Professional learning or professional development? Or continuing professional learning and development? Changing terminology, policy and practice', *Professional Development in Education*, 40(5), 683-687, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.960688>.
- O'Brien, M., Burton, D., Campbell, A., Qualter, A. and Varga-Atkins, T. (2006) 'Learning networks for schools: keeping up with the times or a leap into the unknown?', *The Curriculum Journal*, 17(4), 397-411, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585170601081438> .
- OECD (2003) *Schooling for Tomorrow. Networks of Innovation. Towards New Models for Managing Schools and Systems*, Paris: OECD.
- OECD (2015) *Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective*, Paris: OECD.

- OECD (2017) "'What do we know about teachers' selection and professional development in high-performing countries?", *PISA in Focus*, No. 70', Paris: OECD Publishing <https://doi.org/10.1787/87acdc87-en>.
- OECD (2019) *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*, Paris: OECD Publishing, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en>.
- Omidvar, O. and Kislov, R. (2014) 'The Evolution of the Communities of Practice Approach: Toward Knowledgeability in a Landscape of Practice—An Interview with Etienne Wenger-Trayner', *Journal of management inquiry*, 23(3), 266-275, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1056492613505908> .
- OSCAILT (2009a) 'Minutes of meeting 14/01/2009'.
- OSCAILT (2009b) 'Minutes of meeting 17/11/2009'.
- OSCAILT (2010a) 'Minutes of meeting 07/11/2010'.
- OSCAILT (2010b) 'Minutes of meeting 02/03/2010'.
- OSCAILT (2011a) 'Minutes of meeting 15/09/2011'.
- OSCAILT (2011b) 'Minutes of meeting 15/11/2011'.
- OSCAILT (2012) 'Minutes of Meeting 23/01/2012'.
- OSCAILT (2013a) 'Minutes of meeting 03/12/2013'.
- OSCAILT (2013b) *Report of Dormant Accounts funded scheme to enable DEIS schools in Limerick city to maximise community use of premises and facilities*, Limerick, available: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Report-of-the-Dormant-Accounts-Funded-Scheme-to-Enable-DEIS-Schools-in-Limerick-City-to-Maximise-Community-Use-of-Premises-and-Facilities.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- OSCAILT (2014a) 'Minutes of meeting 24/09/2014'.
- OSCAILT (2014b) 'Minutes of meeting 25/11/2014'.
- OSCAILT (2015) 'Minutes of meeting 30/04/2015'.
- OSCAILT (2016) 'Minutes of meeting 11/5/2016'.
- OSCAILT (2017a) 'Minutes of meeting 1/6/2017'.
- OSCAILT (2017b) 'Minutes of meeting 05/10/2017'.
- OSCAILT (2017c) 'Minutes of meeting 18/01/2017'.

- O' Sullivan, C., Ryan, S., O' Sullivan, L. and Masterson, M. (2019) *Teacher Wellbeing and Diversity: A Manual for Teachers in Diverse Educational Settings*, Limerick: Mary Immaculate College, available: <https://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Teacher%20Wellbeing%20and%20Diversity%20Handbook%202019.pdf> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- O' Sullivan, D. (2005) *Cultural politics and Irish education since the 1950s: Policy paradigms and power*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- Owen, S. (2016) 'Professional learning communities: building skills, reinvigorating the passion, and nurturing teacher wellbeing and “flourishing” within significantly innovative schooling contexts', *Educational Review*, 68(4), 403-419, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2015.1119101> .
- O' Dwyer, A., Hamilton, M. and Bowles, R. (2020) 'Learning with and from others: Self-Study of Teacher Education within a Landscape of Practice', *Studying Teacher Education*, 16(3), 364-384, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2020.1784132> .
- Pallant, J. (2016) *SPSS Survival Manual: A Step by Step Guide to Data Analysis using IBM SPSS*, 6th ed., Maidenhead, Berkshire, England: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Parker, M., Patton, K. and O'Sullivan, M. (2016) 'Signature pedagogies in support of teachers' professional learning', *Irish Educational Studies*, 35(2), 137-153, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2016.1141700>.
- Parker, M., Patton, K. and Tannehill, D. (2012) 'Mapping the landscape of communities of practice as professional development in Irish physical education', *Irish Educational Studies*, 31(3), 311-327, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2012.710067> .
- Patton, K. and Parker, M. (2017) 'Teacher education communities of practice: More than a culture of collaboration', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67, 351-360, available: <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.06.013> .
- Patton, K., Parker, M. and Tannehill, D. (2015) 'Helping Teachers Help Themselves: Professional Development That Makes a Difference', *NASSP Bulletin*, 99(1), 26-42, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0192636515576040> .
- Penuel, W.R., Fishman, B.J., Yamaguchi, R. and Gallagher, L.P. (2007) 'What Makes Professional Development Effective? Strategies That Foster Curriculum Implementation', *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(4), 921-958, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0002831207308221> .
- Peurach, D.J., Glazer, J.L. and Winchell Lenhoff, S. (2016) 'The Developmental Evaluation of School Improvement Networks', *Educational Policy*, 30(4), 606-648, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0895904814557592> .
- Pil, F.K. and Leana, C. (2009) 'Applying organizational research to public school reform: The effects of teacher human and social capital on student performance',

Academy of Management Journal, 52(6), 1101-1124, available:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2009.47084647> .

PLUS (2001a) 'Minutes of meeting 04/05/2001'.

PLUS (2001b) 'Minutes of meeting 23/03/2001'.

PLUS (2013a) 'Minutes of meeting 13/03/2013'.

PLUS (2013b) 'Minutes of meeting 20/11/2013'.

Polyani, M. (1962) *Personal Knowledge*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Polyani, M. (1969) *Knowing and Being*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Portes, A. (1998) 'Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24(1), 1-24, available:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.1>.

Power, M. and Barnes, C. (2011) *Feeling Safe in our Community*, Limerick: Limerick Regeneration Agency.

Printy, S.M. (2007) 'Leadership for Teacher Learning: A Community of Practice Perspective', *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(2), 187-226, available:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013161X07312958> .

Punch, K. (2009) *Introduction to Research Methods in Education*, London: SAGE.

Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Pyrko, I., Dörfler, V. and Eden, C. (2016) 'Thinking together: What makes Communities of Practice work?', *Human Relations*, 70(4), 389-409, available:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0018726716661040> .

Pyrko, I., Dörfler, V. and Eden, C. (2019) 'Communities of practice in landscapes of practice', *Management Learning*, 50(4), 482-499, available:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1350507619860854> .

Rawdon, C., Sampson, K., Gilleece, L. and Cosgrove, J. (2020) *Developing an Evaluation Framework for Teachers' Professional Learning in Ireland: Phase 1 Desk-based research*, Dublin, available: https://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ERC-TPL-Wellbeing-Literature-Review-Report_Final.pdf [accessed 1 March 2021].

Rincón-Gallardo, S. (2016) 'Essential features of effective networks in education', *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1(1), 5-22, available:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JGCC-09-2015-0007> .

- Rincón-Gallardo, S. (2020) 'Leading school networks to liberate learning: three leadership roles', *School Leadership & Management*, 40(2-3), 146-162, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1702015> .
- Robson, C. (2011) *Real World Research: A Resource for users of Social Research Methods in Applied Settings*, 3rd ed., Chichester: Wiley.
- Ryan, S. (1994) *Home School Community Liaison Scheme. Final Evaluation Report*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Ryan, S. (1999) *The Home School Community Liaison Scheme. Summary Evaluation Report*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Ryan, S. and Lannin, C. (2021) *Parents in Partnership. Mapping the Way for Family, School and Community Engagement*, Limerick: Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College.
- Sahlberg, P. (2011) 'The Fourth Way of Finland', *Journal of Educational Change*, 12(2), 173-185, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10833-011-9157-y> .
- Sammons, P., Mujtaba, T., Earl, L. and Gu, Q. (2007) 'Participation in network learning community programmes and standards of pupil achievement: does it make a difference?', *School Leadership & Management*, 27(3), 213-238, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13632430701379412> .
- Sartory, K., Jungermann, A.-K. and Järvinen, H. (2017) 'Support for School-to-school Networks: How Networking Teachers Perceive Support Activities of a Local Coordinating Agency', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 65(2), 143-165, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2016.1184742> .
- Scanlan, M. (2020) 'Pandemics, Epidemics and the Power of Metaphor', *Teachers College Record*, available: <https://www-tcrecord-org.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie> [accessed 1 June 2021].
- Schleicer, A. (2016) *Teaching Excellence through Professional Learning and Policy Reform: Lessons from around the World*, Paris: OECD.
- Scott, J. and Carrington, P. (2011) *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, London: SAGE.
- Schuller, T., Preston, J., Hammond, C. Bessett-Grundy, A. and Brynner J. (2004) *The Benefits of Learning: The Impact of Education on Health, Family Life and Social Capital*, London: Routledge Falmer.
- Seligman, M.E.P., Ernst, R.M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K. and Linkins, M. (2009) 'Positive education: positive psychology and classroom interventions', *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(3), 293-311, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27784563> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Sharratt, L. (2018) 'Leading with Knowledge in Communities of Practice', *Australian Educational Leader*, 40(4), 12-16, available: <https://search-ebSCOhost->

com.libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=134948967&site=ehost-live [accessed 1 March 2021].

- Shirley, D. (2016) 'Three forms of professional capital: systemic, social movement, and activist', *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1(4), 302-320, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-08-2016-0020>.
- Silverman, D. (2004) *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, 2nd ed., London: SAGE.
- Silverman, D. (2013) *Doing Qualitative Research*, 4th ed., London: SAGE.
- Slegers, P., Moolenaar, N. and Daly, A. (2019) 'The Interactional Nature of Schools as Social Organisations: Three Theoretical Perspectives' in James, C., Eddiy-Spicer, D., Connelly, M. and Kruse, S., eds., *The Sage Handbook of School Organisation*, Sage, available: <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/the-sage-handbook-of-school-organization/book256513> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Smyth, E. (2017) 'Educational Disadvantage and the DEIS Programme' in Fleming, B., ed., *Education Matters Year Book 2017-2018*, Dublin: Education Matters, 175-179.
- Smyth, E. (2018) 'Educational Inequality: Is 'Free Education' Enough?' in Hartford, J., ed., *Education for all? The Legacy of Free Post-Primary Education in Ireland*, Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Smyth, E. (2018) 'Working at a different level? Curriculum differentiation in Irish lower secondary education', *Oxford Review of Education*, 44(1), 37-55, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2018.1409967>.
- Smyth, E. and McCoy, S. (2009) *Investing in Education: Combating Educational Disadvantage*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute. Smyth, E., McCoy, S. and Kingston, G. (2015) *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS*, Dublin: Economic Social and Research Institution, available: <https://www.esri.ie/publications/learning-from-the-evaluation-of-deis> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Snow, J.L., Martin, S.D. and Dismuke, S. (2015) "'We Do More Than Discuss Good Ideas": A Close Look at the Development of Professional Capital in an Elementary Education Liaison Group', *Teacher education quarterly (Claremont, Calif.)*, 42(2), 43-63, available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/teaceducquar.42.2.43> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Stake, R.E. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*, Thousand Oaks, California London: Sage.
- Stake, R.E. (2010) *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work*, New York: Guilford Press.
- Stoll, L. (2010) 'Connecting Learning Communities: Capacity Building for Systemic Change' in Hargreaves, A., Lieberman, A., Fullan, M. and Hopkins, D., eds.,

Second International Handbook of Educational Change, Springer Netherlands, 469-484.

Stoll, L. and Seashore Louis, K. (2007) *Professional Learning Communities: Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas*, England: Open University Press.

Stott, A., Jopling, M. and Kilcher, A. (2006) *How do School to School Networks Work*, England: National College for School Leadership.

Stynes, M. and McNamara, G. (2019) 'The challenge of perpetual motion: the willingness and desire of Irish primary school principals to juggle everything', *Irish Educational Studies*, 38(1), 25-42, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2018.1512885> .

Tannehill, D. and MacPhail, A. (2017) 'Teacher empowerment through engagement in a learning community in Ireland: working across disadvantaged schools', *Professional Development in Education*, 43(3), 334-352, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2016.1183508>.

Teaching Council (2016) *Cosán: Framework for Teachers' Learning*, Maynooth: Teaching Council.

Thomas, G. (2011) 'A Typology for the Case Study in Social Science Following a Review of Definition, Discourse, and Structure', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(6), 511-521, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800411409884> .

Timperley, H. and Earl, L. (2012) *Learning and Change Networks. A background paper on designing networks to make a difference*, New Zealand: Ministry for Education and University of Auckland.

Tong, W. (2017) 'Building professional capital within a 21st century learning framework', *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 2(1), 36-49, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JPC-06-2016-0018> .

Tormey, R. (1999) 'Disadvantage or Disadvantaging: Conceptualising Class Differences in Education as a Disease or as a Process?', *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, 2(1), 22.

Tormey, R. (2010a) 'The silent politics of educational disadvantage and the National Anti-poverty Strategy', *Irish Educational Studies*, 29(2), 189-199, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03323311003779076>.

