



An Investigation into Collaborative Practice between the Class Teacher, Special Education Teacher (SET) and Speech and Language Therapist to Identify and Meet the Needs of Students with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD) in Irish Primary Schools

by

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Abstract

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The number of students presenting with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD) represents a significant cohort of the student population nationally and internationally, according to the literature. These students require specialised in-school support from school staff as well as support from external professionals such as Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs). This research set out to investigate the nature and extent of collaborative practice in Irish primary schools to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD.

A social constructivist paradigm was adopted for the investigation to ensure that the various perspectives and multiple realities of principals, class teachers, SETs, and SLTs were identified and validated. The study adopted a qualitative approach and the researcher employed semi-structured interviews as her primary data collection method. The research was conducted in four main cluster groups in the greater Dublin area, which enabled the researcher to examine the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher utilised the theoretical framework of Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice (CoP) (1991), as a lens for analysis. Thematic analysis of the dataset, guided by the theoretical framework, unveiled a number of significant findings.

In summary, findings suggest that while the value of collaborative practice is acknowledged as necessary in meeting the needs of students with SLCD, participants reported common issues that challenge effective collaborative practice. The nature of these challenges was identified as being a lack of time to engage, the absence of a shared knowledge and the limitations of current Continued Professional Development (CPD) around curricular change, such as the introduction and implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum, by the Department of Education in 2019. The study suggests that due to these impediments, effective collaborative practice has been hindered and thus, the needs of students with SLCD are not being appropriately identified or addressed. Finally, this study argues that collaborative practice and the development of CoPs are required to effectively meet the needs of students with SLCD in inclusive classrooms, which are increasingly diverse.

This study offers some key recommendations which may inform future policy and practice, in relation to multidisciplinary collaboration in schools, approaches to Initial Teacher Education and CPD. Frameworks, emerging from the data, are provided which may usefully guide the establishment of meaningful CoPs, enhanced ITE and approached to CPD, so that stakeholders can effectively identify and meet the needs of all students, particularly those with SLCD in their own context of practice.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or any other person, for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification.

Signed: 

Ciara Concannon

Date: 19th April 2022

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List of Acronyms

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
BOM	Board of Management
CAQDA	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CHO	Community Healthcare Organisation
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Continued Professional Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DLD	Developmental Language Disorder
DoE	Department of Education
EADSNE	European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
EU	European Union
GAM	General Allocation Model
HSE	Health Service Executive
IASLT	The Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists
IEP	Individualised Education Plan
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals' Network
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LAD	Language Acquisition Device
LI	Low Incidence (disability)
LS/RT	Learning Support/Resource Teacher
MGLD	Mild General Learning Disabilities
MIC	Mary Immaculate College

MIREC	Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee
MIRR	Mary Immaculate College research Repository and Digital Archive
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NHS	National Health Service
NIPT	National Induction Programme for Teachers
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development
OT	Occupational Therapist
PDST	Professional Development Services for Teachers
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLC	Primary Language Curriculum
PMC	Primary Maths Curriculum
PST	Professional Support Team
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RCSLT	Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists
RD	Research Diary
SEN	Special Education Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organiser
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SESS*	Special Education Support Service
SET	Special Education Teacher
SETAM	Special Education Teacher Allocation Model
SIM	School Inclusion Model
SLI	Specific Language Impairment
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SSLD	Specific Speech and Language Disorder

UNESCO

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organisation

ZPD

Zone of Proximal Development

*This organisation no longer exists. The service is now provided by the NCSE

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Fostering collaboration amongst class teachers, special education teachers (SETs) and speech and language therapists (SLTs), at a whole school level, in Irish primary schools, represents a unique opportunity to improve the classroom experience for both teachers and students, especially those with speech, language and communications difficulties (Mulholland and O'Connor 2016). Over the past two decades, collaborative practice has received increasing attention both nationally and internationally (Law *et al.* 2000; McCartney 2002; Giangreco *et al.* 2010; Lynch *et al.* 2020), resulting in enhanced pedagogies, curricula dissemination and policy reform. The introduction of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC), Circular 0045/2019 (DES 2019a), The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM), Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a), the School Inclusion Model (SIM) (DES 2019b) and the In-School and Early Years' Therapy Support Demonstration Project (DES 2018), which will be referred to as the Demonstration Project from this point forward, illustrate the current efforts made by the Department of Education (DoE) and National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to promote greater collaborative practices between key stakeholders, in establishing fully inclusive classrooms (NCSE 2019). This movement has a fundamental impact on both the teaching and learning of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), especially those with speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD) (Bishop *et al.* 2017; Howe 2020; Lynch *et al.* 2020). Therefore, this study is timely and warranted as it was carried out during the rollout of the PLC, and therefore, offers a unique insight into the lived experiences of key stakeholders. The data collected in this study is a primary source regarding the impact of collaborative practices on the ground in Irish primary schools and how stakeholders are engaging in collaborative practice to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD.

Concurring with the literature presented in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five along with the theoretical framework which underpins this research 'Community of Practice' (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1991), inter-professional collaboration between class teachers, SETs and SLTs is needed now more than ever with the increasing number of students with SEN being educated in mainstream settings (Stevens and O'Moore 2009; Ware *et al.* 2009; Lacey 2013; McCoy *et al.* 2016; Rose *et al.* 2017).

Given this context, the current study seeks to investigate collaborative practice between class teachers, SETs and SLTs to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD in Irish primary schools.

1.2 Policy Context

Since the 1990s, the Irish government has developed a substantial body of legislation which mandates inclusive education to secure effective provision for students with SEN (Howe 2020; Rose and Shevlin 2021). This legislation focuses on upholding the statutory rights of children with SEN to an education that is appropriate in meeting their needs, regardless of ability (NCSE 2014). The discernible shift in government policy regarding SEN has been notably influenced by international and national developments (Shevlin and Banks 2021). Internationally, the Warnock Report (1978), the Education Act (1981) (Government of the United Kingdom), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) World Declaration for All (1990) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) have significantly shaped policy legislation globally and subsequently influenced Irish policy and practice (Howe 2020), as reflected in the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) Report (1993), the Education Act (1998) and the EPSEN Act (2004).

In Ireland, momentum for change was initiated 'through a combination of government sponsored reviews of the existing provision and parental litigation that highlighted serious shortcomings within current educational provision' (Shevlin and Banks 2021, p.2). The publication of the SERC report in 1993, represented the first serious attempt since the 1960s to address special education policy in Ireland. Prior to this, it was widely believed that 'children and young people with SEN were qualitatively different from their peers and that their social and learning needs were significantly dissimilar to other children so that they required separate education away from their mainstream peers' (Griffin and Shevlin 2011, p.1). The SERC report introduced the concept of 'continuum of provision' favouring the integration of students with SEN in mainstream settings, where possible (g. 2020). The fundamental impact of the SERC report was that it, 'provided a blueprint for the development of special education that continues to influence policy decisions' (Griffin and Shevlin 2011, p.45). The seven principles outlined in the report presented basic guidelines for

future improvements of inclusive education (MacGiolla Phádraig 2007). Broadly speaking, these principles included the right of the student with SEN to an appropriate education, emphasised the importance of parent involvement in the decision-making process regarding their child's education, promoted the enrolment of students with SEN in mainstream schools and advocated the need for adequate services and resources to support SEN provision (Department of Education 1993, pp.19-20). Successive Governments have supported the principles proposed in the SERC Report with many developments traced from this source, in particular, the White Paper on Education: Charting our Education Future (DES, 1995), the Education Act 1998 (Government of Ireland 1998) and the EPSEN Act 2004 (Government of Ireland 2004).

1.2.1 White Paper on Education

The White Paper on Education supported the continuum of provision as proposed in the SERC Report. It stated that 'all students regardless of their personal circumstances have a right of access to and participation in the education system according to their potential and ability' (DES 1995, p.26). The White Paper highlighted the lack of substantive legislation for education in Ireland. Subsequent legislation followed which focused on the provision of support for students with SEN.

1.2.2 The Education Act

The Education Act (1998) was Ireland's first piece of legislation that established in law the importance of providing an appropriate education for all children, including those with a disability or special educational need (SEN) (Government of Ireland 1998; Meegan and MacPhail 2006; Shevlin and Banks 2021). It provided a legal framework for policy and practice, ensuring appropriate accommodations were made to 'break down any barriers to learning for students with disabilities' (MacGiolla Phádraig 2007, p.294). This act safeguarded the enrolment of students with SEN in mainstream settings by forcing schools to 'establish and maintain an admission policy which provides for maximum accessibility' (MacGiolla Phádraig 2007, p.294). Consequently, schools could no longer refuse admission of a student without valid justification. While the Education Act (1998) focused on addressing the equality of access for all students, research would argue that its implementation was flawed as it did not fully meet the proposed recommendations of the SERC report (Kinsella and Senior 2008).

1.2.3 Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act

Within six years of the Education Act (1998) being enacted, significant advancements were made regarding special education policy in Ireland with the passing of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004 (Government of Ireland 2004). The EPSEN Act (2004) radically changed the education landscape in Ireland (Griffin and Shevlin 2007; Kenny *et al.* 2020), shifting ‘from one in which the provision of inclusive education was an emerging feature of schooling to a system in which the provision of inclusive education is mandatory, except where this would not be in the best interests of the child or would be inconsistent with the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated’ (Meaney *et al.* 2005, p.209). This act enforced considerable challenges for the whole school community as stakeholders within the school environment were not specifically trained in the area of SEN and thus, felt unprepared to address such change. Under the EPSEN Act (2004), principals were afforded full responsibility for overseeing special education provision in school, ensuring the needs of all students were effectively addressed (Griffin and Shevlin 2011). Furthermore, assessment procedures and the development of individual education plans (IEPs¹) for students accessing provision were emphasised as core areas to be implemented in schools (Meaney *et al.* 2005; Byrne 2021). Despite such challenges, this change has had a positive impact on current educational practice (Byrne 2008). The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was established as a result of recommendations made by the EPSEN Act 2004, to improve the delivery of services to students with SEN (Shevlin *et al.* 2013). The NCSE were responsible for coordinating provision, distributing information, conducting research and advising best practice (Rose *et al.* 2015). Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) were appointed on a regional basis by the NCSE to support the identification, assessment and provision of resources for students with SEN (Flood 2010; NCSE 2014; Rose *et al.* 2015).

Despite the efforts of the EPSEN Act (2004) to provide appropriate provision to students with SEN, aspects of the act including ‘assessment, individual education planning and appeals’ have not been fully implemented due to ‘economic constraints’ (Rose *et al.* 2015, p.24; Kenny *et al.* 2020). The failure to implement all components

¹IEPs are now called School Support Plus Plans under the SETAM (DES 2017a). Both terms are used throughout this thesis.

of the EPSEN Act (2004) has resulted in ‘major problems in obtaining timely and detailed assessments and uneven and inconsistent development of IEPs’ (Rose *et al.* 2015, p.173). However, Josepha Madigan, Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion, recently announced the Department of Education’s commitment to a full review of the EPSEN Act (2004). This review will seek to ‘ensure that legislation on education for students with additional needs is up-to-date, fully operational, and reflective of the lived experiences of students and families’ (DES 2021). Although shortfalls emerged in the legislation due to the lack of financial support (Flood 2010), the enactment of the EPSEN Act (2004) has notably played a crucial role in defining and underpinning DES policies for the provision of education for students with SEN in Ireland. This was evident in the release of the Special Education Circular 02/05 ‘Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools’ (DES 2005), which introduced the General Allocation Model (GAM). The GAM aimed to develop ‘truly inclusive schools’ (DES 2005, p.4) by providing additional teaching supports on an annual basis to schools for students with high incidence disabilities such as borderline mild general learning disability/ mild general learning disability (MGLD) and specific learning disability (SLD) (DES 2005). It also provided support to students who scored on or below the tenth percentile in standardised literacy and numeracy assessments (Carey 2005; Egan, 2013). The GAM aimed to utilise additional teaching resources in a flexible manner to improve the delivery of services. This approach enabled both in-class and withdrawal support, while also allowing students with similar needs to be grouped for additional support when appropriate. A fundamental principle of the GAM was that students with the greatest level of need would receive the greatest level of support. Yet, the allocation of resources was based on a number of factors, including school size, gender and socioeconomic status. Differing student teacher ratios applied to boys’ schools, girls’ schools, mixed schools and designated disadvantaged schools (DEIS). While the GAM initiated the move away from labelling students in order to access additional SET support in schools, several inadequacies were identified with this model (NCSE 2014; Howe 2020). Students with SEN arising from low incidence disabilities had to be assessed by an educational psychologist in order to receive a formal diagnosis to qualify for support in school. Furthermore, the GAM focused on allocating support based on categories of disabilities rather than focusing on the student’s individual needs (NCSE 2014). Concurring with Desforges and Lindsay (2010), there are many practical and

conceptual difficulties utilising a categorical approach. They claim that categories are ‘inconsistent with the complexity of the SENs of individual children and are instructionally irrelevant in that they do not inform educational interventions’ (Desforges and Lindsay 2010, p.35). According to Shevlin *et al.* the ‘complexity of individual pupil needs is too wide ranging to be captured by a single descriptor’ (2013 p.125). Therefore, the assessment process which offers a ‘one-off snapshot’ to identify ‘deficits’ is unviable (Shevlin *et al.* 2013, p.126).

The shortcomings of the GAM were highlighted by the NCSE after completing a ‘comprehensive strategic review of special education supports’ in Irish primary schools (NCSE 2014, p.3). Their findings revealed the need for change in the allocation of special education supports on a national scale (NCSE 2013). The Report *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs: A Better and More Equitable Way*, instigated the establishment of a ‘new model’ of support, addressing the inadequacies outlined above. Arising from the recommendations of the NCSE Working Group Report (2014b), Circular 0013/2017 documented how the new Special Education Teaching Allocation Model (SETAM), would provide schools with a ‘single unified allocation for special educational support’ based on the schools’ educational profile (DES 2017a, p.1). The new model gave schools greater autonomy over deploying resources, enabling schools to provide teaching support to all students based on their individual needs (Curtin 2021; Kenny *et al.* 2020). The new model was piloted in the 2015/2016 academic year and received a positive response from the participating schools (DES 2016). Thus, in September 2017, the SETAM was introduced to all schools. In order to support schools in their deployment of resources for students with SEN, the DES disseminated *Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (DES 2017b). The guidelines focused on a three-step process to supporting students with SEN:

- How can we identify needs?
- How can we meet needs?
- How can we monitor and record outcomes for students with special educational needs?

The guidelines highlighted the importance of establishing an ‘inclusive whole-school framework’ by promoting effective collaborative practices and enhanced

engagement between schools, parents and students alike (DES 2017b, p.3). In order to support the varying needs of all students, collaboration with external professionals such as speech and language therapists (SLTs), occupational therapists (OTs) and psychologists is encouraged. The new allocation model supports a multi-disciplinary approach to enrich practice while also providing appropriate intervention. While the introduction of the SETAM altered the way in which the CoS was implemented, it is important to note that the CoS structures remained the same (NEPS 2010). Students are ‘positioned upon a continuum of need, supported within a continuum of provision and by a continuum of services’ (Rix et al. 2013, p.8), as advocated by the recommendations of the SERC report (1993).