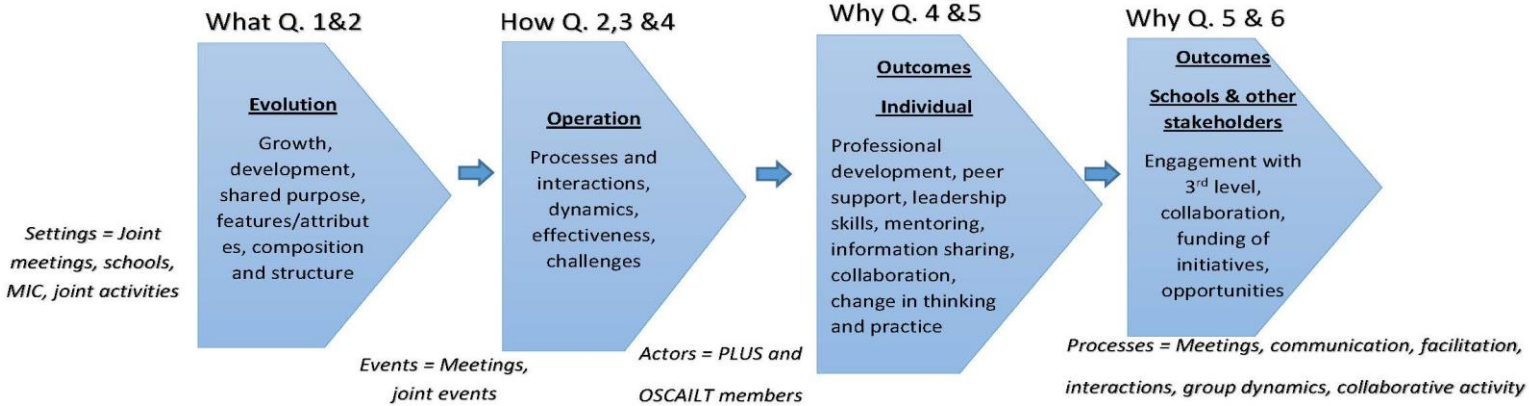
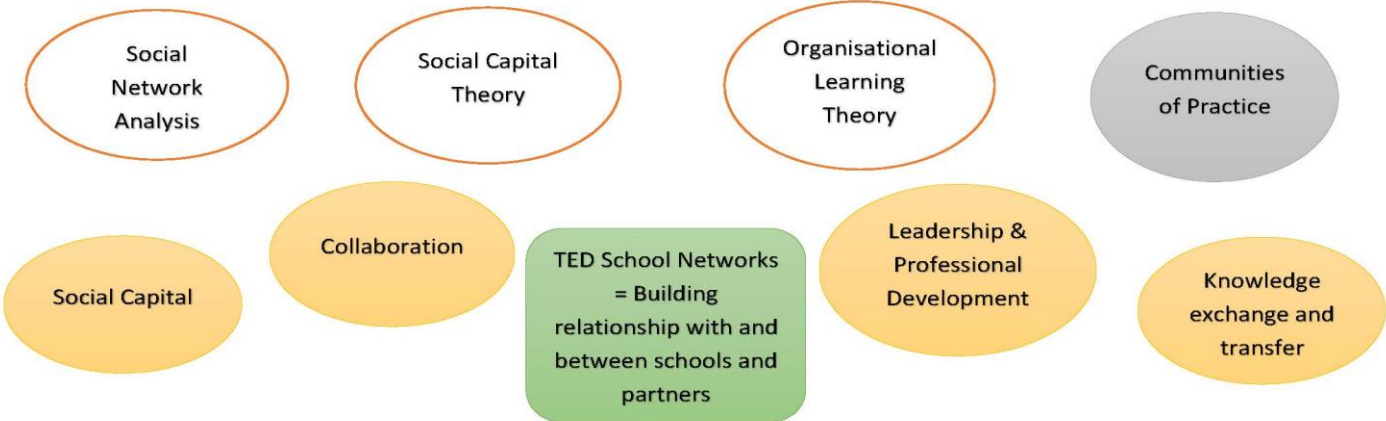
Townsend, A. (2015) 'Leading school networks: Hybrid leadership in action?', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 43(5), 719-737, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1741143214543205> .

Townsend, A. (2019) 'Situating partnership activity, an activity theory inspired analysis of school to school inquiry networks', *Cogent Education*, 6(1), available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2019.1576424> .

- Tschannen Moran, M. (2001) 'Collaboration and the need for trust', *Journal of Educational Administration*, 39(4), 308-331, available: http://www.sciencebrewer.org/uploads/5/2/0/3/52037401/collaboration_and_the_need_for_trust.pdf [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Tseng, F.-C. and Kuo, F.-Y. (2014) 'A study of social participation and knowledge sharing in the teachers' online professional community of practice', *Computers & Education*, 72, 37-47, available: <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2013.10.005> .
- Tynan, F. and Nohilly, M. (2018) *WISE. Wellbeing in Schools Everyday: A whole-school approach to the practical implementation of wellbeing*, Limerick: Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College.
- Viac, C. and Fraser, P. (2020) *Teachers' Well-Being: A Framework for Data Collection and Analysis. OECD Education Working Paper No. 213*, Paris, available: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/teachers-well-being_c36fc9d3-en [accessed 1 March 2021].
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Warren Little, J. (2002) 'Locating learning in teachers' communities of practice: opening up problems of analysis in records of everyday work', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(8), 917-946, available: [http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(02\)00052-5](http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(02)00052-5) .
- Weir, S. and Archer, P. (2005) *A Review of School-Based Measures aimed at Addressing Educational Disadvantage in Ireland*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S. and Archer, P. (2011) *A Report on the First Phase of the Evaluation of DEIS. Report to the Department of Education and Skills*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S., Archer, P., O'Flaherty, A. and Gilleece, L. (2011) *A report on the first phase of the evaluation of DEIS*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S., Kavanagh, L., Kelleher, C. and Moran, E. (2017) *Addressing Educational Disadvantage. A Review of Evidence from the International Literature and of Strategy in Ireland: An update since 2005*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S., Kavanagh, L., Moran, E. and Ryan, A. (2018) *Partnership in DEIS schools: A Survey of Home -School - Community Liaison Coordinators in Primary and Post - Primary schools in Ireland*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S. and McAvinue, L. (2012) *The impact of DEIS on class size in primary schools*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre.


- Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2010) 'Conceptual Tools for CoPs as Social Learning Systems: Boundaries, Identity, Trajectories, and Participation' in Blackmore, C., ed., *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*, Springer and Open University, 125-143.
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R.A. and Snyder, W. (2002) *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Wenger-Trayner, B., Kubiak, C., Wenger, E., Fenton-O'Creevy, M. and Hutchinson, S. (2015) *Learning in Landscapes of Practice: Boundaries, Identity, and Knowledgeability in Practice-based Learning*, London: Routledge.
- Wenger-Trayner, E. and Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015) *Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction*, available: <https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/> [accessed 1 March 2021].
- West, M. (2010) 'School-to-school cooperation as a strategy for improving student outcomes in challenging contexts', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 21(1), 93-112, available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09243450903569767> .
- Yin, R.K. (2009) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed., London: SAGE.

Appendix 1. Draft Conceptual Framework October 2016



Appendix 2. Ethical Clearance

For Office Use Only Application Reference Number:	A14-025
--	---------


 COLAÍSTE MHIURE GAN SMÁL MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK	Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form
---	---

1 Title of Research Project
Networking, Collaboration and Partnership as Means of Addressing Educational Disadvantage: A critical examination of member schools of the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project school networks.

2 Applicant	
Name	Ruth Bourke
Department / Centre / Other	Education - Dept. Learning, Society and Religious Education
Position	Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Coordinator and PhD candidate

3 Decision of MIREC Chair	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required but the full MIREC process is not. Ethical clearance is therefore granted if required for external funding applications and the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required

4 Reason(s) for Decision
Application satisfies MIREC requirements

5 Declaration	
Name (Print)	Áine Lawlor MIREC Chair
Signature	 MIREC Chair
Date	04/07/2014

Appendix 3. Focus Group Schedules

PLUS Network Representative Focus Group schedule

Welcome; introductions; introduction to study; housekeeping; permission to record.

Outline

- Rationale for interview i.e., to explore your opinions and experiences of the PLUS/OSCAILT network
- Structure of interview i.e. 45-50 minutes in total
- Outline topics that will be discussed (1. Your role as network representative; 2. How networks have evolved, built shared commitment and purpose, 3. Features, attributes and organisation)

Topic 1: How the networks evolved, purpose and shared commitment

- The PLUS network was set up in 1998 when all the designated disadvantaged primary schools in the city were invited to a meeting in the college and has been in existence for 18 years. If you were involved at the time, can you tell me a little bit about this?
- Why do you think the network has sustained for this length of time?
- What is your opinion of the mission of the PLUS Network?

The PLUS network explores issues and identifies needs around inequities in educational opportunities and proposes practical steps to actively address these needs and improve and enhance educational outcomes for children.

- How would you describe the level of commitment from members to the PLUS network? Why do you think this is?
- What has supported/enabled commitment from members to the networks over the years? What has been a challenge to commitment from members to the networks over the years?
- What do you think motivates the schools to participate in the network/s?
- What expectations do you think schools have of the network/s?
- What are the particular needs of DEIS schools in comparison to other schools? In what ways has the PLUS network supported DEIS schools over the years/ What contribution has the network made to supporting DEIS schools?

Topic 3: Features, activities and organisation

- How would you describe the PLUS network to colleagues/other teachers?
Prompts:
Composition e.g., who is involved? Individual level or whole school level?
Structure e.g., levels of formality between members, hard structures (planning, meetings, working groups), soft structures (relationships, trust, knowledge of each other, shared purpose, aims)
- Which PLUS activities has your school participated in since you have been involved as representative? Can you tell me a bit about the same? E.g., Studio Classroom, MIC Children's Choir, League of Legends.
- What works well about the PLUS network? What is challenging?

Wrap up & Thanks

- Recap main points made in Focus Group to clarify
- Ask participants if they have anything else that they would like to add to the Focus Group?
- Thank people for their time and remind them of survey and individual interviews.

OSCAILT Network Representative Focus Group & Facilitator Focus Group Schedule

Outline

- Welcome
- Purpose of research and permission to record
- Rationale for interview i.e., to explore your opinions and experiences of the OSCAILT network
- Structure of interview & length i.e. 45-50 minutes in total
- Outline topics that will be discussed (1. How networks have evolved, built shared commitment and purpose, 2. Features, attributes and organisation; 3. Policy question)

Topic 1: How the networks evolved, purpose and shared commitment

- The OSCAILT network was set up in 2008/2009 to support the roll out of the Dormant Account Initiative to maximise the use of schools for the wider community. If you were involved at the time, can you tell me a little bit about this?
- Why do you think the network has sustained for this length of time?
- What is your opinion of the mission of the OSCAILT Network?

The OSCAILT network aims to maximize community use of school facilities and promote the mission of "Opening Schools for Life, Learning and Leisure".

- How would you describe the level of commitment from members to the OSCAILT network? Why do you think this is?
- What has supported/enabled commitment from members to the network over the years?
- What has been a challenge to commitment from members to the networks over the years?
- What do you think motivates the schools to participate in the network?
- What expectations do you think schools have of the network?
- What do you think has been the most valuable activity or outcome of the OSCAILT network over the years?
- What are the particular needs of DEIS schools in comparison to other schools? Based on your experience of the network, in what ways do you think the OSCAILT network supported has DEIS schools over the years/ What contribution has the network made to supporting DEIS schools?

Topic 2: Features, activities and organisation

- If you were describing the network to colleagues/other people in your organisations, how would you describe it?

Prompts:

Composition e.g., who is involved? Individual level or whole school level?

Structure e.g., levels of formality between members, hard structures (planning, meetings, working groups), soft structures (relationships, trust, knowledge of each other, shared purpose, aims)

- What works well about the OSCAILT network?
- What is challenging?
- **Clarification For Facilitator Focus Group:** What is the link between OSCAILT and the DEIS Literacy Initiative? Inspectorate?

Topic 3: Policy

- The new DEIS Action (2017) plan includes measures to encourage DEIS schools to network in clusters focused on innovation and improvement in schools. The School Excellence Fund for DEIS was recently launched by Minister Bruton in November. What do you think is the key learning/message from OSCAILT network that should be taken into consideration by policy makers and practitioners in rolling out such measures?

Wrap up & Thanks

- Recap main points made in Focus Group to clarify
- Ask participants if they have anything else that they would like to add to the Focus Group?
- Thank people for their time and remind them of individual interviews, possible survey, observations and analysis of minutes

Appendix 4. Interview Schedules

PLUS Network Representative Individual Interviews

Welcome; introductions; introduction to study; housekeeping; permission to record.

Outline

- Rationale for interview i.e., to explore your opinions and experiences of the PLUS network
- Structure of interview i.e. 45 -50 minutes in total
- Outline topics that will be discussed (1. Individual level outcomes from participation in the network; 2. Knowledge creation and sharing practices; 3. Explore any issues arising in the Focus Groups.

(From Focus Group) Topic 3: Features, activities and organisation

- How would you describe the PLUS network to colleagues/other teachers?

Prompts:

Composition e.g., who is involved? Individual level or whole school level?

Structure e.g., levels of formality between members, hard structures (planning, meetings, working groups), soft structures (relationships, trust, knowledge of each other, shared purpose, aims)

Topic 1 – Individual level and school level outcomes of participation in the network

- Tell me about your involvement with the PLUS network/ How did you become involved?
- What motivates you personally to continue your involvement as a representative of your school on the network?
- What expectations do you personally have of the network? What do you expect from attending the meeting and being involved?
- What motivates your school to continue involvement in the network/s? Why do you think your school stays involved?
- What expectations do you think your school have of the network?
- How do you feedback information from PLUS to your principal and school?
- What do you think are the benefits of being a member of a school network? For network representatives (individual level) and schools (school level).
Prompts: League of Legends, Choir, Studio Classroom, LEGO elective, DEIS specialism students
- What do you think are the challenges of being a member of a school network? For network representatives (individual level) and schools (school level).
- What impact, if any, has membership of a school network had in your school for the staff? For network representatives (individual level) and schools (school level).

Topic 2 – Knowledge creation, sharing practices and collaboration in the networks

- What has been the key learning for you personally, if anything, from participating in the network?
- What enables learning and sharing of practice to take place in the network?
- What inhibits learning and sharing of practice from taking place in the network?
- Have you been involved in any collaborative activities within the network over the years? E.g., joint working groups, funding proposals etc. If so, how would you describe this experience?

Topic 3 – Explore issues raised in Focus Groups

- Importance of children coming on campus to MIC;
- Importance of link with MIC;
- Importance of the network for role of HSCL;
- Importance of students going on placement in DEIS schools.

Wrap up & Thanks

- Recap main points made in the interview to clarify
- Ask participants if they have anything else that they would like to add to the Focus Group?
- Thank people for their time and remind them of survey and individual interviews.

OSCAILT Network Representative Individual Interviews

Welcome; introductions; introduction to study; housekeeping; permission to record.

Outline

- Rationale for interview i.e., to explore your opinions and experiences of the OSCAILT network
- Structure of interview i.e. 45 -50 minutes in total
- Outline topics that will be discussed (1. Individual level outcomes from participation in the network; 2. Knowledge creation and sharing practices; 3. Explore any issues arising in the Focus Groups.

(From Focus Group) Topic 3: Features, activities and organisation

- How would you describe the OSCAILT network to colleagues/other teachers?
Prompts:
Composition e.g., who is involved? Individual level or whole school level?
Structure e.g., levels of formality between members, hard structures (planning, meetings, working groups), soft structures (relationships, trust, knowledge of each other, shared purpose, aims)

Topic 1 – Individual level and school level outcomes of participation in the network

- Tell me about your involvement with the OSCAILT network.
- What motivates you personally to continue your involvement as a representative of your school on the network?
- What expectations do you personally have of the network?
- What motivates your school to continue involvement in the network/s?
- What expectations do you think your school have of the network?
- What do you think are the benefits of being a member of a school network? For network representatives (individual level) and schools (school level).
- What do you think are the challenges of being a member of a school network? For network representatives (individual level) and schools (school level).
- What impact, if any, has membership of a school network had in your school for the staff? For network representatives (individual level) and schools (school level).

Topic 2 – Knowledge creation, sharing practices and collaboration in the networks

- What have you learned/What has been the key learning for you personally, if anything, from participating in the network?
- What enables learning and sharing of practice to take place in the network?
- What inhibits learning and sharing of practice from taking place in the network?
- Have you been involved in any collaborative activities within the network over the years? E.g., joint working groups, funding proposals etc. If so, how would you describe this experience?