Taking the above into consideration, the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) has shifted away from focusing primarily on student assessment and diagnosis, towards a more consultative approach focusing on ‘engaging with support staff, parents and other relevant professionals in a detailed problem-solving process to help students with complex needs’ (Murtagh and Seoighe 2020, p.4). The development within NEPS and the emphasis on a whole school approach to supporting students with SEN, as outlined in the SETAM (DES 2017a), highlights the departments attempt at a system level to support inter-professional collaboration with the hope of developing more inclusive schools (Nugent *et al.* 2014).

Furthermore, in the 2018/19 academic year, the ‘Demonstration Project’ (DES 2018) was established (DES 2019b), which focused on the provision of in-school therapy support from SLTs, OTs and psychologists. The project built upon the experiences and expertise of these stakeholders in supporting schools to identify and successfully meet the needs of all students, especially those with SLCD by providing ‘the right support at the right time’ (Lynch *et al.* 2020, p.1). The Demonstration Project was ‘embedded in the national drive from the DES, National Council for Special Education (NCSE), DCYA, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health (DoH) to promote and support the development of inclusive practice in education’ (Lynch *et al.* 2020, p.1) under the School Inclusion Model (SIM) (DES 2019b). The Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion, Josepha Madigan identified many positives arising from Ireland’s first ever dedicated in-school therapy supports for students, stating:

‘It is important that we continue to develop and expand the range of supports that we can provide for children with special educational needs in schools. This includes increasing the kind of interactions between educational and therapy services which can significantly impact on children’s development and education. Providing early access to speech and language therapy or occupational therapy services can make a vital difference to children’s future opportunities’

(DES 2021)

Given the policy context of this research and the global move towards a more inclusive and collaborative school environment (Smyth *et al.* 2014), the researcher felt that this investigation into collaborative practice and interdisciplinary work in schools within the Irish context, was warranted.

1.3 Developing the Research Question

The research question was developed at a time when significant policy changes relating to the delivery of support in school for students with SEN were being proposed, along with the roll out of phase one of the new Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (DES 2019a). The substantial changes at Department of Education level have required schools to make structural and educational adjustments in order to meet new legislative requirements (Mulholland and O’Connor 2016). While collaboration is advocated in many special educational policies, gaps in the literature revealed the need for exploratory research into collaborative practices between key stakeholders to identify and meet the needs of students with SEN, in particular, those with SLCD (Dockrell and Lindsay 2001; Glover *et al.* 2015; Gallagher *et al.* 2019). Given the lack of awareness of SLCD across different contexts (IASLT 2017) and the increase of students with SEN being educated in mainstream settings (McCoy *et al.* 2016; Rose *et al.* 2017) the researcher believed that such investigation was warranted and therefore, adopted Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theoretical framework of CoP as a lens for in-depth analysis.

1.3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework, which underpins this research, is Lave and Wenger’s Community of Practice (CoP). CoP guided the research process from ‘conception’ to its ‘dissemination’ (Ravitch and Riggan 2017, p.1) It provided a conceptual foundation for this investigation as the researcher was interested in examining collaborative practices on the ground in schools between class teachers, SETs and SLTs to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD. While the researcher acknowledges the challenges in identifying a theoretical framework which

is ‘just right’ (Ravitch and Riggan 2017, p.1), she firmly believes CoP was the most appropriate frame for carrying out this investigation. The researcher initially examined Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1986), which focuses on a broad range of contextual factors impacting children’s learning and development (Odom *et al.* 2004; Ring *et al.* 2016). Bronfenbrenner’s theory views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple environmental layers (Ring *et al.* 2018). While there were aspects of Bronfenbrenner’s theory which linked to this research question, the researcher felt Bronfenbrenner’s theory would influence the study to focus on student-stakeholder interaction, whereas CoP allowed the researcher to focus on the interactions of key stakeholders in meeting the needs of all students. The researcher also considered Vygotsky’s Socio-Cultural Theory (1978) as it focuses on the critical role social interaction plays in children’s learning. As this research highlights how the class teachers and SETs value the input of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), i.e., the SLT, Vygotsky’s theory may have been suitable for this research. However, once again the researcher perceived that CoP would allow her to examine the social interactions of key stakeholders without having to focus primarily on the student-stakeholder relationship. After examining the alternative frameworks mentioned above, the researcher was consistently drawn back to Lave and Wenger’s CoP framework (1991), as it primarily focuses on the importance of stakeholder-to-stakeholder interaction in identifying and meeting students’ needs.

In broad terms, CoP is a theory of learning with the process of social involvement being the primary premise (Wenger 1998; Wenger *et al.* 2002; Lacey 2013; Boven 2014). CoP can be defined as:

‘Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis’

(Wenger *et al.* 2002, p.4)

For the purpose of this research, a CoP, within a school environment, was the primary source for investigation. The CoP theoretical model of knowledge comprises of three basic elements:

- The domain (a joint enterprise)
- The practice (a shared repertoire)
- The community (mutual engagement)

(Wenger 1998)

Fundamentally, it is the combination of the above that underpins the principles of a CoP (Wenger *et al.* 2011). CoP will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Six.

1.3.2 Research Question

The core research question pertaining to this study is: *An Investigation into Collaborative Practices between the Class Teacher, Special education teacher (SET) and Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) to Identify and Meet the Needs of Students with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD), in Irish Primary Schools.* The researcher focused on how the participants from four main cluster schools (All girls' school, all boys' school, mixed gender school and DEIS school) were meeting the needs of students with SLCD in their own setting. The aim of this study was to examine if effective collaboration between key stakeholders is happening on the ground in schools while implementing the PLC? and if so, how are these collaborative practices being implemented to support students with SLCD in the mainstream classroom.

1.3.3 Embedded Questions

As this study seeks to bridge the gap in our knowledge of collaborative practice and the impact it has on teaching and learning for students with SLCD, the following embedded questions were used to guide this study:

- Do class teachers, parents, SETs and SLTs collaborate to meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties?
- If so, how is this negotiated?
- Who are the key stakeholders in this collaboration?
- Do these stakeholders make use of the Primary Language Curriculum in their planning to meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties in their classrooms? If so, in what ways?
- Who is involved in the School Support Plus plan for students with language needs at the School Support Plus stage?
- What are the benefits of collaboration in identifying and meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties, if any?
- What are the challenges encountered when engaging in collaborative practice?

1.4 Rationale for the Study

The researcher's experience as a mainstream class teacher provided the initial stimulus for this study. Over the past five years, the researcher has constantly doubted her own practice, questioning herself 'Am I doing the right thing?' when supporting students with SEN, especially those with SLCD. While the researcher has a solid foundation regarding the provision of students with SEN in the mainstream classroom after specialising in special education at an undergraduate level, as well as engaging in consistent CPD to enhance her own practice, the researcher still felt ill equipped to successfully identify and meet the needs of her students with SLCD. In the researcher's experience, the lack of engagement and support available from outside agencies i.e., SLTs, hinder the ability of in-school and external practitioners to support students with SLCD. This experience mirrors the findings of Dockrell and Lindsay (2001) and Wilson *et al.* (2015). The classification of collaboration as witnessed in the IASLT Position Paper, 'of sending the SLT assessment and diagnostic report with recommendations to the school' (2017, p.51), was the extent of collaboration experienced by the researcher. The researcher acknowledged the recommendations documented in the report, however these were often difficult to implement considering the demands of an overcrowded curriculum (Morgan and NicCraith 2015), increasing class sizes (Hargreaves 2019) and the lack of time available to collaborate with the SLT (Travers *et al.* 2010; Bush and Grotjohann 2020).

Another factor which drove this research investigation was 'teacher isolation'. On several occasions throughout the researcher's career, she has felt isolated behind the closed doors of her classroom (Fullan 2007). Concurring with Conway, Irish classrooms remain 'a secret garden' and thus, what teachers do in terms of best practice often remains unknown (2002, p. 63). Echoing Murphy (1982) and Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019), it may still be the case that the lack of collegial support and effective collaboration is one of the main reasons for teacher attrition. The demanding structure of the school curriculum has hindered effective collaboration to occur. Teachers simply do not have the time to sit down and plan together, discuss teaching strategies or share concerns that they may have encountered (Hargreaves 1994; Hartas 2004). Working in a relatively isolated environment, in addition to the lack of clear structures for sharing information between professionals, has resulted in fragmented instruction, hindering the delivery of support to students with additional needs and thus,

impeding student learning (Daly *et al.* 2016). While the researcher acknowledges that there are systemic inadequacies with regard to time, human resources and funding, she is determined that effective collaborative practices can still be embedded within the school environment, once teachers are committed to engage and supported in doing so. By cultivating successful CoP, stakeholders are situated to move beyond the traditional approach to teaching and learning (Freeburg 2018).

Furthermore, the researcher was conscious that, despite her best efforts she was unable to fully meet the needs of all students effectively. Turning towards online search engines with the hope to find appropriate material to increase achievement levels was often the case. Not having the specific knowledge and skills to support students with SLCD left the researcher feeling inadequate as a teacher. Therefore, the researcher felt the need for greater collaborative practice to be established in order to meet the needs of students with SLCD. Firstly, the researcher believes that support needs to be provided within the school environment i.e., between class teacher and SETs and secondly from the experts who work outside of the school community such as SLTs who are specifically trained in the area of speech and language (Drudy and Kinsella 2009). The research sought to examine the benefits of establishing effective communities of practice, if any, and whether such developments would alleviate teacher isolation, enhance overall instruction and improve student outcomes (Goddard and Goddard 2007; Korth *et al.* 2010; Mulholland and O'Connor 2016; Hargreaves 2019; Mora-Ruano *et al.* 2019). Therefore, this research occurred at an appropriate time with the first ever dedicated in-school therapy support for students being piloted in one hundred and fifty primary schools and pre-school settings (DES 2018). The initiation of the Demonstration Project illustrates the current period of national review in Ireland and highlights the relevance of this research given that the NSCE have welcomed the continuation of the SIM (Lynch *et al.* 2020). This research along with the NCSE's published report *Evaluation of In-School and Early Years Therapy Support Project* (Lynch *et al.* 2020), aims to maximise student access, participation and engagement by improving the delivery of support to students with SLCD.

While the literature states that effective teacher collaboration can improve academic outcomes for all students (Hang and Rabren 2009; Goddard *et al.* 2010; Lacey 2013), the researcher does not dismiss that teacher collaboration can be challenging and difficult to achieve (Pinkus 2005; Weist *et al.* 2012). The outcomes and findings of this

research may contribute to existing knowledge on collaborative practice to support truly inclusive schools. The significance of this research is outlined in the subsequent section.

1.4.1 The Significance of this Research

This research is timely and relevant considering the DES and NCSE's move towards a more collaborative approach with regard to the delivery of support for students with SEN. Despite policy and legislative documents espousing the importance of collaboration, this study investigates if and how collaborative practices are embedded on the ground among key stakeholders i.e., class teachers, SETs and SLTs. Literature would argue that collaboration has now become a hot topic or 'buzzword' used in education today (Vasquez *et al.* 2013, p.21). As such, there is a need to assess the level at which collaboration is understood within the school environment (Laluvain 2010). This needs to be teased out and deconstructed through qualitative research wherein the participants, key stakeholders in the process are enabled to openly report on their own collaborative practice in school and whether they feel such processes are effective or not. Only by attaining this data can we then begin to fundamentally assess the effectiveness of collaboration and the impact it has on student outcomes. Once the current situation in Irish schools, with regard to collaborative practice is understood and documented, policymakers can then apply this knowledge to the improvement of teaching for those with SEN and inform future practices through continued professional development (CPD). This data could also be useful to policymakers and school management in reflectively analysing the effectiveness of new policies. Data and analysed findings could provide another metric of analysis, one which is focused on the feedback from stakeholders on the ground in schools, unlike the financial and legal litigation lenses that policymakers usually focus on when reflecting on former policy implementation (Mulholland and O'Connor 2016). The following section will provide a brief description of the chosen paradigm and research design of the study.

1.5 Paradigm and Research Design

Having examined the literature involved and given the axiological philosophy of this study, the research was formed and based on a social constructivist paradigm (Cohen *et al.* 2018; Creswell and Poth 2018). A social constructivist approach

emphasises the world of experiences as lived, felt and undergone by people (Schwandt 2007), in this case principals, class teachers, SETs, and SLTs. As this research is primarily concerned with the social interactions of stakeholders to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD, the researcher felt that a social constructivist paradigm was the most appropriate way of exploring the research question as she wanted to understand the ‘phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it’ (Costantino 2008, p.119). As the research was predominantly based on open-ended queries, various perspectives and multiple realities of the participants were identified and validated (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Flick 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark 2018; Creswell and Poth 2018). The researcher personally engaged with the participants in order to gather data and construct knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Lincoln *et al.* 2011).

Qualitative research seeks to reveal ‘the authenticity of human experience’ (Silverman 2010, p.6). Given that this research is an investigation into collaborative practices between the class teacher, SET and SLT to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD in Irish primary schools, the researcher felt that a qualitative approach was the most effective way of exploring the attitudes and personal experiences of her participants (Mertens 2015). In order to examine the perspectives of those on the ground, semi-structured interviews were utilised as the primary data collection method in this study. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in four different primary school settings. An all girls’ mainstream school, an all boy’s mainstream school, a mixed mainstream school (non-DEIS) and a mixed mainstream school (DEIS) in the greater Dublin area. A combination of purposive sampling and convenience sampling was used to collect data from a specific group of participants i.e., principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs. The researcher strived to include a diverse range of students, so that perspectives from all social and economic backgrounds were considered in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 participants (teacher participants (n=9), SET participants (n=10), SLT participants (n=4), principal participants (n=4)).

While this section briefly introduced the study’s paradigm and research design, a more in-depth account of the overall methodological process will be outlined in Chapter Seven. In order to fully understand the steps taken to carry out this research,

the following section will provide the reader with a timeline of work, highlighting the researcher's progress over the past four years.

1.6 Timeline of Study

Figure 1.1 below provides a brief synopsis of the research timeline. It illustrates the consecutive steps taken by the researcher in order to reach completion. The researcher was adamant to complete the study within the defined timeframe as it was a timely piece of research considering that current policy and legislation regarding inclusive education in Ireland were under review (NCSE 2019). At government level, there was also a significant push towards the promotion of collaborative practices between stakeholders on the ground in schools with the dissemination and implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (DES 2019a) the SETAM as well as the pilot phase of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018). At the early stages of this research, there were talks of developing a new Primary Maths Curriculum (PMC) in the same format as the PLC. Following concerns regarding the amount of change in curriculum reform, the PMC was delayed by the Minister for Education and Skills in December 2018, with the aim of it being implemented on a phased basis in September 2022 (DES 2019a). Therefore, the researcher believes that the findings from this research may highlight potential areas for improvement as reported by principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs on the ground.