Topic 3 – Explore issues raised in Focus Groups

- Role of school leader e.g., responsibility, mental wellbeing, peer support

Topic 4 – Relevance of networking as a practice to support DEIS schools

- The core research question of this doctoral research is ‘How do school networks operate to support DEIS schools? A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks’. Based on your experience to date of the PLUS/OSCAILT network, how would you describe the way in which the networks have supported the DEIS schools in Limerick?
- The new DEIS Action (2017) plan includes measures to encourage DEIS schools to network in clusters focused on innovation and improvement in schools. What do you think is the key learning/message from PLUS and OSCAILT networks that should be taken into consideration by policy makers and practitioners in rolling out such measures?

Wrap up & Thanks

- Recap main points made in the interview to clarify
- Ask participants if they have anything else that they would like to add to the Focus Group?
- Thank people for their time and remind them of survey and individual interviews.

OSCAILT Facilitator Individual Interview Schedule

Welcome; introductions; introduction to study; housekeeping; permission to record.

Outline

- Purpose of research and permission to record;
- Rationale for interview i.e., to explore your opinions and experiences of the OSCAILT network;
- Structure of interview i.e. 45-50 minutes in total;
- Outline topics that will be discussed (1. Your role as facilitator of the network; 2. Individual level and organisation level outcomes of participation in the network 3. Knowledge creation, sharing practices and collaboration in the network; 4. Explore issues raised in Focus Group).

Topic 1: Your role as facilitator/s of the network.

- How would you describe the role of the facilitator of the OSCAILT network? What is involved?
- Has the role changed in any way since you became involved in the network? Please explain.

Topic 2 – Individual level and organisation level outcomes of participation in the network?

- Tell me about your involvement with the OSCAILT network.
- What motivates you personally to continue your involvement as a representative of your school on the network?
- What expectations do you personally have of the network?
- What motivates your organisation to continue involvement in the network/s?
- What expectations do you think your organisation has of the network?
- What do you think are the benefits of being a member of a school network? For network representatives (individual level) and schools/organisations (school/organisation level).
- What do you think are the challenges of being a member of a school network? For network representatives (individual level) and schools/organisations (school/organisation level).
- What impact, if any, has membership of a school network had for your organisation? For network representatives (individual level) and schools/organisation (school/organisation level).

Topic 3 – Knowledge creation, sharing practices and collaboration in the network

- What have you learned/What has been the key learning for you personally, if anything, from participating in the network?
- What enables learning and sharing of practice to take place in the network?
- What inhibits learning and sharing of practice from taking place in the network?
- Have you been involved in any collaborative activities within the network over the years? E.g., joint working groups, funding proposals etc. If so, how would you describe this experience?

Topic 4 - Explore issues raised in Focus Groups

(One of the aims of the first round of individual interviews will be to explore some of the findings from the focus groups and time will be allocated to this in the schedule).

Wrap up & Thanks

- Recap main points made in the interview to clarify
- Ask participants if they have anything else that they would like to add to the Focus Group?
- Thank people for their time and remind them of survey and individual interviews.

Appendix 5. Surveys

PLUS Network Survey

Please tell me about yourself.

The purpose of collecting this information is to build a profile of network representatives as a group. Findings will be anonymous and reported in aggregate form i.e., about the PLUS network representatives as a group. No individual will be identifiable.

1. Are you **male** or **female**? (Please tick as appropriate) Male _____ Female _____
2. To which **age group** do you belong? (Please tick as appropriate)
 20 - 29 yrs _____ 30 - 39 yrs _____ 40 - 49 yrs _____ 50 - 59 yrs _____ 60 yrs or older _____
3. **How long have you been teaching in this school?** _____ years
4. What is **your role in the school?** (Please tick as appropriate)

Home School Community Liaison Coordinator	
Class teacher	
Special Education teacher	
Deputy principal	
Assistant principal	
Other – please specify	

5. If HSCL, for **how many years have you been HSCL?** _____ years
6. Do you **hold a post of responsibility?**
 - a) Yes _____ No _____
 - b) If Yes, please give details

7. Did you **actively seek to become the PLUS network representative** for your school?
 - a) Yes _____ No _____
 - b) Please explain your answer

8. Which of the following **qualifications do you hold?** (*Please tick all that apply*)

A primary school teaching diploma or certificate, or other primary school qualification

A primary degree in education (B.Ed) _____

A primary degree in another subject _____

A postgraduate diploma in education _____

A qualification in learning support, special education or resource teaching _____
A higher degree in education (PhD, Masters etc.) _____
A higher degree in another subject (PhD, Masters etc.) _____
No qualification _____
Other [please specify] _____

9. Which **aspect of your role** do you find:

a) **Most stressful?**

b) **Least stressful?**

10. In the **last 12 months** have you engaged in **formal or informal professional learning specific to DEIS schools?** According to *'Cosán: Framework for Teachers' Learning'* (Teaching Council 2016) informal learning could be through 'educationally rich' discussions, phone calls or conversations as opposed to a formal training session.

Formal professional learning specific to DEIS schools

a) Yes _____ No _____

b) If Yes, please give details

Informal professional learning specific to DEIS schools

c) Yes _____ No _____

d) If Yes, please give details

11. Did your **teacher training** include instruction **on working in partnership and collaboration with other schools and/or agencies?**

a) Yes _____ No _____

b) If Yes, please give details

12. Did your **teacher training** include instruction on **working in partnership with parents?**

a) Yes _____ No _____

b) If Yes, please give details

13. **Since you became a teacher, have you ever received any professional training, including in-service training, on working in partnership and collaboration with other schools and/or agencies?**

a) Yes _____ No _____

b) If Yes, please give details

14. **Since you became a teacher, have you ever received any professional training, including in-service training, on working in partnership with parents?**

a) Yes _____ No _____

b) If Yes, please give details

15. **Do you currently participate in any other support groups available to you in your role?**

a) Yes _____ No _____

b) If Yes, please give details

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

OSCAILT Network Survey

There are two parts to this survey. Part A is about OSCAILT network representatives. Part B is about the schools involved in OSCAILT.

Part A – Please tell me about yourself

The purpose of collecting this information is to build a profile of network representatives as a group. Findings will be anonymous and reported in aggregate form i.e., about the OSCAILT network representatives as a group. No individual will be identifiable.

1. Are you **male or female**? (Please tick as appropriate) Male _____ Female _____

2. To which **age group** do you belong? (Please tick as appropriate)
20 - 29 yrs _____ 30 - 39 yrs _____ 40 - 49 yrs _____ 50 - 59 yrs _____ 60 yrs or older _____

3. For **how many years have you been Principal**?
(a) in this school? _____ years (b) in other Primary Schools? _____ years
(c) in DEIS primary schools? _____ years

4. How long have you been **teaching in this school**? _____ years

5. Which of the following **qualifications** do you hold? (Please tick all that apply)
A primary school teaching diploma or certificate, or other primary school qualification _____
A primary degree in education (B.Ed) _____
A primary degree in another subject _____
A postgraduate diploma in education _____
A qualification in learning support, special education or resource teaching _____
A higher degree in education (PhD, Masters etc.) _____
A higher degree in another subject (PhD, Masters etc.) _____
No qualification _____
Other [please specify] _____

6. Which **aspect of your role** do you find:
 - a) **Most stressful**?

 - b) **Least stressful**?

7. In the last 12 months have you engaged in **formal or informal professional learning specific to DEIS schools**? According to *'Cosán: Framework for Teachers' Learning'* (2016) informal learning could be through 'educationally rich' discussions, phone calls or conversations as opposed to a formal training session.

Formal professional learning specific to DEIS schools

e) Yes _____ No _____

f) If Yes, please give details

Informal professional learning specific to DEIS schools

g) Yes _____ No _____

h) If Yes, please give details

8. Did your **teacher training** include instruction on **working in partnership and collaboration with other schools and/or agencies**?

c) Yes _____ No _____

d) If Yes, please give details

9. Did your **teacher training** include instruction on **working in partnership with parents**?

c) Yes _____ No _____

d) If Yes, please give details

10. **Since you became a teacher**, have you ever received **any professional training, including in-service training, on working in partnership and collaboration with other schools and/or agencies**?

c) Yes _____ No _____

d) If Yes, please give details

11. **Since you became a teacher**, have you ever received **any professional training, including in-service training, on working in partnership with parents**?

c) Yes _____ No _____

d) If Yes, please give details

12. Do you currently **participate in any other support groups available to you in your role?**

c) Yes _____ No _____

d) If Yes, please give details

13. If there is **any further information** that you wish to include **about the OSCAILT network**, please do so in the space below.

Part B – About your school

Please tell me about your school. The purpose of collecting this information is to build a profile of the schools in the OSCAILT network. Findings will be anonymous and the report will relate to the group of schools in the OSCAILT network. No individual school will be identified.

1. Name of school

2. Number of pupils enrolled _____ No. Male _____ No. Female _____

3. Number of families _____

4. Is your school:

Primary (Please tick as appropriate)		Post Primary (Please tick as appropriate)	
Vertical (Infants – 6 th class)		Voluntary secondary school	
Junior School		Vocational/Community College	
Senior School		Community School	
		Comprehensive School	

5. Is your school: (Please tick as appropriate)

Co educational		All girls		All boys	
----------------	--	-----------	--	----------	--

6. Please indicate whether you are:

A 'walking' principal _____

A teaching principal _____

7. Excluding yourself, how many **full-time and part-time administrative staff** work in your school?

Full-time admin. Staff _____ Part-time admin. Staff _____
 None _____

8. Approximately **how many staff does your school currently have in the following capacities?** Please indicate the number employed on a full-time and part-time basis.

Staff	Full time	Part time
Mainstream teachers		
Special Education Teachers		
Special needs assistants		
<i>Other staff – please specify</i>		

9. Are there any **teachers in your school who work in a shared capacity** e.g., HSCL Coordinator?

Yes _____ No _____

If Yes, please give details _____

10. How many **Special Education teachers are assigned to EAL?** _____

11. How many **classes (across all year-groups) are there in the school?** _____ classes

12. Is your school building adequate to accommodate all your needs?

Yes _____ No _____

If No, please explain _____

13. In **which year was the school built?** _____

14. Does your school have a **special class or unit?**

a) Yes _____ No _____

b) If Yes, please give details

15. Are the **school buildings and other facilities (playing fields etc. if relevant) open to the local community?**

Please tick as appropriate	Yes	No
In the evenings during the week		
At weekends		
Out of term time		

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

Appendix 6. Precode List

Name	Files	References
Benefits of OSCAILT for principal	17	70
Benefits of OSCAILT to school	16	39
Benefits of PLUS for reps	8	14
Benefits of PLUS to school	9	30
Changes in OSCAILT	13	21
Commitment from schools to OSCAILT	2	3
Commitment from schools to PLUS	1	1
Comparison OSCAILT to other principal supports	10	15
DEIS funding	3	5
DEIS literacy initiative	10	14
Description of PLUS	7	17
Description OSCAILT	16	28
Impact of OSCAILT	18	54
Importance DEIS electives PLUS	10	18
Importance of building relationship with families in DEIS school	5	5
Inhibits learning and sharing in PLUS	6	6
Inhibits sharing and learning in OSCAILT	13	16
Learning and sharing in OSCAILT	16	33
Learning and sharing in PLUS	10	20
Length of involvement PLUS	9	13
Length of involvement in OSCAILT	8	9
Motivation to attend OSCAILT	17	22
Motivation to attend PLUS	10	16
Origin OSCAILT	8	12
OSC talk about PLUS	1	1
OSCAILT advice to policy makers and practitioners	14	16
OSCAILT challenge of participation	18	36
OSCAILT Collaborative activity	10	15
OSCAILT competition between schools	12	16
OSCAILT DEIS School Context	12	20
OSCAILT Dormant accounts initiative	14	24
OSCAILT facilitators	17	35
OSCAILT gap in provision	4	5
OSCAILT importance of link MIC	10	13

OSCAILT individual school context	7	13
OSCAILT organisation	15	32
OSCAILT ref PLUS activity	7	10
OSCAILT reference to other DEIS principals	8	15
OSCAILT relationship between members	15	32
OSCAILT rep on other fora	4	7
OSCAILT role of principal DEIS school	7	12
OSCAILT support for new DEIS principal	13	27
OSCAILT support to DEIS schools	16	21
OSCAILT teaching career	4	4
OSCAILT visiting MIC Campus	1	1
OSCAILT walking principal	1	1
Perceptions of school staff OSCAILT	5	6
Perceptions of school staff PLUS	1	1
Personal expectation OSCAILT	7	7
Personal expectation PLUS	4	5
Personal impact of membership OSCAILT	7	10
Personal learning from OSCAILT	12	14
Personal learning PLUS	7	7
PLUS advice to policy makers and practitioners	9	10
PLUS challenge of participation	10	15
PLUS description of HSCL role	6	12
PLUS facilitation	5	5
PLUS importance role HSCL	7	16
PLUS initiatives	11	21
PLUS organisation	7	11
PLUS relationship and link MIC	8	18
PLUS rep report to school	6	7
PLUS school context	4	5
PLUS suggestions to improve attendance	3	4
PLUS support for DEIS schools	10	13
PLUS visit MIC campus	10	18
PLUS works well	1	1
School expectation of PLUS	1	1
Suggestions to develop PLUS	6	11
Teaching career PLUS	1	1

Trust in OSCAILT	17	35
View of PLUS Mission statement	1	1
View Oscailt mission statement	2	4
Why OSCAILT has lasted so long	1	1
Why PLUS has lasted so long	2	2

Appendix 7. PLUS Tree Node

Name	Files	References
Reordering, re-labelling, distilling, merging and imposing a hierarchy	15	750
Theme - Evolution of PLUS network	2	5
PLUS after OSC	0	0
PLUS origin and development	2	3
Theme - PLUS advice to policy makers	9	17
Theme - PLUS Challenges	10	21
Lack of diversity of reps	1	2
MIC parking	2	2
PLUS demands of rep role	9	12
PLUS school context	0	0
PLUS sustainability	2	3
Theme - PLUS DEIS School Context	4	5
Theme - PLUS description of HSCL role	6	13
Theme - PLUS Learning and knowledge creation	10	56
PLUS Conditions learning	9	20
PLUS Learning formal	4	4
PLUS Learning inhibits	6	6
PLUS Learning informal	9	24
Theme - PLUS Network Model	10	169
PLUS Collaboration	4	5
PLUS Ethos	4	5
PLUS Facilitation and coordination	9	31
PLUS Network activities	10	31
PLUS Ownership and Agency	3	4
PLUS Processes and interactions	9	39
PLUS Purpose	6	16
PLUS Responsive	6	19
PLUS Structure	7	19
Theme - PLUS supports education policy	13	148
PLUS Links to support agencies	9	15
PLUS Support DEIS remit and 3rd level access	11	25
PLUS Supports Teaching and Learning	13	54
Theme - PLUS suggestions to develop	8	24
Theme - PLUS Support for DEIS schools	15	179