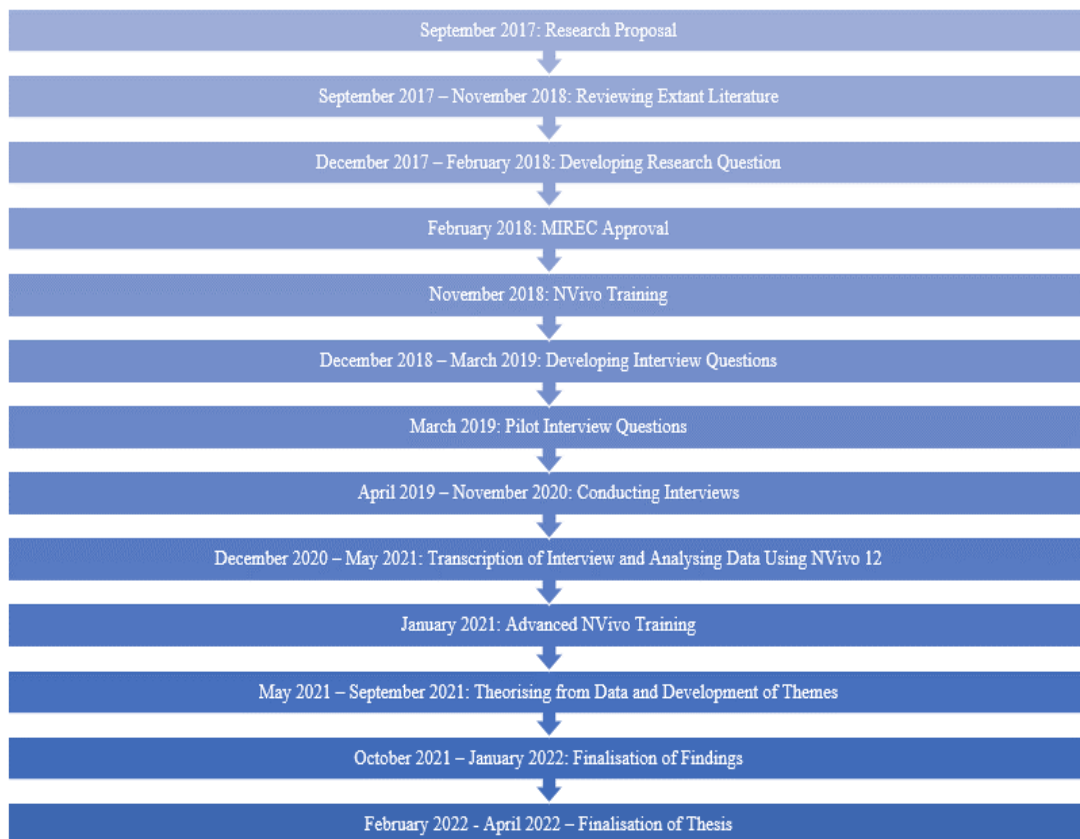


Figure 1.1 Research Timeline

1.7 Overview of Thesis

Chapter One provides an introduction and overall context for the research investigation. It outlines the national and international policies which support inclusive practice and the provision of education for students with SEN. The research question along with the embedded questions are presented and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theoretical framework, CoP which underpins the entire research is briefly discussed. Within this chapter the researcher emphasises the rationale for undertaking this research while also highlighting its significance within the context of contemporary Irish education. Following this, the researcher provides a synopsis of the chosen paradigm which led this research investigation, along with the research design and data collection processes.

Chapter Two contextualises and analyses an extensive range of literature surrounding educational policy and reform within the Irish context. This chapter provides a critical overview of key concepts which led to the dissemination and

implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (DES 2019a), The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) (DES 2017a) and the Demonstration Project (DES 2018), which advocate collaborative practices among key stakeholders to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD in Irish primary schools.

Chapter Three provides a comprehensive review of the extant literature surrounding language and Developmental Language Disorders (DLD), while also providing a brief synopsis of typical language acquisition, highlighting the salient theories in the field. The importance of early identification, appropriate intervention and assessments will also be discussed.

Chapter Four explores the pertinent literature relating to Continued Professional Development (CPD). It highlights the value and purpose of teacher professional development, models of CPD and the efforts made by the Department of Education and The Teaching Council to promote and establish high professional standards in initial teacher education and induction.

Chapter Five defines collaboration and inter-professional practice. It examines the role and responsibilities of principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs in supporting students with SLCD, as well as highlighting the positive impact of effective collaborative practices on student learning. Moreover, the challenges to cultivating and implementing inter-professional practice are also discussed.

Chapter Six presents Lave and Wenger's theoretical framework CoP (1991), which provided a conceptual foundation for this investigation.

Chapter Seven outlines the methodological approaches adopted to unearth high qualitative data from the participating principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs. It explores the chosen research design and social constructivist paradigm in greater depth. Following this, it provides a profile of the participating schools wherein, the semi-structured interviews were conducted. Furthermore, the ethical considerations that were adhered to are outlined and the use of qualitative software such as NVivo 12 for qualitative data analysis is described.

Chapter Eight presents the qualitative findings of the study which are interlinked with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Six and the extensive literature analysed in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five. This chapter presents and

analyses the participants perspectives with respect to the research question, using the interview transcripts as well as Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phased approach to thematic analysis. The data is thematically presented, including interview excerpts and direct quotes to support the themes which derived from the data analysis phase of this study.

Chapter Nine provides a summary of the research. In this section, the main findings are further synthesised, and the theoretical implications of the study discussed. Moreover, it highlights the study's unique contribution to existing research and provides recommendations for future policy and practice in Irish primary schools.

Chapter Two

Literature Review: Educational Policy Reform

2.1 Introduction

To address the research topic appropriately, it is important that one understands the background, national and international context of the research. This literature review will contextualise and analyse the relevant literature to provide a rationale for the research question. An overview of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) (DES 2017a) will be documented, which promotes inclusive practices to support the provision of education for students with Special Education Needs (SEN). Furthermore, a critical overview of the key concepts that led to the implementation and dissemination of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (DES 2019a)² will be presented. Finally, the historical trajectory of the SETAM and PLC will be discussed in detail, along with the In-School and Early Years' Therapy Support Demonstration Project (DES 2018), which will be referred to as the 'Demonstration Project' from this point forward. The development of educational policies, such as those mentioned above, and the implications of these changes on collaborative practice is heavily reflected in this literature review. The Literature map in Figure 2.1 illustrates the predominant themes and subthemes that emerged which shaped the foundation of this literature review (Rose *et al.* 2010). Through examining an extensive range of literature, this literature review and the successive literature reviews (Chapter Three, Four and Five) aim to illuminate many aspects of the research question and embedded questions as outlined in Section 1.3.

2.2 Literature Search

To inform this study, a comprehensive and in-depth search of relevant literature regarding collaborative practice to identify and meet the needs of students with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD) was carried out by the researcher. As this study is very much rooted in policy and curriculum, the researcher felt that a thematic literature review was the most suitable for this investigation. Given the

² The Primary Language Curriculum was developed in 2015 and was introduced for junior infants to second class on a phased basis from September 2016 (DES 2015). In September 2019 the PLC was rolled out to all classes (DES 2019a).

researchers own experience working in the field of education as both a class teacher and an assistant principal, with responsibilities for the PLC, the researcher felt that it was important to understand typical language development and then, why students experience difficulties when acquiring language. The researcher also felt that it was important to examine policies and the need for a collaborative approach in their implementation. The researcher engaged in a rigorous review of the policy, theory and empirical research in these areas and a purposive search strategy was adopted using the keywords shown in Table 2.1 below. These themes were chosen as the researcher perceived them to closely align with the research question and thereby, enabled her to explore insightful and relevant literature.

Focus of the search	Keywords Sample
Language Acquisition	Supporting students with language difficulties; Early intervention; Behaviourism Theory; Cognitive Theory; Nativist Theory; Social-Interaction Theory; Socio-Cultural Theory
Special Education Needs	Inclusion; Developmental Language Disorder; Speech Language and Communication Difficulties; Special Education Teacher Allocation Model
Primary Language Curriculum	Collaboration; CPD; integrated language curriculum; progression steps
Community of Practice	Inter-professional practice; Collaborative practice; multi-disciplinary teams Demonstration Project; Special Education Teacher Allocation Model

Table 2.1 Key Search Terms Used

The policy literature was sourced by consulting and interrogating the DoE website and that of the NCCA and NCSE. These searches contributed to the subthemes illustrated in the Literature Map illustrated in Figure 2.1. Empirical papers were weighted (Gough 2007) with regard to relevance to the research question, the researchers' lived experience and search criteria adopted as outlined in Table 2.1 above. However, with the exception of the Evaluation of the Demonstration Project (Lynch *et al.* 2020), there was a real dearth of empirical literature with regard to multidisciplinary

collaboration in schools, particularly with the SLT, to support students with SLCD. Consequently, this review unveiled a gap in the literature and provided a sound rationale for this study within the Irish context.

The researcher conducted the literature search by using the following educational search engines and databases; Academic Search Complete, SAGE, EBSCO Host, ERIC, Journal Seek, Google Scholar and PubMed Central. Google Scholar, Sage and ERIC databases have consistently provided rich literature regarding curriculum implementation, dissemination and inclusive practices. The following online journals were also very beneficial and worthwhile in the initial stage of the research: *The Journal of Special Needs in Ireland*; *The Journal of Educational Research*; *The Journal of Learning Disabilities*; *Teaching Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms*; *Communities of Practice and Professional Development*. Furthermore, references discovered in academic journals were further utilised to enhance the review. In addition to the above, the researcher took advantage of and utilised Mary Immaculate College (MIC) library and Mary Immaculate College Research Repository and Digital Archive (MIRR). This allowed the researcher to access the digital archive collections as well as published and unpublished works of faculty members and research students at MIC. This assisted the researcher in finding high quality studies on her chosen research topic.

Finally, to ensure that no relevant literature was excluded, a hand search of literature was conducted and grey literature such as government reports, policy statements and issue papers were also appraised. The researcher compiled and investigated a great mixture of articles, books and online databases to ensure that the researcher covered all possible literature that would enhance her research.

2.3 Literature Map

The literature map provided below (see Figure 2.1) will act as a visual guide into the structure of the literature review. It highlights several themes and issues which emerged throughout the research, along with the various links which became apparent.



Figure 2.1 Literature Map

It is evident from examining the literature map above, the key topics that were identified and reflected on by the researcher for the purpose of this study. The researcher selected six topics, which became the central components for exploration. These include the role of language in education, curriculum change and reform, community of practice, collaboration, special education and the PLC. The researcher engaged in extensive literature related to the chosen topics which in turn led to the establishment of the researcher's literature review. Taking Creswell's (2014) advice on board, the researcher examined the results of other studies that were of relevance to the research question, as well as ongoing dialogue in the literature, filling in the gaps and extending prior studies (Cooper 2010; Marshall and Rossman 2011). Concurrently, Rose *et al.* (2010), assert that the organisation of the literature is a crucial process, which enables the researcher to read broadly while maintaining a focus on the specific research question. The literature map presented above gives the reader an insight into what is to follow. As this chapter proceeds, it will examine each topic in the above literature map, and it will start by examining the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) (DES 2017a).

2.4 Special Education Teacher Allocation Model

The introduction of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) (Department of Education and Skills (DES) Circular 0013/2017), and the subsequent guidelines (DES 2017b) promotes inclusive practices which support the provision of education for students with Special Education Needs (SEN) in mainstream classrooms. The implementation of the SETAM gives schools greater autonomy over managing and utilising additional teaching supports, based on the individual learning need of the students (DES 2017a; Travers 2017). The SETAM encourages effective inclusion for students with SEN by promoting collaborative practice on a whole school level, while emphasising the importance of key stakeholders working together to identify and meet the needs of students with additional learning needs (Curtin and Egan 2021). The SETAM supports a range of teaching methods such as 'team-teaching, small group teaching and, where necessary, individualised teaching to address specific learning needs' (DES 2017a, p.18). For this to be effective, the class teacher in consultation with the SET must consider ways in which learning can be differentiated or adapted to suit the individual student. The provision of in-class support, as well as small group

instruction, enables teachers to meet the individual needs of students by assessing and monitoring progress.

Primarily, the objective of circular 0013/2017 is that ‘special education teaching resources are utilised in the optimum manner to improve learning experiences and educational outcomes for pupils with SEN’ (DES 2017a, p.3). This framework seeks to enable schools to identify students’ educational, social and emotional needs in addition to physical, sensory, language and communication difficulties. The SETAM acknowledges that all students require different levels of support (Banks *et al.* 2012) and emphasises the importance of appreciating a student's individual needs, with or without diagnosis (DES 2017a). Thus, the framework recognises needs as being on a continuum ‘ranging from mild to severe, and from transient to long term’ (DES 2017b, p.6). Concurring with Warnock *et al.*, this model incorporates a system of support which emphasises the importance of ensuring that provision is suitable, ranging from ‘differentiated arrangements to more inclusive ones’ (2010, p.7). Therefore, collaborative thinking, planning and decision making is integral to the process (Triegaardt 2018). In order to make best use of resources within the SETAM, collaboration between on-site and external professionals such as SLTs must be shared and developed (Curtin 2021). According to Beveridge, ‘explicit recognition of the complementary roles of all involved’ is required (1999, p.128).

The guidelines which accompany Circular 0013/2017, specifically outline three pillars to support students with SEN in mainstream schools. These encompass:

- How can we identify needs?
- How can we meet needs?
- How can we monitor and record outcomes for students with SEN?

(DES 2017b, p.3)

These three pillars are crucial for ensuring that students with additional learning needs are given the support they deserve. This process aims to guide the ‘identification, intervention and monitoring of outcomes’ for students with SEN (DES 2017b, p.6) Each pillar involves stakeholders engaging in effective collaborative practice to support student learning. Each pillar and the many opportunities for collaboration, within the application of the SETAM in practice, will be discussed hereunder.

2.4.1 How can we identify needs?

The SETAM insists that schools and staff work within a Continuum of Support (CoS) to identify and respond to the needs of students with SEN in the mainstream setting. The CoS framework recognises that students with SEN require different levels of support depending on their learning needs (DES 2017b). Utilising a CoS helps to ensure that ‘interventions are incremental, moving from class-based interventions to more intensive and individualised support’ (DES 2017b, p.6). Interventions are implemented based on teacher observation, assessments and close monitoring of student progress. The CoS assists schools in gathering and analysing data based on a student’s academic, social and emotional needs. It supports teachers’ planning and reviewing of progress in accordance with external professionals i.e., Speech and Language Therapist (SLT), Occupational Therapist (OT) and psychologist, as required. The diagram below (Figure 2.2) illustrates the problem-solving process from which the CoS evolved.