PLUS 3rd level link	8	22
PLUS Access 3rd level	11	26
PLUS DEIS elective students	11	40
PLUS Resources and expertise	10	33
PLUS TED Initiatives	14	58
Theme - PLUS Support HSCL or rep role	10	82
PLUS Expertise	3	4
PLUS informative	10	36
PLUS Networking, camaraderie and peer support	9	22
PLUS Relevance of meetings	7	20
Theme - Relationships in PLUS	9	31
PLUS Relationships between members	8	25
PLUS Relationships enable collaboration	1	1
PLUS Relationships with external stakeholders	1	1
PLUS Trust	3	4

Appendix 8. OSCAILT Tree Node

Name	Files	References
Reordering, re-labelling, distilling, merging and imposing a hierarchy	19	986
Theme - OSC Advice to policy makers	14	34
Theme - OSC Challenges	17	46
Theme - OSC Competition	12	21
Theme - OSC DEIS school context	12	21
Theme - OSC Description of DEIS principal role	7	12
Theme - OSC evolution	15	40
OSC Changes	13	27
OSC Dormant Accounts	8	13
Theme - OSC Exosystem Local Level	13	46
OSC Implementation other initiatives	10	23
OSC Multiagency approach	10	23
Theme - OSC Learning and knowledge creation	18	121
OSC Formal learning	6	10
OSC Informal learning	17	51
OSC Inhibits learning	8	12
OSC Knowledge sharing and creation	14	23
OSC Learning conditions	14	25
Theme - OSC Network model	19	179
OSC Collaboration	10	15
OSC Ethos	8	16
OSC Facilitation and coordination	18	43
OSC Membership	6	7
OSC Processes and interactions	15	32
OSC Responsive	16	42
OSC Structure	13	24
Theme - OSC Policy	18	71
OSC Advocacy and lobbying	15	27
OSC Raise awareness of DEIS school context	14	29
OSC Recognition of DEIS schools	6	10
OSC Support DEIS plans and remit	3	5
Theme - OSC Relationships	18	155
OSC Break down barriers	9	21
OSC Bridge to other initiatives and supports	4	5

OSC Connections	12	26
OSC External stakeholders	4	6
OSC Members	14	36
OSC Relationships enable collaboration	3	3
OSC Shared understanding	8	14
OSC Trust	18	44
Theme - OSC Support for DEIS Principals	19	191
OSC Comparison other principal supports	11	21
OSC Guidance and information	15	41
OSC Peer support	18	75
OSC Principal wellbeing	16	37
OSC Professional development	3	4
OSC Role of DEIS principal	8	13
Theme - OSC Support DEIS Schools	15	49
OSC Initiatives and off shoots	13	20
OSC Resources and expertise	7	18
OSC Support 3rd level link	7	11

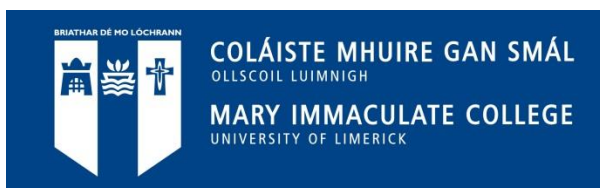
Appendix 9. Emerging Propositions October 2019

Propositions	PLUS	OSCAILT
The networks build social capital of staff in DEIS schools through networking		
Social Capital subtheme – building trusting relationships between members that enable them to: Provide support for each other in their role and decrease isolation (Bonding) Work together towards common goal (collaboration and cohesion)	Yes	Yes
Social Capital subtheme – creating connections and developing relationships between members and other stakeholders that supports schools to: Access supports & expertise Create flows of information and feedback loops Support the implementation of their DEIS plans (Bridging social capital)	Yes	Yes
The networks are a source of CPD for members		
CPD subtheme – relevance to context & role	Yes	Yes
CPD subtheme – leadership		Yes
CPD subtheme – supporting DEIS plans	Yes	Yes
The networks support wellbeing of individual members and in schools		
Wellbeing subtheme – supporting staff in stressful roles and preventing burnout	Yes	Yes
Wellbeing subtheme – supporting wellbeing in the wider school community i.e., staff, parents, children	Yes	Yes
The networks have a social justice and advocacy role		

Social justice subtheme – supporting aspirations for third level education	Yes	
Social justice subtheme – creating opportunities for children to engage in activities that they may otherwise not have	Yes	Yes
Social justice subtheme – advocacy for supports and services for children and families in DEIS schools	Yes	Yes
The networks support teaching and learning		
T&L subtheme – supporting T&L in DEIS schools by assisting schools to respond to diverse range of children’s needs	Yes	Yes
T&L subtheme – supporting T& L in DEIS schools through TED network activities i.e., MIC Children’s Choir & SC	Yes	
T&L subtheme – supporting T&L in DEIS schools through DEIS & LEGO elective students	Yes	
T&L subtheme – training for teachers e.g., seminars, workshops, LEGO training etc.	Yes	
Supporting implementation of DEIS plans	Yes	Yes
Challenges	Yes	Yes

Appendix 10. PLUS and OSCAILT member Information Letters and Consent Forms

Focus groups and individual interviews



School networks as a means of supporting DEIS schools to address identified issues of educational disadvantage: A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

Participant Information Sheet

22nd March 2017

Dear PLUS member,

My name is Ruth Bourke and I am a postgraduate student in Mary Immaculate College. I have also been working with the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in the College since 2004 and I facilitate the PLUS³⁸ Network.

I am presently completing a PhD in Education by research in the Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education, Faculty of Education, under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Ryan. The proposed case study research will form part of my doctoral thesis. It has ethical clearance from the MIC Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). The purpose of this letter is to provide information on the study and request permission from you to participate in the research.

What is the study about?

The Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project, Mary Immaculate College facilitates two networks of DEIS schools in Limerick: PLUS and OSCAILT³⁹. Your school is a member of both networks. The aim of the research is to develop an in

³⁸ Primary Liaison with University Services (PLUS) comprises 12 DEIS band 1 primary schools 2 DEIS rural primary schools and 2 non-mainstream schools in Limerick City and county.

³⁹ OSCAILT is a network of 12 DEIS band 1 primary and 4 DEIS post-primary schools in Limerick city, facilitated and supported by the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in Mary Immaculate College (MIC) and the Department of Education.

depth understanding of schools' participation in the networks from the perspective of members.

What are the benefits of this research?

Recent developments in both the Irish and international education landscape, particularly in teacher professional development, have brought collaboration and learning to prominence in the form of networks of schools, communities of practice and professional learning communities. However, there is a gap in research and literature on school networks in Ireland. This research will help to illuminate the processes, interactions and relationships involved in the school networks concerned. It will also contribute to a body of knowledge on how and why schools and other stakeholders engage in such practices, as well as the benefits and challenges of being involved. This research will be of benefit to the schools and staff involved in such practices, as well as the TED project and other stakeholders, in terms of developing a clear understanding of how the networks operate and function and the benefits and challenges associated with participation. It is also important for the wider educational community at local and national level. There are no risks in this research greater than those involved in everyday practices.

What is involved?

This research will involve gathering data from school staff about their participation in specific network activities or participation as a representative of the school in the networks.

The data collection methods that will be used include:

- A survey with relevant school staff members who have participated in network activities (e.g. League of Legends, Workshops, MIC Children's Choir, Studio Classroom, Dormant Accounts funded OSCAILT initiative) about their opinions and experiences the same;
- A survey with current and former PLUS and OSCAILT network representatives about their opinions, beliefs and attitudes about participating in the networks and network practices and activities (see above);
- Focus groups with current and former PLUS and OSCAILT network representatives about their opinions and experiences of participating in the networks;
- I will return to focus group participants to do two 1 hour individual semi-structured interviews to explore their opinions and experiences in greater detail;
- Observations of selected networks meetings.

Participation in the research is voluntary and you can withdraw from the research at any stage without providing a reason, and without consequence. Informed consent will be sought from individual research participants.

With permission focus groups and semi-structured interviews will be audio recorded and will take about an hour each. They will be arranged for a time and place that suits you on an agreed date.

Please fill in the attached Information and Consent Form if you are willing to participate in the research.

How will confidentiality be maintained?

All information gathered will remain confidential and stored safely. All electronic data records will be password protected and/or encrypted as appropriate. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than a participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain anonymity. While the details of PLUS and OSCAILT network member schools and organisations are already in the public arena, individual schools and staff members will not be identifiable in any results which will be published. The only people who will have access to the data will be myself, my supervisor and the internal or external examiner on request.

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years. All information provided will only be used for the purpose of this research and research records with any names or contact details will be destroyed carefully following the completion of the study.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data gathered will be analysed and used to write my doctoral thesis. As part of this process, each interview and focus group participant will be offered an opportunity to validate their contribution. On completion of the thesis, I will also meet each network to present a summary of the findings and discuss how I might support each network to use the research findings for the benefit of the networks.

The research findings may also be used for academic and professional presentations, papers and publications. Acknowledgement of the contribution of school staff and network representatives will be made in any dissemination of the research. Every effort will be made to ensure anonymity of the participants and individual schools within the thesis and any subsequent dissemination of the research.

I would be very grateful if you could complete the attached Informed Consent Form and return to me to confirm that you consent to taking part in this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Ruth Bourke

Ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie

061-774715 / 086-XXXXXX

**If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent,
you may contact:**

MIREC Administrator

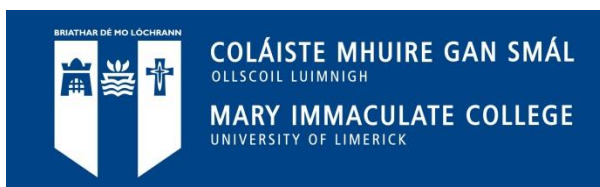
Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie



School networks as a means of supporting DEIS schools to address identified issues of educational disadvantage: A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

PLUS network representatives

CONSENT FORM

	YES	NO
I have read attached information on this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand what the research is about, and what the information will be used for.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am fully aware of what is involved, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware that my identity will be anonymous in the research study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to contact the person conducting the study if I need to.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in the survey.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in a focus group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in semi-structured interviews.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the interviews being audio recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in observations of OSCAILT network meetings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

For further information contact:

Ruth Bourke, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick 086-XXXXXX ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie

MIREC Administrator, **Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick**
061-204515 mirec@mic.ul.ie

Agreement to contribute to this research	
Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):	
Signature:	
Date:	
Contact details (to arrange interviews):	Mobile: Email:



School networks as a means of supporting DEIS schools to address identified issues of educational disadvantage: A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

Participant Information Sheet

15th March 2017

Dear Principal,

My name is Ruth Bourke and I am a postgraduate student in Mary Immaculate College. I have also been working with the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in the College since 2004 and I facilitate the PLUS⁴⁰ Network.

I am presently completing a PhD in Education by research in the Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education, Faculty of Education, under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Ryan. The proposed case study research will form part of my doctoral thesis. It has ethical clearance from the MIC Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). The purpose of this letter is to provide information on the study and request permission from you to participate in the research.

What is the study about?

The Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project, Mary Immaculate College facilitates two networks of DEIS schools in Limerick: PLUS and OSCAILT⁴¹. Your school is a member of both networks. The aim of the research is to develop an in depth understanding of schools' participation in the networks from the perspective of members.

What are the benefits of this research?

⁴⁰ Primary Liaison with University Services (PLUS) comprises 12 DEIS band 1 primary schools 2 DEIS rural primary schools and 2 non-mainstream schools in Limerick City and county.

⁴¹ OSCAILT is a network of 12 DEIS band 1 primary and 4 DEIS post-primary schools in Limerick city, facilitated and supported by the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in Mary Immaculate College (MIC) and the Department of Education.

Recent developments in both the Irish and international education landscape, particularly in teacher professional development, have brought collaboration and learning to prominence in the form of networks of schools, communities of practice and professional learning communities. However, there is a gap in research and literature on school networks in Ireland. This research will help to illuminate the processes, interactions and relationships involved in the school networks concerned. It will also contribute to a body of knowledge on how and why schools and other stakeholders engage in such practices, as well as the benefits and challenges of being involved. This research will be of benefit to the schools and staff involved in such practices, as well as the TED project and other stakeholders, in terms of developing a clear understanding of how the networks operate and function and the benefits and challenges associated with participation. It is also important for the wider educational community at local and national level. There are no risks in this research greater than those involved in everyday practices.

What is involved?

This research will involve gathering data from school staff about their participation in specific network activities or participation as a representative of the school in the networks.

The data collection methods that will be used include:

- A survey with relevant school staff members who have participated in network activities (e.g. League of Legends, Workshops, MIC Children’s Choir, Studio Classroom, Dormant Accounts funded OSCAILT initiative) about their opinions and experiences the same;
- A survey with current and former PLUS and OSCAILT network representatives about their opinions, beliefs and attitudes about participating in the networks and network practices and activities (see above);
- Focus groups with current and former PLUS and OSCAILT network representatives about their opinions and experiences of participating in the networks.
- I will return to focus group participants to do individual semi-structured interviews to explore their opinions and experiences in greater detail;

Participation in the research is voluntary and you can withdraw from the research at any stage without providing a reason, and without consequence. Informed consent will be sought from individual research participants.

With permission focus groups and semi-structured interviews will be audio recorded and will take about an hour each. They will be arranged for a time and place that suits you on an agreed date.

Please fill in the attached Information and Consent Form if you are willing to participate in the research.

How will confidentiality be maintained?

All information gathered will remain confidential and stored safely. All electronic data records will be password protected and/or encrypted as appropriate. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than a participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain anonymity. While the details of PLUS and OSCAILT network member schools and organisations are already in the public arena, individual schools and staff members will not be identifiable in any results which will be published. The only people who will have access to the data will be myself, my supervisor and the internal or external examiner on request.

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years. All information provided will only be used for the purpose of this research and research records with any names or contact details will be destroyed carefully following the completion of the study.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data gathered will be analysed and used to write my doctoral thesis. As part of this process, each interview and focus group participant will be offered an opportunity to validate their contribution. On completion of the thesis, I will also meet each network to present a summary of the findings and discuss how I might support each network to use the research findings for the benefit of the networks.

The research findings may also be used for academic and professional presentations, papers and publications. Acknowledgement of the contribution of school staff and network representatives will be made in any dissemination of the research. Every effort will be made to ensure anonymity of the participants and individual schools within the thesis and any subsequent dissemination of the research.