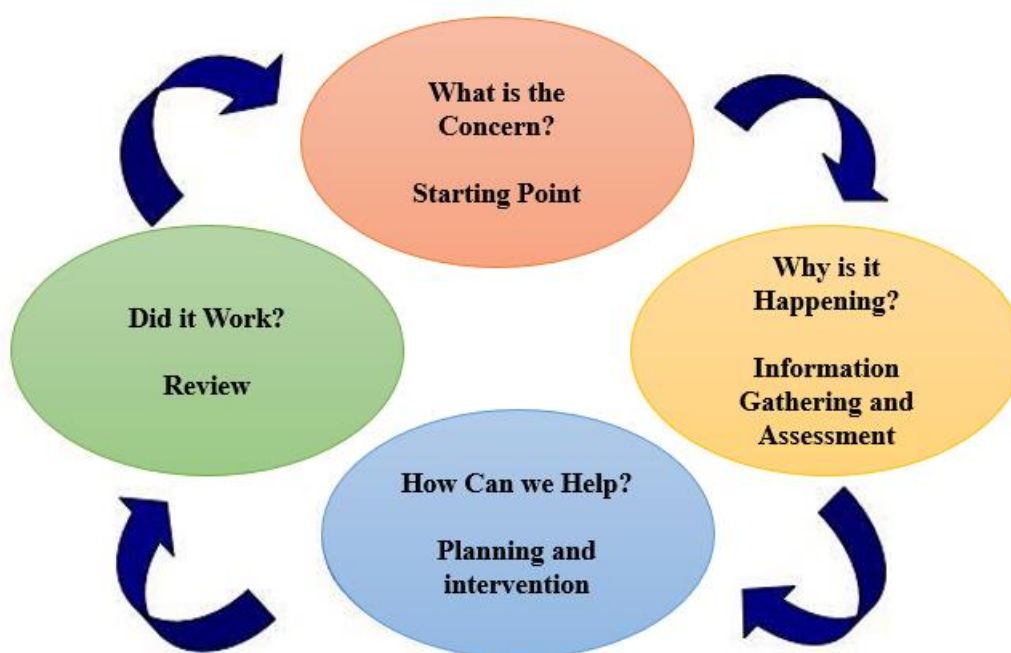


Figure 2.2 The Continuum of Support- Problem-Solving Model of Assessment and Intervention (DES 2017b, p.7)

The problem-solving model illustrated above, depicts how ‘assessment, target setting, intervention and review’ (DES 2017a, p.28) is a continuous process and can be used

throughout all stages of this three-step process. The CoS highlights the importance of looking at the student's needs in context (DES 2017b) and examines how stakeholders can work together, collaboratively, to provide tailored support.

2.4.2 How can we meet needs?

Once the needs of students are identified and a Student Support File³ (SSF) is initiated, the next step is to ensure that effective teaching and learning strategies, early intervention and prevention programmes are implemented to meet those needs. In order for this to be successful, collaboration and precise planning amongst relevant stakeholders is key. The class teacher and SET, in conjunction with the parents and sometimes the student, set targets and plan interventions that will address the priority learning needs of the individual student, which is documented in the Student Support Plan⁴ (SSP). These stakeholders may also discuss a variety of teaching methodologies and resources that will support the students' specific learning styles. Outcomes for these students must then be assessed regularly, recorded and used in the reviewing process. This will support and inform the subsequent phases of intervention (Baldwin 2018).

As the SETAM is flexible in nature, schools have the autonomy to identify and respond to needs as early as possible and in a bespoke manner (DES 2017a). However, schools must ensure that 'pupils with the greatest level of need have access to the greatest levels of support' (DES 2017b, p.7). With substantial international evidence indicating that early intervention and prevention programmes can lead to improved outcomes for students, many schools have utilised their additional teaching resources in the junior end of the school to 'strengthen station teaching approaches which target the promotion of language, literacy and numeracy skills' (DES 2017b, p.14). Some well-known interventions implemented are 'Literacy Lift Off' and 'Ready, Set, Go – Maths'. The implications of early intervention will be discussed below in section 2.10. The implementation of the SETAM encourages the use of resources for in-class support where possible, which reflects international trends, moving away from predominant use

³ Student Support Files are recognised as effective tools in enabling schools to plan interventions and to monitor and track a student's progress through the Continuum of Support (CoS). The SSF facilitates teachers to document 'progress and needs over time' and assists them in providing appropriate support to those with SEN (DES 2017b, p.10).

⁴ The Student Support Plan is stored within the SSF and is drawn up by the class teacher in conjunction with the parents and SET. It outlines the necessary actions to be taken by key stakeholders in order to provide additional support to those with SEN. The SSP is then implemented for an agreed period of time and thereafter reviewed.

of withdrawal support evidenced in preceding special education policies. Current researcher undertaken by Curtain and Egan (2021), emphasise that the SETAM has increased collaborative practice among key stakeholders and the use of in-class support for students with SEN.

2.4.3 How can we monitor and record outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs?

Monitoring and recording outcomes for students with SEN is a recursive process and is a vital part of the SETAM (DES 2017a). The guidelines (DES 2017b) emphasise the importance of adopting a whole school approach for successful monitoring and recording of students' progress to occur. In order to determine the student's current level of performance, 'criterion-referenced tests and other methods of assessment (for example, teacher-designed tests, checklists, samples of work and observations) that allow students to demonstrate their progress' are utilised (2017b, p. 17). These assessment methods provide teachers and SETs with baseline data which guide appropriate instruction (Baldwin 2018). Once effective measures are put in place, the SET, in conjunction with the class teacher and the students' parents can establish specific learning targets, within a defined timeframe for their students to achieve. These targets are explicitly outlined in the SSF and are reviewed regularly (see Section 2.5.2). Figure 2.3 illustrates the process.

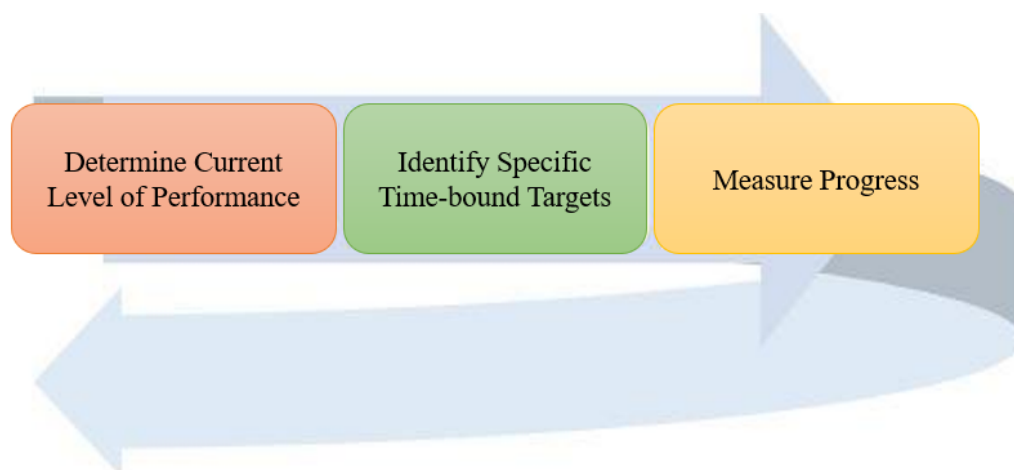


Figure 2.3 The Process of Monitoring and Recording Outcomes for Students with SEN (DES 2017b)

Monitoring and reviewing student progress is a dynamic process which involves ongoing consultation between all key stakeholders involved. As targets and learning