I would be very grateful if you could complete the attached Informed Consent Form and return to me to confirm that you consent to taking part in this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Ruth Bourke

Ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie

061-774715 / 086-XXXXXX

**If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent,
you may contact:**

MIREC Administrator

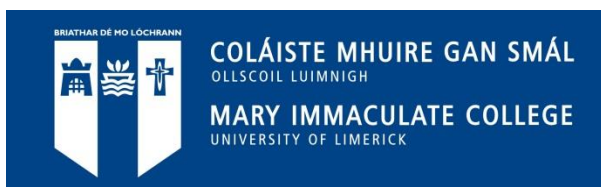
Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie



School networks as a means of supporting DEIS schools to address identified issues of educational disadvantage: A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

OSCAILT network representatives

CONSENT FORM

	YES	NO
I have read attached information on this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand what the research is about, and what the information will be used for.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am fully aware of what is involved, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware that my identity will be anonymous in the research study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to contact the person conducting the study if I need to.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in the survey.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in a focus group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in semi-structured interviews.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the interviews being audio recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

For further information contact:

Ruth Bourke, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick 086-XXXXXX ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie

MIREC Administrator, **Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick**
061-204515 mirec@mic.ul.ie

Agreement to contribute to this research	
Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):	
Signature:	
Date:	
Contact details (to arrange interviews):	Mobile: Email:



How do school networks operate to support DEIS schools? A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

Facilitator Information Sheet

12th February 2018

Dear OSCAILT facilitator,

My name is Ruth Bourke and I am a postgraduate student in Mary Immaculate College. I have also been working with the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in the College since 2004 and I facilitate the PLUS⁴² Network.

I am presently completing a PhD in Education by research in the Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education, Faculty of Education, under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Ryan and Dr. Margaret Nohilly. The proposed case study research will form part of my doctoral thesis. It has ethical clearance from the MIC Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). The purpose of this letter is to provide information on the study and request permission from you to participate in the research.

What is the study about?

The Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project, Mary Immaculate College facilitates two networks of DEIS schools in Limerick: PLUS and OSCAILT⁴³. The aim of the research is to develop an in depth understanding of members' participation in the networks from their perspective.

What are the benefits of this research?

⁴² Primary Liaison with University Services (PLUS) comprises 12 DEIS band 1 primary schools 2 DEIS rural primary schools and 2 non-mainstream schools in Limerick City and county.

⁴³ OSCAILT is a network of 12 DEIS band 1 primary and 4 DEIS post-primary schools in Limerick city, facilitated and supported by the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in Mary Immaculate College (MIC) and the Department of Education.

Recent developments in both the Irish and international education landscape, particularly in teacher professional development, have brought collaboration and learning to prominence in the form of networks of schools, communities of practice and professional learning communities. However, there is a gap in research and literature on school networks in Ireland. This research will help to illuminate the processes, interactions and relationships involved in the school networks concerned. It will also contribute to a body of knowledge on how and why schools and other stakeholders engage in such practices, as well as the benefits and challenges of being involved. This research will be of benefit to the schools and staff involved in such practices, as well as the TED project, the Department of Education and other stakeholders, in terms of developing a clear understanding of how the networks operate and function and the benefits and challenges associated with participation. It is also important for the wider educational community at local and national level. There are no risks in this research greater than those involved in everyday practices.

What is involved?

This research will involve gathering data from network members about their participation in specific network activities or participation as a representative of their school/organisation in the networks.

The data collection methods that will be used include:

- Focus groups with current and former PLUS and OSCAILT network representatives about their opinions and experiences of participating in the networks.
- Individual semi-structured interviews to explore the opinions and experiences of focus group participants in greater detail.
- A survey with current and former PLUS and OSCAILT network representatives about their opinions, beliefs and attitudes about participating in the networks and network practices and activities.
- Observations of selected networks meetings focusing on how the work of the network takes place through the meetings e.g., How do the meetings operate? What are the structures and processes involved? What are the dynamics? How does knowledge creation and sharing occur within and beyond the networks? What enables this to take place?
- Analysis of relevant network documentation i.e., agendas and minutes of meetings and non-confidential reports, to triangulate data from interviews and/or observations. The purpose of the analysis would be for descriptive information about network meetings such as agenda items, general views of the meeting and any actions agreed e.g., invite a guest speaker on a specific topic.

Participation in the research is voluntary and you can withdraw from the research at any stage without providing a reason, and without consequence. Informed consent will be sought from individual research participants.

With permission focus groups and semi-structured interviews will be audio recorded. They will be arranged for a time and place that suits you on an agreed date.

Please fill in the attached Information and Consent Form if you are willing to participate in the research.

How will confidentiality be maintained?

All information gathered will remain confidential and stored safely. All electronic data records will be password protected and/or encrypted as appropriate. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than a participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain anonymity. While the details of PLUS and OSCAILT network member schools and organisations are already in the public arena, individual schools, organizations and staff members will not be identifiable in any results which will be published. The only people who will have access to the data will be myself, my supervisors and the internal or external examiner on request.

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years. All information provided will only be used for the purpose of this research and research records with any names or contact details will be destroyed carefully following the completion of the study.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data gathered will be analysed and used to write my doctoral thesis. As part of this process, each interview and focus group participant will be offered an opportunity to validate their contribution. On completion of the thesis, I will also meet each network to present a summary of the findings and discuss how I might support each network to use the research findings for the benefit of the networks.

The research findings may also be used for academic and professional presentations, papers and publications. Acknowledgement of the contribution of network representatives will be made in any dissemination of the research. Every effort will be made to ensure anonymity of the participants and individual schools within the thesis and any subsequent dissemination of the research.

I would be very grateful if you could complete the attached Informed Consent Form and return to me to confirm that you consent to taking part in this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Ruth Bourke

Ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie

061-774715 / 086-XXXXXX

**If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent,
you may contact:**

MIREC Administrator

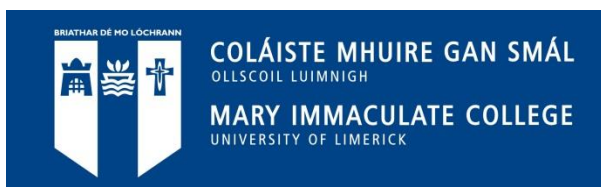
Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie



How do school networks operate to support DEIS schools? A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

OSCAILT network facilitator

CONSENT FORM

	YES	NO
I have read attached information on this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand what the research is about, and what the information will be used for.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am fully aware of what is involved, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware that my identity will be anonymous in the research study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to contact the person conducting the study if I need to.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in the survey.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in a focus group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in a semi-structured interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the interviews being audio recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to participating in observations of OSCAILT network meetings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to analysis of agendas and minutes of meetings and non-confidential reports.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

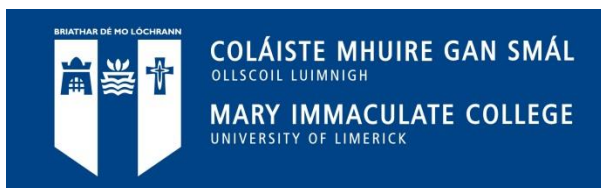
For further information contact:

Ruth Bourke, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick 086-XXXXXX ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie

MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick
061-204515 mirec@mic.ul.ie

Agreement to contribute to this research	
Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):	
Signature:	
Date:	
Contact details (to arrange interviews):	Mobile: Email:

Survey and Documentary Analysis Information Letter and Consent Forms



School networks as a means of supporting DEIS schools to address identified issues of educational disadvantage: A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

Survey and Documentary Analysis Permission

3/10/2018

Dear PLUS Representative

My name is Ruth Bourke and I am a postgraduate student in Mary Immaculate College. I have also been working with the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in the College since 2004 and I facilitate the PLUS⁴⁴ Network.

I am presently completing a PhD in Education by research in the Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education, Faculty of Education, under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Ryan and Dr. Margaret Nohilly. The proposed case study research will form part of my doctoral thesis. It has ethical clearance from the MIC Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). Many of you have already completed consent forms to participate in this research and I have conducted focus groups and individual interviews with some of you. I have attached a detailed information form for those of you not already familiar with the research.

The purpose of this letter is to provide information about the attached survey and to request your permission to conduct documentary analysis of PLUS network agendas, minutes and supporting documentation for the purposes of the research.

1. **Survey** – The purpose of the attached short survey is to collect demographic information about network representatives in order to build a profile of network representatives as a group. Findings will be anonymous and reported in aggregate form i.e., about the PLUS network representatives as a group. No individual will be identifiable.
2. **Documentary Analysis** – I need permission from all current network representatives in order to access agendas, minutes and supporting documentation for the purposes of documentary analysis for this research. The purpose of the analysis would be for descriptive information about network meetings such as meeting agenda items, levels of attendance, issues of concern, general views of attendees and any actions agreed. The minutes and other relevant documents would be invaluable sources of historical and contextual information about the network since it began in 1998 as well as information

⁴⁴ Primary Liaison with University Services (PLUS) comprises 12 DEIS band 1 primary schools 2 DEIS rural primary schools and 2 non-mainstream schools in Limerick City and county.

about changes and developments over the years and to highlight examples of collaboration. Findings will be anonymous and reported about the PLUS network as a group. No individual will be identifiable. In order to further protect the integrity of the process the findings in relation to the proposed documentary analysis will be reviewed by a person designated by the TED Steering Committee.

I would be extremely grateful if you could:

- 1. Complete the consent form for the survey and documentary analysis;**
- 2. Complete the attached survey;**
- 3. Return the completed consent form and survey by post in the stamped addressed envelope provided or by email to ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie (A digital copy of these documents have also been sent to you).**

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and indeed your ongoing support for this research. Once all the data is analyzed, I will present a synopsis of the findings to those that participated in the research so that participants can validate their contribution.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Ruth Bourke

Ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie

061-774715 / 086-XXXXXX

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator

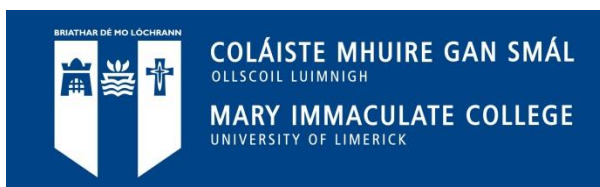
Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie



School networks as a means of supporting DEIS schools to address identified issues of educational disadvantage: A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

PLUS network representatives - CONSENT FORM

Please tick the relevant box

YES NO

I have read attached information on this research. YES NO

I understand what the research is about, and what the information will be used for. YES NO

I am fully aware of what is involved, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study. YES NO

I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence. YES NO

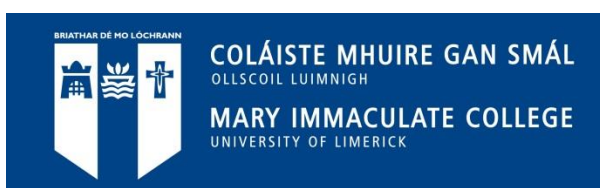
I am aware that my identity will be anonymous in the research study. YES NO

I know how to contact the person conducting the study if I need to. YES NO

I consent to documentary analysis as specified in the information sheet. YES NO

I consent to participating in the survey. YES NO

Agreement to contribute to this research	
Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):	
Signature:	
Date:	



School networks as a means of supporting DEIS schools to address identified issues of educational disadvantage: A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

Survey and Documentary Analysis Permission

02/10/2018

Dear OSCAILT Representative,

My name is Ruth Bourke and I am a postgraduate student in Mary Immaculate College. I have also been working with the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) project in the College since 2004 and I facilitate the PLUS⁴⁵ Network.

I am presently completing a PhD in Education by research in the Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education, Faculty of Education, under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Ryan and Dr. Margaret Nohilly. The proposed case study research will form part of my doctoral thesis. It has ethical clearance from the MIC Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). Many of you have already completed consent forms to participate in this research and I have conducted focus groups and individual interviews with some of you. (*For those of you that are not familiar with this research, a more detailed information letter has been included*).

The purpose of this letter is to provide information about the attached survey and to request your permission to conduct documentary analysis of OSCALIT network agendas, minutes and supporting documentation for the purposes of the research.

1. Survey – The purpose of the attached short survey is to collect demographic information about your school and network representatives in order to build a profile of network schools and representatives as a group. Findings will be anonymous and reported in aggregate form i.e., about the OSCAILT schools and network representatives as a group. No individual school or person will be identifiable.

2. Documentary Analysis – I need permission from all current network representatives in order to access agendas, minutes and supporting documentation for the purposes of documentary analysis for this research. The purpose of the analysis would be for descriptive information about network meetings such as meeting agenda items, levels of attendance, issues of concern, general views of attendees and any actions agreed. The minutes and other relevant documents would be invaluable sources of historical and contextual information about the network since it began in 2009 as well as information about changes and developments over the years and to highlight examples of collaboration. Findings will be anonymous and reported about the OSCAILT network as a group. No individual school or person will be identifiable. In order to further protect the integrity of the process the findings in relation to the proposed documentary analysis will be reviewed by a person designated by the TED Steering Committee.

⁴⁵ Primary Liaison with University Services (PLUS) comprises 12 DEIS band 1 primary schools 2 DEIS rural primary schools and 2 non-mainstream schools in Limerick City and county.

I would be extremely grateful if you could:

- 1. Complete the consent form for the survey and documentary analysis;**
- 2. Complete the attached survey;**
- 3. Return the completed consent form and survey by post in the stamped addressed envelope provided or by hand in a sealed envelope.**

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and indeed your ongoing support for this research. Once all the data is analyzed, I will present a synopsis of the findings to those that participated in the research so that participants can validate their contribution.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Ruth Bourke

Ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie

061-774715 / 086-XXXXXX

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator

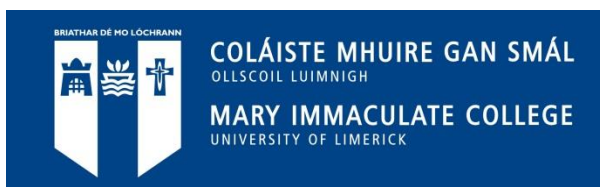
Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie



School networks as a means of supporting DEIS schools to address identified issues of educational disadvantage: A case study analysis of two Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project facilitated school networks.

OSCAILT network representatives – CONSENT FORM

Please tick the relevant box

YES NO

I have read attached information on this research. YES NO

I understand what the research is about, and what the information will be used for. YES NO

I am fully aware of what is involved, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study. YES NO

I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence. YES NO

I am aware that my identity will be anonymous in the research study. YES NO

I know how to contact the person conducting the study if I need to. YES NO

I consent to documentary analysis as specified in the information sheet. YES NO

I consent to participating in the survey. YES NO

Agreement to contribute to this research	
Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):	
Signature:	
Date:	

Appendix 11. Letter of request to and approval from TED Steering Committee April 2018

Extract from Memo to the TED Steering Committee September 2017

Memo

Date: 15th September 2017

Subject: Analysis of PLUS and OSCAILT minutes of meetings and relevant documents for PhD research

From: Ruth Bourke

Department: PhD student Dept. Learning Society and Religious Education, MIC and Project Support Worker, TED Project, Curriculum Development Unit

Supervisors: Dr. Sandra Ryan and Dr. Margaret Nohilly

To: TED Steering Committee

Institution: Mary Immaculate College

Ruth Bourke is requesting permission from the TED Steering Committee to ask the PLUS and OSCAILT network members' permission to analyse minutes of meetings and other relevant documents i.e., documents that the networks may have put together outlining their concerns on a particular issue, letters that may have been sent by networks advocating on particular issue or funding submissions, for her PhD research. The purpose of the analysis would be for descriptive information about network meetings such as meeting agenda items, levels of attendance, issues of concern, general views of attendees and any actions agreed. The minutes and other relevant documents would be invaluable sources of historical and contextual information about the networks since they began (PLUS in 1998 and OSCAILT in 2009) as well as information about changes and developments over the years and to highlight examples of collaboration.

Feedback from TED Steering Committee on presentation made 5th April 2018

Hi Ruth,

The committee were very impressed with your research yesterday - they believe it to be very valuable and timely.

After you left they discussed your requests in relation to permission to undertake observations and to access mins and associated documents relating to the PLUS and OSCAILT networks.

The following decisions were made.

In relation to access to minutes of meetings and associated documentation the committee decided that they would like confirmation that MIREC approval was sought and gained for access to minutes and associated documentation. Minutes would need to be redacted if they were to be used. If minutes and associated documentation are used the following steps must be followed:

1. The people to whom the minutes refer must read the your work before your PhD is submitted
 2. The documentation must be referenced and written up in general terms - no person or school can be identified
 3. The sections of your work (findings / recommendations) which refer to/are informed by the documentation (mins and associated documents) would need to be read by the schools and a person designated by the TED Steering Committee prior to submission.
2. In relation to carrying out observations - the committee didn't agree to this aspect of your request.

The committee wished you every success and look forward to a very positive outcome for you on your PhD journey.

XXX

Appendix 12. PLUS Original Aims and Objectives

Aims, Goals and Objectives of the Urban Network as Identified by the Schools Involved.

The Following aims, goals, and objectives were gathered from those present at the city network meeting on Wednesday, November 4, 1998. The object of the exercise was to further clarify the role of the network, and see how it might grow and develop. The following list which is not in order of importance.

- To meet regularly to discuss issues relevant to disadvantaged schools with a view to taking united objective action on addressing these issues and problems.
- To provide a forum for involvement, belonging, sharing integrating, discussion, support empowerment, support, interlinking.
- To provide schools with the opportunity to be involved in an inclusive process.
- Exchange of expertise and resources.
- Justice Group for disadvantage.
- A voice for the voiceless.
- To allow children to enjoy childhood and be nurtured and empowered without robbing them of their innocence by forcing academic skills and rules on them.
- To retain the rights of schools to have a three year infant cycle if they see it as necessary.
- To lobby the Government on Educational issues we prioritise.
- Promote interests of staff and pupils in disadvantaged schools.
- Develop our understanding and practice on Educational Disadvantage.
- The network as a mechanism whereby schools have a forum to voice the issues/problems they are dealing with a view to take practical steps to bring about solutions and change.
- To involve Mary Immaculate College more meaningfully in the education of children from lower socio-economic groupings.
- To be biased towards disadvantaged in the allocation of funds and resources.
- To make the general teaching body more aware of the plight of the disadvantaged.
- Through the work of the network to create a more just, equitable society, with a more even distribution of wealth.
- To confront inequality.
- Networking with other agencies.
- Making our young people independent/equal opportunities.
- To show that many problems of the disadvantaged in the education system spring from our unwillingness to face squarely this issue - on a national or regional level.

Appendix 13. Revised PLUS Network Mission Statement and Aims 2014

Mission Statement

“The PLUS network is a partnership of primary schools in DEIS contexts and Mary Immaculate College. The PLUS network explores issues and identifies needs around inequities in educational opportunities and proposes practical steps to actively address these needs and improve and enhance educational outcomes for children”

The PLUS network will:

1. Meet regularly and be a forum for schools to share best practice, provide mutual support and voice the issues or concerns which they encounter with a view to empowering schools to take practical steps to bring about solutions and change.
2. Facilitate links between schools and the expertise, resources, and facilities of Mary Immaculate College and create opportunities to bring evidence-based educational innovation to schools and link them to current best practice in a range of curricular areas as well as teaching and learning. Such links will involve Mary Immaculate College more meaningfully in the education of children from DEIS context and promote the involvement of the college staff and students in local community activities in accordance with the College strategic plan.
3. Promote the interests of children, staff and parents pupils in DEIS schools as well as collaborate with teachers, parents, children and relevant agencies to promote more equitable outcomes in education.
4. Advocate and lobby on educational issues which are identified by the network as priorities.
5. Develop our understanding and practice on delivering equity of educational opportunities through Continuous Professional Development.

Appendix 14. PLUS Network Meeting Agenda Items

1998

Meeting date	Agenda items
10/06/1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome – President MIC • College involvement regarding educational disadvantage • Introduction to TED Project • College resources and expertise available • Group work • Synthesis
08/07/1998	<p>Sub-group meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning October 7th • Suggested plan of action • Agenda October 7th
07/10/1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions taken • Action priorities for the group • Vote on priorities for the year
02/12/1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda and minutes • Feedback – Absenteeism Task Force, Behavioural Task Force, Early Childhood Task Force • Issues Arising • Discussion on Direction of Network, Developing Identity, towards Mission Statement • Agenda and date of next meeting

1999

Meeting date	Agenda items
27/01/1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda and minutes • Feedback Task Forces • Issues arising • Discussion on Direction of Network, Developing Identity, towards Mission Statement • Finance • Date next meeting
17/02/1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda and minutes • Report on progress of survey • Finance • Towards an identity
24/03/1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda • Survey • Dublin Inner City • Towards and identity • Date of next meeting
05/05/1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and focus session • Agenda and Minutes • Report from Task Force Meetings • Planning for May 28th • Date and time of next meeting
28/05/1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background to TED Project • Background to PLUS network • Survey reports a) Absenteeism b) Early Childhood c) Behavioural Problems • Discussion forum • Closure
--	---

2000

Meeting date	Agenda items
26/01/2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Focus Session • Matters arising • Short reports – Task Forces • SWOT Analysis • Closure • Date and time next meeting
22/03/2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Information • Task Forces – Absenteeism, Behavioural Problems, Three Year Infant Cycle • Date and time next meeting
06/04/2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Proposals regarding the Three Year Infant Cycle
12/04/2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • History • Introduction to Consensus Decision Making • Board of Management Meeting • Date and time of next meeting
30/11/2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and apologies • Introductions • Centre for Educational Disadvantage Research • TED Coordinator • Empty Desks • Behavioural Project • AOB • Conclusion

2001

Meeting date	Agenda items
17/01/2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Behavioural project • Launch Empty Desks • School presentations • School visits • Priority areas identified • AOB • Conclusion
14/02/2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Schools in PLUS and trainee/graduate teachers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Presentations • Information booklet for resource/special needs teachers • Launch Empty Desks • Cur le Chéile network • AOB • Conclusion
27/03/2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Launch Empty Desks • Submission to NAPS review • Information booklet for resource/special needs teachers • TED summer course • SWOT analysis revisited • AOB • Conclusion
01/05/2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Publication of Neart • Curriculum study option: Education and disadvantage • Starting time of meetings • TED summer course • Absenteeism • TED in 12 months • Conclusion
03/10/2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Chronic absenteeism • New format for meetings • Guest Speaker - Breakfast Clubs - A talk • Group discussion • AOB • Conclusion
06/11/2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Guest Speaker - Genuine parent involvement • General discussion • Breakfast clubs- follow up • Membership of TED PLUS network • Organisation of PLUS meetings • Conclusion
04/12/2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Sharing of practice • General discussion • Chronic Absenteeism • Membership of TED PLUS network • Conclusion

2002

Meeting date	Agenda items
15/01/2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Guest Speaker - Non national children in the primary school • Pilot surveys • Conclusion
13/03/2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Cur le Chéile Network

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TED and 2nd level schools • Working together - teachers pilot survey • Sharing of good practice • Conclusion
24/04/2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Cur le Chéile Network • LEDP • Sharing of good practice • Conclusion
19/06/2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Address President of College • Group discussion • Conclusion
09/10/2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Presentation - Absenteeism Initiative • General discussion • Small group discussion • Outcomes • Conclusion
20/11/2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Apologies • PAUL • Discussion • Guest speaker – Oral Language • AOB • Conclusion

2003

Meeting date	Agenda items
05/03/2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • PAUL and absenteeism • Date next meeting
02/04/2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Minutes • Matters arising • Discussion Absenteeism initiative • Next meeting
30/04/2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome • Minutes • Absenteeism initiative • Matters arising • Feedback visits to schools • AOB • Next meeting
01/10/2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Introduce new project support worker • Bí Folláin • TED Background Information • Neart Booklet • PAUL Absenteeism Initiative • Funding childcare facilities • Feedback from DES • Frank Howe seminar • Absenteeism presentation • Feedback • AOB

05/11/2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date and time next meeting • Welcome • Letter forwarded to DES • Meeting with Limerick Childcare Committee • Resources from Health Promotion Officer • Recommended publications • Frank Howe visit December 2003 • Absenteeism initiative • Withdrawal of school • AOB • Date next meeting
03/12/2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Newspaper article NEWB • Frank Howe seminars update • Absenteeism initiative • Mid Western Health Board resources • Recommended website • Revised Neart booklet • Expansion of PLUS • AOB • Date next meeting

2004

Meeting date	Agenda items
14/01/2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Project Support Worker • Curriculum Specialisation (Educational Disadvantage): student placements • Proposed project: Parent-School Partnerships • Subject profile: English literacy • Frank Howe seminars: update • Absenteeism initiative: update • Neart booklet: update • Expansion of PLUS Network to include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2nd level schools which PLUS Network schools feed into 2. School Completion Programme • AOB • Date and time of next meeting.
11/02/2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Subject Profile: Mathematics • Education Welfare Officers • Information and discussion • Updates: Absenteeism Initiative & Neart • Expansion of PLUS Network • New agenda item - Open Forum suggestions • Secondary places for 6th class children in Limerick - Follow-up from public meeting on February 2nd, Discussion of action to be taken within the PLUS Network • AOB

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date and time of next meeting
10/03/2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • School Completion Programme • Subject Profile: Mathematics (part 2) • Updates - Absenteeism Initiative & Neart • Expansion of PLUS Network • Secondary places for 6th class children in Limerick - Follow-up from public meeting on Monday, March 8th • AOB • Date and time of next meeting
21/04/2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Subject Profile: Art • Secondary places for 6th class children in Limerick - Follow-up from public meeting on Monday, 19th April • School Completion Programme - Discussion on the expansion of PLUS • Updates - Absenteeism Initiative and Handbook & Neart • AOB • Date and time of next meeting
27/05/2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Subject Profile: SPHE • Secondary places for 6th class children in Limerick- Follow-up from the public meeting held on Monday, 24th May • School Completion Programme - Discussion on the expansion of PLUS • End of year evaluation - Evaluation of PLUS 2003/2004 • Updates - Absenteeism Initiative and Handbook & Neart • AOB • Date and time of next meeting
22/09/2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Update on secondary school places • Planning for PLUS 2004/2005 • PLUS Halloween festival • AOB • Date and time of next meeting • Closure
20/10/2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • School profile • Update on secondary school places • Aggression and peer rejection among 5th class children in Limerick city - Presentation of research results • Possible expansion of PLUS • Updates - Physical education as subject profile, Neart and absenteeism publications • A.O.B. • Date and time of next meeting
18/11/2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Subject profile - Physical Education • Update on secondary school places

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PE training opportunity for PLUS schools: 'Action for Life' – Irish Heart Foundation • Possible expansion of PLUS • Updates - Educational Disadvantage seminar, Neart and absenteeism publications • A.O.B. • Date and time of next meeting
16/12/2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Subject profile : Music • Possible expansion of PLUS • Secondary school places for 6th class children • Updates – Action for Life, Educational Disadvantage Seminar, Neart and Absenteeism publications

2005

Meeting date	Agenda items
27/01/2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Expansion of PLUS • Secondary school places for 6th class children • MIC student placements in PLUS schools - Information on the 3rd year curriculum specialisation (educational disadvantage) • Updates - 'Action for Life' training, Educational Disadvantage seminar, Absenteeism publication, Physical Education resources • Launch of Neart • A.O.B. • Date and time of next meeting
24/02/2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Secondary places for 6th class children • Special Educational Needs - Information and discussion on the new 'weighting system' • Promoting positive behaviour in the school yard - Ideas from the Working Together Project • TED on-line summer school - 'Promoting Positive Behaviour in the Primary School' • Updates - 'Action for Life' training, Educational Disadvantage seminar, Absenteeism publication • A.O.B. • Date and time of next meeting
22/03/2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Guest speaker - "Children on Location - What children in Limerick can tell us about their neighbourhood" • Absenteeism and promoting attendance • Secondary school places for 6th class children

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Educational Needs • Updates - 'Action for Life' training, Educational Disadvantage seminar • A.O.B. • Date and time of next meeting
28/04/2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Absenteeism and promoting attendance • Social and emotional learning • Tips and ideas compiled by Health Promotion Officer, MIC/HSE • Special Educational Needs • Secondary school places for 6th class children • Updates - 'Action for Life' training, Research by XXX, Meeting of PLUS and Cur le Chéile principals • A.O.B. • Date and time of next meeting – final meeting of the year
26/05/2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Seminar on challenging behaviour - INTO professional development programme • Wrap-up of PLUS issues 2004/2005 • Evaluation of PLUS 2004/2005 • A.O.B. • Date and time of next meeting
21/09/2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introduction • Review of PLUS 2004 – 2005 • Updates - Special Education Needs Allocation, • Absenteeism Initiative • Planning 2005 – 2006 • A.O.B. • Date and time of next meeting
26/10/2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introduction • Co-Ordinator Limerick City Childcare Committee – Presentation on School Age Childcare • Feedback from planning September 2005 • Secondary School application process January 2005 • A.O.B. • Date of next meeting
23/11/2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introduction • Minutes and matters arising • Presentation on Working Together Project • Date and time of next meeting

Meeting date	Agenda items
25/01/2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introduction • Subject Profile – Science • Minutes November 2005 and matters arising • Secondary School Applications • Seminar on Litigation • Updates • A.O.B. • Date and time of meetings 2006
22/02/2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introduction • Secondary school applications • Seminar on Litigation • Family School Community Educational Partnership – Co-Ordinator • Presentation on Literacy • AOB • Date and time next meeting
26/04/2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introduction • Feedback – Schools and Law Seminar • Letter to Minister of Education re: secondary school application process • Feedback ‘<i>Learning Spaces Community Places</i>’ Conference – Teachers TV • A.O.B. • Date and time of next meeting
24/05/2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introduction • Guest Speaker – Senior Psychologist, NEPS • Review and Evaluation • AOB • Date and time of next meeting
27/09/2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introduction • TED Project Staff • Review and planning • Planning and PLUS Expansion • PLUS flyer • AOB • Date and time next meeting
18/10/2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Introduction of representatives new schools • Feedback on planning • Intercultural education • AOB • Date and time next meeting
29/11/2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Pedagogical Option in Educational Disadvantage for 3rd year B.Ed. students • Principal Speech and Language Therapist, St. Camillus’ Hospital. • A.O.B. • Date and time of next meeting

Meeting date	Agenda items
17/01/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Follow up on Speech and Language session • Peer Tutoring • Update on secondary school places • PLUS and Cur le Chéile meeting • A.O.B. • Date and Time of Next Meeting
27/02/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Update on secondary school places • Incredible Years • PLUS and Cur le Chéile meeting • A.O.B. • Date and Time of Next Meeting
17/03/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint meeting PLUS and Cur le Chéile Networks, Gort, Co. Galway
25/04/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • PLUS and Cur le Chéile Meeting • Behaviour Seminar • Out of Schools report • Educational Disadvantage Colloquium, June 2007 • Date and Time of Next Meeting
23/05/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Out of School Group Report- Presentation by Local Anti-Poverty Strategy Coordinator • Educational Disadvantage Colloquium, June 19th 2007 • Updates • Review and Evaluation • AOB • Date and time next meeting
03/10/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • TED Project Staff • Review and planning • Working Together Project resource • Voice and Choice' Launch • Incredible Years • InTouch Article • AOB • Date and time next meeting
14/11/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Limerick Regeneration Agency • Update on planning • InTouch Article • Limerick Enterprise Network Community Time Bank • AOB • Date and time next meeting

05/12/2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • AOB • Date and time next meeting •
------------	--

2008

Meeting date	Agenda items
23/01/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Updates • 3rd year B.Ed. Pedagogical Option • Limerick Regeneration Agencies – Launch of vision documents • Voice and Choice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
27/02/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Local Revenue Office • Secondary school places • EPSEN and Disability Acts • Guest Speaker- General Manager, Blue Box Creative Learning Centre • AOB • Date and time next meeting
02/04/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Retention of Staff 2008/2009 • Secondary school places • Follow up Lobbying • Letter to Principals re ADHD Presentation • Effective Teaching and Learning Conference • AOB • Date and time next meeting
14/05/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest Speaker – ADHD – Whole School
04/06/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Update • Family School Community Educational Partnership Coordinator • Review 2007-2008 • AOB • Date and time next meeting
24/09/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • TED project staff update • Review 2007/2008 • Planning 2008/2009

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directory of Services • AOB • Date and time next meeting
05/11/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • TED staff update • Issues 2008-2009 • SESS/HSE focus group: feedback • Research update • Budget 2008 • Neart Review • Presentation on Limerick Regeneration – Guest speaker • AOB • Date and time next meeting
03/12/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • SLT developments • Dormant Accounts • DEIS ICT funds • DEIS review • NEART Review • Mission Transition presentation – Guest speaker • AOB • Date and time next meeting

2009

Meeting date	Agenda items
January 2009	File missing
11/02/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • SEN session: Dealing with Challenging Behaviour • Principals' Forum • Dormant Accounts • Sharing Good Practice • Feedback from survey of PLUS activities • AOB • Date and time next meeting
11/03/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest speaker presentation open to all staff – Dealing with Challenging Behaviour: Promoting Active Student Responding as Prevention and Positive Reduction Strategies
13/05/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • League o' Legends Soccer Tournament • Mission Transition control group • Early years research request • Early school leaving strategy • Work review • Yellow Flag

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing good practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
05/11/2009	Files missing
28/11/2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Priorities for 2009/2010 • DEIS ICT funds • Ped Op • DEIS Review • Sharing good practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting

2010

Meeting date	Agenda items
13/01/2010	Files missing
24/03/2010	Presentation to DEIS principals - Educational Research Centre
19/05/2010	Files missing
18/11/2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • TED Update • TED's ongoing work • Review of PLUS work 2009/2010 and Planning 2010/2011 • Guest speaker – Drama Circles • AOB • Date and time next meeting

2011

Meeting date	Agenda items
02/02/2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Literacy and Numeracy Draft Plan • Education and Disadvantage Elective Placement • PLUS Teacher Seminar • Drama Circle • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
02/02/2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Literacy and Numeracy Draft Plan • Letter to SENO • PLUS teacher seminar • Sharing of good practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
06/04/2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • SENO Letter

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • League o'Legends • PLUS teacher seminar • Sharing of good practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
14/04/2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLUS teacher seminar – Building Bridges of Understanding
18/05/2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • League o'Legends • Update on TED staff • Forum on Patronage in the Primary school • Sharing of good practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
19/10/2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Stress Management Programme • Filial Play • Planning events for the year ahead • Communication • Sharing of good practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
17 & 24 th November 2011	Oral Language Workshops
30/11/2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Guest speaker - Cyber bullying workshop • Stress Management Programme • Filial Play • STRANDS resource • PLUS Factor • Oral Language Workshops • Science workshop • Trauma workshops: • Membership of PLUS • Communication • AOB • Date and time next meeting

2012

Meeting date	Agenda items
18/01/2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Workshops – Trauma and Stress Management • Membership of PLUS Network • Pedagogical Option in Education and Disadvantage • DEIS & budget 2012 • Gala launch of TED

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
22/02/2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Workshops – Trauma and Stress Management • Membership of PLUS Network • DEIS & budget 2012 • Launch of ‘How are Our Kids’. • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
24/04/2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation on STRANDS (Strategies for Teachers to Respond Actively to the Needs of Children with Down Syndrome) resource (all staff)
30/05/2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Workshops – Trauma workshop evaluations • Membership of PLUS Network • League of Legends June 14th 2012 • DEIS & budget 2012 • AOB • Date and time next meeting
28/11/2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Elective for 3rd year students – Teaching in a DEIS School • Mindfulness training • Moodle site for PLUS network • Cyber-bullying – Bí Folláin Newsletter • Update DEIS and budget 2012 • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting

2013

Meeting date	Agenda items
23/01/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • School placements for 3rd year elective students • Seminar/Workshop options for PLUS schools • Moodle site for PLUS network: update • League o’Legends possible dates • QDOSS conference April 18th Croke Park • Budget cuts 2013: DEIS, SCP • AOB • Date and time next meeting

13/03/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising Mindfulness seminar • Options for inviting younger children on campus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Science/Art/Music/Literacy related - Teacher/school involvement - Logistics and date/timing constraints • League o’Legends: discussion on format • Full service school: Appointment of project manager • Sharing of Good Practice/ Recent initiatives in schools • AOB • Date and time next meeting
01/05/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Mindfulness input • On Campus event for 1st/2nd class • Moodle site for PLUS network: information for sign in • League o’Legends format • Sharing of Good Practice/ Recent initiatives in schools • Planning 2013/2014 • AOB • Date and time next meeting
02/10/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Review 2012/2013 • Planning for 2013/2014 • Moodle site for PLUS network • Guest Speaker - MIC Children’s choir initiative • Sharing of Good Practice/ Recent initiatives in schools • AOB • Date and time next meeting
20/11/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Summary Feedback from the PLUS needs analysis, • Mission statement and objectives review • PODS of work update • Moodle site for PLUS network • MIC Children’s choir initiative • Date for League o’Legends 2014 • Sharing of Good Practice/Recent initiatives in schools • AOB • Date and time next meeting

2014

Meeting date	Agenda items
--------------	--------------

29/01/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • School placements for 3rd year elective students • Seminar/Workshop options for PLUS schools • Mission statement review • Sharing of Good Practice/Recent initiatives in schools • Update on TED /Lego initiative and Children’s Literature Conference • AOB • Date and time next meeting
26/03/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Guest Speaker - Update on Lego WeDo and Lego training • Guest Speaker - Apps and their educational applications – bring iPads/ tablets • Identifying Maths initiatives past, present and future • Sharing of Good Practice/Recent initiatives in schools –focus on numeracy • Buzzing with Books: Children’s Literature Conference • AOB • Date and time next meeting
14/04/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Update on Lego WeDo and Lego training • League o’Legends • Identifying CPD in numeracy • Sharing of Good Practice/Recent initiatives in schools –focus on numeracy • Buzzing with Books: Children’s Literature Conference • AOB • Date and time next meeting
23/09/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Elective ‘Teaching in a DEIS school’ • Pods of work • Sharing of Good Practice/ Recent initiatives in schools • AOB • Date and time next meeting

2015

Meeting date	Agenda items
--------------	--------------

20/01/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Guest speaker - Apps that have educational applications • Working with Families Module in the B.Ed. programme • Planning for a session on self care • Sharing of Good Practice/Recent initiatives in schools • Update on TED initiatives and projects • Planning for League o’Legends • AOB • Date and time next meeting
04/03/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Guest Speaker - Doodle Families • Sharing Good Practice • League o’Legends change of date • Proposal for network schools to produce a combined response to teaching council CPD report • AOB • Date and time next meeting
19/05/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • League o’ Legends Thursday 11th June • Network schools combined response to Teaching Council CPD consultation • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
23/09/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Teaching council CPD consultation 24th September • ‘Teaching in a DEIS school’ elective • Update on TED project work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MIC Children’s Choir - Doodle Families Evaluation - Bedford Row Family Project Research • Guest Speaker - Studio Classroom Art Exhibition Tour @ 2pm • School demographics and intercultural education • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
11/11/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Update on TED project work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MIC Children’s Choir - Doodle Families Evaluation - Bedford Row Family Project Research • Review & planning 2015- 2016 • Sharing of Good Practice

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AOB • Date and time next meeting
--	---

2016

Meeting date	Agenda items
19/01/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Guest Speaker - Ideas for schools to commemorate the 1916 centenary • Update on TED project work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DEIS Specialism - LEGO Elective - Studio Classroom Phase 2 - MIC Children's Choir • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
09/03/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • DEIS Review • Update on TED project work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Studio Classroom Phase 2 - Trauma and the Child workshop 14th & 15th March - League of Legends – Wed 22nd June - MIC Children's Choir - Changing Faces of Ireland Photography Exhibition - Bedford Row Family Project Research • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
18/05/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • League of Legends Thursday 19th May • Update on TED project work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DEIS Review submission - Studio Classroom Phase 2 - MIC Children's Choir • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
21/09/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • B.Ed. Elective – Teaching in a DEIS School • Science Week, MIC – Monday 14th November, Lime Tree Theatre – Guest speaker • Development and Intercultural Awareness Day, 22nd November • Update on TED project work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Studio Classroom Exhibition - MIC Children's Choir

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLUS Agenda for 2016-2017 • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
23/11/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • LEGO Elective Spring 2016 • Show Racism the Red Card • Update on TED project work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MIC Children's Choir - Studio Classroom - League o' Legends – 18th May 2017 • Sharing of Good Practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting

2017

Meeting date	Agenda items
18/01/2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Guest Speaker – Presentation, Project Leader, Children's Grief Project • AOB • Date and time next meeting
22/03/2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Update on TED Project Work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MIC Children's Choir - League o' Legends - Studio Classroom - Embracing Diversity Nurturing Integration Project (EDNIP) • PhD – Case study research on OSCAILT and PLUS networks • Sharing of good practice • AOB • Date and time next meeting
10/05/2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TED Coordinator - Presentation on the AIMF funded initiative Embracing Diversity, Nurturing Integration: Learning for Life Project • League of Legends Soccer Tournament 18th May • Sharing of good practice
20/09/2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Minutes and matters arising • Update TED Project work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guest Speaker – EDNIP - MIC Children's Choir • Guest speakers - Placement of B.Ed. students in DEIS schools – Teaching in a DEIS school module and Drama module • Sharing of good practice • AOB

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Date and time next meeting
--	--

Appendix 15. Article about secondary school places

Irish Times, Dublin, 11th May 2004

Limerick's new class system; The recent revelation that 49 children from disadvantaged areas of Limerick are unable to find a place at second level raises serious questions, writes John Downes.

It must be pretty difficult to be told at the age of 11 or 12 that no secondary school in your area wants to enrol you. Yet at the recent INTO conference in Tralee, delegates heard 49 students in Limerick were faced with just such a situation.

All the students in question came from disadvantaged backgrounds, and all except two or three were male.

So how could it be that a system which claims to be inclusive could crank to a halt in such a way?

[PRINCIPAL A]⁴⁶ is principal of [SCHOOL A] national school in the [AREA] area of Limerick. [SCHOOL A] is officially designated disadvantaged by the Department of Education, and currently has 10 children who do not have a place at second level.

While hers is by no means the only Limerick school to have experienced the problem, [PRINCIPAL A] believes her own situation underlines the class bias among some schools in her area.

"Kids receive a letter saying the board of management is informing them they don't meet the criteria of the school," [PRINCIPAL A] says. "There is a strong opinion that [AREA] wouldn't be a very popular address with some of these schools. I think the area has a negative effect on some of the kids' ability to get into the schools." This sends out an "awful message" to students who are already designated disadvantaged, [PRINCIPAL A] says.

In the right circumstances they would blossom, [PRINCIPAL A] believes. There are a number of factors to be considered when trying to understand how such a situation has come to pass, [PRINCIPAL A] says.

The recent closure of the nearby [SCHOOL B] secondary school on the [ROAD] Road is one. The school, which has ceased taking in first year pupils, was established in 1993 in response to a need to find emergency places for 70 students who could not be catered for in other city schools. However, [SCHOOL B] was never intended as a long-term solution.

This year, [PRINCIPAL A's] school has also experienced what [PRINCIPAL A] calls a "bubble" - there are approximately 20 more children graduating than in previous years. As a result, this puts pressure on the local secondary schools to find sufficient places to accommodate them.

But others feel the problem runs a lot deeper than this. There are certain schools in Limerick which everybody knows take only the best and brightest children, they say.

⁴⁶ While the principal and school names are not anonymised in the newspaper article, I have anonymised them here as I made a commitment not to identify principals or schools in the research. There are numerous local and national newspaper articles on this issue.

Sure, they take some from disadvantaged backgrounds, but the majority of their children come from comfortable, middle-class homes.

Likewise, other schools in the area take more than their share of disadvantaged students to make up the slack. There are, they say, educational ghettos in the city.

[PRINCIPAL B] is principal of [SCHOOL C] second-level school in Limerick, one of the schools to which [PRINCIPAL A's] students apply.

Located in a primarily middle-class area of Limerick, [PRINCIPAL B] is rightly proud of its excellent reputation. [PRINCIPAL B] points out that schools do not have unlimited numbers of places for pupils.

"In my school we were not able to take 140 students [this year] . . . we simply had to refuse places because we simply did not have the space. Our school is operating at capacity in terms of the numbers it is taking in." [PRINCIPAL B] rejects any suggestion that [THE] school discriminates against students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Its intake policy does not allow it to discriminate on an academic or socio-economic basis. As a result, every student has the same chance of securing a place, [PRINCIPAL B] says. However, [PRINCIPAL B] admits that [THE] school does not get large numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds applying, suggesting that parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds are choosing not to send them there.

Moreover, [PRINCIPAL B] makes no apologies for the fact that, due to its location, [THE] schools' catchment area is primarily middle-class. But there is "nothing wrong" with the process by which this enrolment is done.

[PRINCIPAL C], principal of [SCHOOL D] school in the area, says the question of disadvantage is not an issue for [THE] school. "We have always taken a mix of students and we've always worked with them. We've achieved very good results," [PRINCIPAL C] says.

So is there a suggestion that a school which is oversubscribed can use this to its favour in selecting the type of children it wants? The Department of Education and Science says no.

There are strict rules which forbid a school from discriminating against any student on the basis of socioeconomic background or exam results.

Nor can a school hide its enrolment policies - they have to be openly available to anyone seeking to inspect them.

At a recent school managers' conference in Cork, the Minister for Education, Mr Dempsey, seemed to acknowledge that there is a problem with some schools. "The evidence I have is that there are some schools in some places that are operating policies that to me look less than fair," he said.

There may be strict rules governing enrolment policies, but whether these are actually enforced is another matter entirely. According to [PRINCIPAL D], INTO executive member for Limerick, the fact that all the children currently awaiting a place in school come from disadvantaged backgrounds speaks for itself.

"It is difficult to get disadvantaged students into secondary schools, full stop," [PRINCIPAL D] believes. "Discrimination is definitely a problem. But who's being discriminated against? It is mainly affecting kids from areas with local authority housing."

[PRINCIPAL D] believes some schools are discriminating in favour of students who are more likely to achieve good results. "If you control the quality of intake, you are ensuring it is going to be a good school," [PRINCIPAL D] says.

For its part, the Department points out that any student has the right to appeal against a refusal to admit them to a particular school. There are currently 31 such appeals in Limerick.

It is also satisfied that there are enough post-primary places in Limerick. Schools should, it says, serve their local communities.

However, [PRINCIPAL D] believes the Department is not doing enough. "This is a national problem. There will be approximately 1,000 students who won't make the transition between primary and secondary this year. The local issue here in Limerick is highlighting a national issue. There are children always slipping into the net.

"Secondary schools have to look at their intake policies and explain why they are not serving the local community. They should explain why [local kids] can't gain access to schools in the local area."

But maybe this is the point. What do we mean by a "good school"? Is it one which does its best for a narrowly selected group of students from a particular background? Indeed, perhaps the best example of this approach is that employed by the fee-paying schools, who openly choose their student intake according to parents' ability to pay.

Or is it one which seeks to value students from all backgrounds, thereby providing a level playing-field? While such an approach admittedly might run the risk of lowering the overall academic attainment in that school, [PRINCIPAL A], for one, believes it is a price worth paying.

There are lots of types of intelligence, not solely those linked to success in exams, [PRINCIPAL A] says. Many of [THE] children display great interest in horses and technical subjects, for example. "I think it is a risk that's worth taking. Having the mix is the greater good. In primary school we do it, and we work at keeping kids in school," [PRINCIPAL A] says.

"I am making a plea for inclusiveness and appropriate programmes to meet the needs of all kids. [The Department] should be making sure that every child has reasonable access to the school of their choice within a reasonable distance of the school. And that's not the case in Limerick," agrees [PRINCIPAL D].

The majority of students leaving sixth class in Limerick have second-level places. However, there is a very real risk that the rest, all from disadvantaged areas, will be stigmatised by their peers unless something is done to prevent this happening again.

A year is a very long time in the school-life of a 12-year-old child.

Appendix 16. DEIS schools in Limerick involved in Dormant Accounts Scheme 2009-2011

School	Address
Mhuire Naofa Cailíní	Mhuire Naofa, Limerick
St John's Girls' and Infant Boys'	Cathedral Place, Limerick City
St Michael's Infant School	CBS Grounds, Sexton Street, Limerick
St John The Baptist Boys N S	Downey Street, Pennywell, Limerick
Scoil Iosagáin	Sraid Seasain, Limerick
Scoil Lile Naofa	Kileely, Limerick
Our Lady Queen of Peace N.S.	Janesboro, Limerick
St Munchin's Girls' and Infant Boys'	Ballynanty, Limerick
St. Munchin's C.B.S.	Shelbourne Road, Limerick
South Hill Junior School	South Hill, Limerick
Our Lady Of Lourdes N S	Rosbrien, Limerick
Corpus Christi N S	Moyross, Limerick
Gaelscoil Sheoirse	Clancy, An Cnoc Theas, Luimneach
Maria King Presentation Primary	Sexton Street, Limerick
Galvone NS	Kennedy Park, Limerick City
St Marys Boys NS	Island Road, Limerick

DEIS Post Primary Schools	Address
Coláiste Mhichíl	Sexton Street, Limerick
Presentation Secondary School	Sexton Street, Limerick
Salesian Secondary School	Fernbank, Limerick
Ardcoil Mhuire	Corbally, Limerick
St Nessan's Community College (VEC)	Moylish Park, Limerick
St Endas Community School	Kilmallock Rd, Limerick

Appendix 17. OSCAILT Network Logo



Appendix 18. OSCAILT Agenda Items

2009

Meeting date	Agenda items
26/02/2009	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Minutes 4th February 2009 3. Review progress to date 4. Rates of pay for tutors 5. Expenses for principals 6. AOB 7. Date next meeting 8. Closure
26/03/2009	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 26th February 2009 4. Agreement whether the XXX would attend for the full duration of the XXXXXXXX meetings 5. Receive clarity from the XXX in relation to Tax workshop and Social Welfare 6. Agree a format for XXXXXXXX meetings 7. Review of Progress to Date 8. Request from XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 9. AOB 10. Date and Time for next meeting 11. Presentation by XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 12. Closure
28/04/2009	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 26th March 2009 4. Clarity from the XXX in relation to 5. Launch of XXXXXXXX 6. Review of Progress to Date 7. Discussion Topic: Sustainability 8. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Conference 9. Speaker and Topic Agreement 10. AOB 11. Date and Time for next meeting 12. Presentation by XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 13. Closure
26/05/2009	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 28th April 2009 4. Press release 5. Update from the in relation to Social Welfare 6. Review of Progress to Date 7. Discussion Topic: Volunteering and Sustainability 8. Speaker and Topic Agreement 9. Date and Time for next meeting 10. AOB 11. Presentation by XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 12. Closure
16/09/2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 26th May 2009 4. XXXXXXXX Launch 5. Clarity from the XXX in relation to Social Welfare and Revenue 6. Update on Reporting Processes 7. Review of Progress to Date 8. Discussion Topic: Child Protection / Garda Clearance 9. Speaker and Topic Agreement 10. AOB 11. Date and time next meeting 12. Presentation XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 13. Closure
15/10/2009	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 16th September 2009 4. XXXXXXXX Launch 5. Revenue Workshop 6. General Update 7. XXX support for XXXXXXXX 8. Sharing experiences 9. Speaker and Topic Agreement 10. AOB 11. Date and time next meeting 12. Presentation by XXXX ISPCC 13. Closure
17/11/2009	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 15th October 2009 4. XXXXXXXX Launch 5. DES Update 6. Sharing experiences 7. Topic: Reporting Template 8. Speaker and Topic Agreement 9. AOB 10. Date and time next meeting 11. Closure

2010

Meeting date	Agenda items
26/01/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 17th November 2009 4. Review XXXXXXXX Launch 5. Sharing of Experiences 6. Child Protection Workshops 7. Speaker/topic for next meeting 8. AOB 9. Date and time next meeting 10. Closure
26/02/2010	Not included
02/03/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 26th February 2010

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Showcase 5. Update on subsidised/hire purchase schemes 6. ASSET 7. One Road In, Many Roads Out Conference 8. Sharing of experiences in rolling out the Capital and Programme elements of this initiative 9. Sustainability 10. Child Protection Guidelines 11. Sustainability 12. CSC: How are our Kids? 13. AOB 14. Date and time next meeting 15. Closure
20/04/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 2nd March 2010 4. Limerick.ie website / activities template 5. Summer Camps 6. School input- XXXXXXXXX 7. Speaker for next meeting 8. AOB 9. Date and time next meeting 10. Closure
18/05/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 20th April 2010 4. XXX update: XX 5. XXX Information sharing: XXXXXXXXXXXXX 6. Information sharing: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 7. Speaker: XXXXXXXXXX: XXXXXXXXXX 8. Evaluation 9. Tea and good wishes 10. Closure 11. Date and time next meeting
21/09/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 18th May 2010 4. Review of XXXXXXXX evaluation of May 2010 5. School input 6. XXX update 7. Research proposal 8. How Are Our Kids? 9. Next meeting 10. Closure
17/11/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 21st September 2010 4. School input 5. XXX update 6. Research proposal 7. Closure

2011

Meeting date	Agenda items
09/02/2011	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 17th November 2010 4. Update 5. Sharing of experience 6. Research update 7. Speaker 8. Closure
11/05/2011	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda 3. Minutes 9th February 2010 4. XXX Update 5. Sustainability 6. Research update 7. AOB 8. Next meeting
15/09/2011	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda 3. Minutes 11th May 2011 4. XXX Update 5. Update on Dormant Accounts Fund Report 6. Schools information sharing 7. The future of XXXX 8. AOB 9. Next meeting
15/11/2011	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda 3. Minutes 15th September 2011 4. XXX Update 5. Update on Dormant Accounts Fund Report 6. Schools information sharing 7. The future of XXXX 8. AOB 9. Next meeting

2012

Meeting date	Agenda items
23/01/2012	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. XXX from XXX 3. Agenda and timekeeper 4. Minutes 15th November 2011 5. XXX Update 6. Sharing of experiences 7. Research and report update 8. Future of XXX forum 9. AOB 10. Next meeting 11. Closure
15/03/2012	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Minutes 23rd January 2012 3. XXX update and information sharing 4. XXXXXXXXXXXX CEO, Limerick Regeneration Agency 5. Update on Dormant Accounts Fund Report 6. Update from sub-group 7. Schools information sharing 8. Mission statement 9. AOB 10. Date and time next meeting
17/05/2012	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 15th March 2012 4. Update from Subgroup – Mission statement 5. Update from Subgroup – bridging group 6. Update from XX 7. Review of XXX visit 8. Meeting XXX 9. Update from research report 10. Schools information sharing 11. AOB 12. Date and time next meeting
02/10/2012	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Minutes 17th May 2012 3. Update from XXX 4. Update from XXXXXXXX working group – Celebration 5. Update on XXXXXXXX Report 6. Where to from here for XXXXXXXX 7. Schools information sharing 8. AOB 9. Date and time next meeting
14/11/2012	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Matters arising 4. Information sharing XXX 5. Working groups 6. Guest speaker XXX 7. AOB 8. Date and time next meeting

2013

Meeting date	Agenda items
06/03/2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 4. Feedback on report 5. Celebration launch 6. Update bridging subgroup 7. Develop a strategy for meeting with XXX 8. Schools information sharing 9. AOB 10. Date and time next meeting
21/03/2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 6th March 2013 4. Celebration launch update 5. AOB 6. Date and time next meeting
23/04/2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 21st March 2013 4. Celebration and launch review 5. Future meeting agenda items 6. AOB 7. Date and time next meeting
17/06/2013 Special meeting with invited guests Minister XX and Mr XX	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Who XXX are 3. What we do 4. The reality on the ground of children's lives 5. Our motivation – equity of outcome and social justice 6. Our plans and aspirations 7. Minister XX's response 8. Mr. XX's response 9. Discussion 10. Closure 11. Evaluation of the meeting by those present 12. Follow up 13. Annual evaluation 14. AOB 15. Next meeting
21/10/2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 17th June 2013 4. Review of 2012-2013 initiatives and activities 5. Planned 2013-2014 initiatives and activities 6. Speakers 7. AOB – Area Based Partnership 8. Date and time next meeting
3/12/2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 21st October 2013 4. XXX - Homemaker Initiative 5. XXX Initiative 6. Free discussion time 7. AOB 8. Date and time next meeting

2014

Meeting date	Agenda items
06/03/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. XXX Office move 5. XXX initiative update 6. Information sharing – deferred 7. AOB 8. Date and time next meeting
05/06/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 6th March 2014 4. XXX initiative update 5. Information sharing 6. AOB 7. Date and time next meeting
14/09/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 5th June 2014 4. Review of evaluations 5. XXX Update and next steps 6. Plan for year ahead 7. AOB 8. Date and time next meeting
25/11/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 14th September 2014 4. XXX update 5. XXX Guest Speaker Mindfulness 6. Dr. XXX Principals Take Care session 7. Future meeting speakers 8. Next meeting date

2015

Meeting date	Agenda items
05/03/2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introduction 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 4. XXX update 5. XXX initiatives/ Preparation for meeting Minister XXX 6. Planning for next meeting 7. AOB
30/04/2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 4. XXX update 5. After school activities / activity post dormant accounts 6. Presentation on the Homemaker Service 7. Presentation on Meitheal 8. Teaching Council CPD Consultation update 9. XXX specialism information sharing 10. AOB
21/10/2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. XXX update 5. XXX audits 6. XXX update 7. Diversity of Children in our Schools: issues emerging, sharing experiences. 8. Planning 15-16 9. AOB
--	--

2016

Meeting date	Agenda items
10/02/2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Correspondence 4. Increasing diversity of children in our schools 5. XXX Update 6. XXX Update 7. Planning 2015-2016 8. XXX update 9. AOB 10. Dates next meetings
20/04/2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Update XXX 4. XXX Start Right Limerick 5. XXX discussion 6. AOB 7. XXX Representative 8. Date next meeting
11/05/2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes meeting 20th April 2016 4. XXX Representative 5. XXX Representative 6. XXX Start Right 7. Limerick Bid 2020 8. XXX response to the XXX Review 9. Special Education Needs 10. Evaluation 11. AOB
25/10/2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes meeting 11th May 2016 4. Review of XXX 15-16 evaluation 5. XXX 6. XXX Start Right 7. Embracing Diversity, Nurturing Integration: Learning for Life Project 8. Planning for year ahead 9. AOB 10. Next meeting

2017

Meeting date	Agenda items
18/01/2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 25th October 2016 4. Presentation from XXX 5. AOB
15/03/2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes 18th January 2016 4. 'Life in a refugee camp' by Dr. XXXXXXXXXXXX 5. Embracing Diversity, Nurturing Integration: Learning for Life project 6. XXX update 7. AOB 8. XXX Phd Proposal
01/06/2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes and matters arising 15th March 2016 4. XXX Limerick update 5. Embracing Diversity, Nurturing Integration: Learning for Life 6. EAL project update 7. End of year review 8. AOB 9. XXX PhD
05/10/2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes and matters arising 1st June 2017 4. XXX 5. Teacher Mental Health 6. EDNIP update 7. EAL project update 8. XXX Start Right Limerick update 9. AOB

2018

Meeting date	Agenda items
24/01/2018	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Agree agenda and timekeeper 3. Minutes and Matters Arising 5th October 2017 4. XXX update 5. XXX update 6. Request from XXX 7. XXX planning 8. Presentation XXX 9. Closure