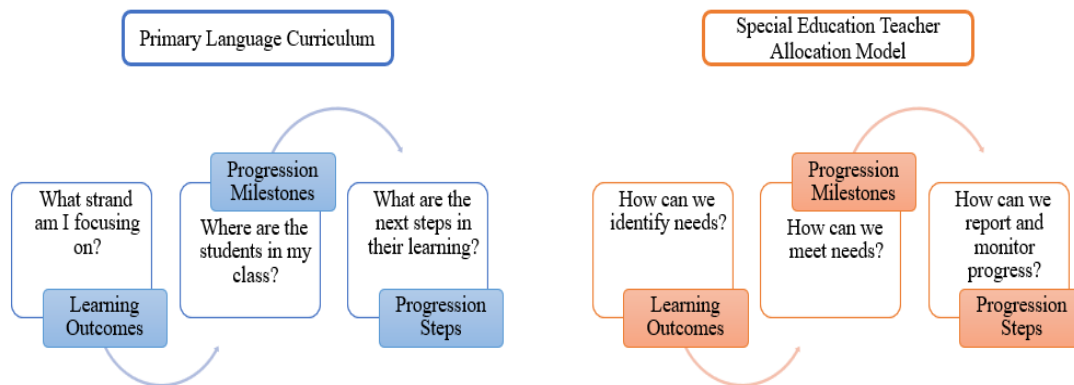
outcomes are developed collaboratively, the SSF provides schools with a useful resource to support and record this process (DES 2017b). Adaptions are made to the SSF once there is evidence of the student achieving the specified goals outlined in the plan. Further recommendations may also be documented in the SSF if specific targets have not been met (NCSE 2006a). The SSF is a collaborative working document which is amended accordingly based on the students' progress. The accumulation of information enables class teachers and SETs to know exactly where to place the student on the Continuum, while also ensuring that each student is provided with the appropriate support. The SSF provides a complete overview of the individual student's strengths, abilities and needs and is an effective tool to plan intervention and to track progress (DES 2017b). Circular 0013/2017 (DES 2017a) stresses that under the SETAM, students in need of additional teaching support should be identified by key stakeholders within schools, by adhering to the corresponding guidelines (DES 2017b) and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) CoS Guidelines (DES 2007a). Therefore, the three pillars discussed above are integral to assist schools with the 'identification of needs, the deployment of resources and the monitoring and recording of student outcomes' (Curtin 2021, p.87). However, in order to provide an appropriate level of support to students, in line with their level of need, effective collaboration and communication among key stakeholders within the school environment and outside the school environment is essential.

2.5 Special Education Teacher Allocation Model and the Primary Language Curriculum

The Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) to support inclusion in primary schools (DES 2017a) complements the PLC (DES 2019a), which is illustrated in Figure 2.4. The three pillars mentioned above which guide identification, intervention and monitoring of outcomes for students with SEN, simultaneously link with the progression continua of the PLC (see Figure 2.4), which can be accessed through the support materials online. The progression continua provide 'practical support to teachers ... building rich pictures of children's language learning and using these pictures to make informed judgments, over time, about children's achievements in language and how to support them to progress' (DES 2015, p.58). The PLC acknowledges that students with SEN may not always progress at the same rate as their

peers. Consequently, they may often remain within the same milestone, yet achieve various aspects of that milestone when given the appropriate guidance and support (DES 2019).

Figure 2.4 Similarities between the Primary Language Curriculum and The



Special Education Teacher Allocation Model

The SETAM (DES 2017a) and its accompanying guidelines (DES 2017b), facilitates and encourages collaborative practices by engaging the school community (i.e., principals, class teachers and SETs) in consultation with parents and students alike. This enhances the students’ overall ‘learning, behaviour and well-being’ (DES 2017a, p.22). This process emboldens stakeholders to identify needs, set targets, engage in reflection, plan strategically and evaluate effectively. Collaborative practice is a vital component of this model and endeavours to ensure that the diverse needs of all students are met and catered for within inclusive settings. Thus, it is crucial that staff members are conscious of the full continuum of needs in their school setting and work together in order to provide instruction that best meets their student’s needs. Often, such support demands collaboration within multidisciplinary teams (Ware *et al.* 2011; Lacey 2013)

Similarly, the PLC (DES 2019a) reiterates the importance of fostering a whole school approach to language instruction. It highlights the significance of collaborative practice, with a focus on communication between the class teacher, SET and SLT (Coolahan *et al.* 2017). Effective collaboration between these stakeholders assists in planning interventions that successfully address students’ priority learning needs and

achieve targets outlined in the Student Support Plan (NCSE 2013; DES 2017b). The PLC will be discussed in greater detail hereunder.

2.6 The Primary Language Curriculum

Ó Duibhir and Cummins assert that the structure of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum is ‘not suitable’ in meeting the needs of the diverse learners in Irish classrooms and therefore stressed the need for curriculum change (2012, p.16). Similar findings were highlighted in the Primary Curriculum Review (NCCA 2005), which provided evidence of stakeholders’ dissatisfaction with the existing English Primary School Curriculum (NCCA 1999). Feedback from teachers stressed the need for ‘a less crowded curriculum with a greater emphasis on practice and on supporting progression in children’s language learning and development’ (DES 2015, p.6). Ó Duibhir and Cummins highlighted the need for an integrated language curriculum, suggesting that ‘an integrated language curriculum would enable teachers to achieve learning efficiencies by explicitly drawing children’s attention to similarities and differences between their languages’ (2012, p.16). Concurring with McGarry (2017), societal factors have significantly influenced the development of the PLC. Over the past two decades, there has been a noteworthy demographic change in Irish society (Kennedy 2013; DES 2019a). According to the DES, there are currently over 200 languages spoken in Ireland (DES 2019a). Due to this ongoing evolution, language instruction and acquisition has become a greater concern in Irish schools (Ó Duibhir and Cummins 2012; McGarry 2017; Little and Kirwan 2021). As a result, the NCCA issued a request for stakeholders in the field to ‘examine the feasibility and advisability of developing an integrated curriculum’ (Ó Duibhir and Cummins 2012, p.10). This request has consequently resulted in the foundation and dissemination of the PLC.

Little and Kirwan assert that the PLC ‘marks an important development in official thinking about language education at primary level’ (2021, p.7). According to McGough (2021) the PLC is a curriculum for all, which strives for inclusivity. It is designed to support and allow students to progress at their own pace and through relationships that are supportive, engaging and inclusive (DES 2019a). The PLC is an integrated curriculum that encourages the cross-linguistic transferral of skills, which has a significant impact on a student’s learning of a subsequent language (Ó Duibhir and Cummins 2012). The PLC values individual difference in language knowledge and

recognises the diversity within our school population (McGough 2021). Moreover, it maps out the general progression of student’s language acquisition and development while also including the profiles of students with SEN (McGough 2021). Extensive research suggests that by fostering an integrated language curriculum, teachers are enabled to reinforce skills and help students to generalise what they have learned in other languages (Little 2003; Ó Duibhir and Cummins 2012; DES 2019a). The development of the PLC (DES 2019a) marks a significant period of educational and curriculum reform in Ireland (Little and Kirwan 2021). It highlights the importance of starting from where the child is at in terms of their language development and supports stakeholders in providing appropriate language learning experiences so that each student can reach their full potential. Circular 0045/2019, states that the PLC ‘recognises and supports teachers as skilled professionals with the autonomy to make key decisions about teaching and learning in in their own school, to include decisions about what children learn, the sequence in which they learn, the pace at which they learn and the activities and experience through which they learn’ (DES 2019a, p. 2). While the PLC highlights greater teacher autonomy, it also emphasises the value of multidisciplinary teams i.e., class teachers, SETs and SLTs engaging in collaborative planning and decision making to support students with additional needs in the mainstream classroom (DES 2019a).

The dissemination and implementation of the PLC is an important moment of educational and curriculum reform within the Irish education system (McGarry 2017). Given its significance, it is important to consider the influences behind its evolution. (Kennedy *et al.* 2012; Ó Duibhir and Cummins 2012; Shiel *et al.* 2012).

2.7 Historical Trajectory

In order to appreciate the evolution of the current curriculum for all students including those with SLCD, one must first consider previous reforms, beginning with the implementation of the following curricula: 1971 Curriculum, Revised 1999 Primary School Curriculum and the Primary Language Curriculum 2019. The development of these curricula is a culmination of an extensive process of collaborative curriculum planning and design by a number of education partners, under the auspices of the NCCA (DES 2005; McGarry 2017). The curriculum timeline below (Figure 2.5), illustrates the

events which resulted in the formation of the PLC and the drive behind curriculum reform in Ireland over the past number of decades.

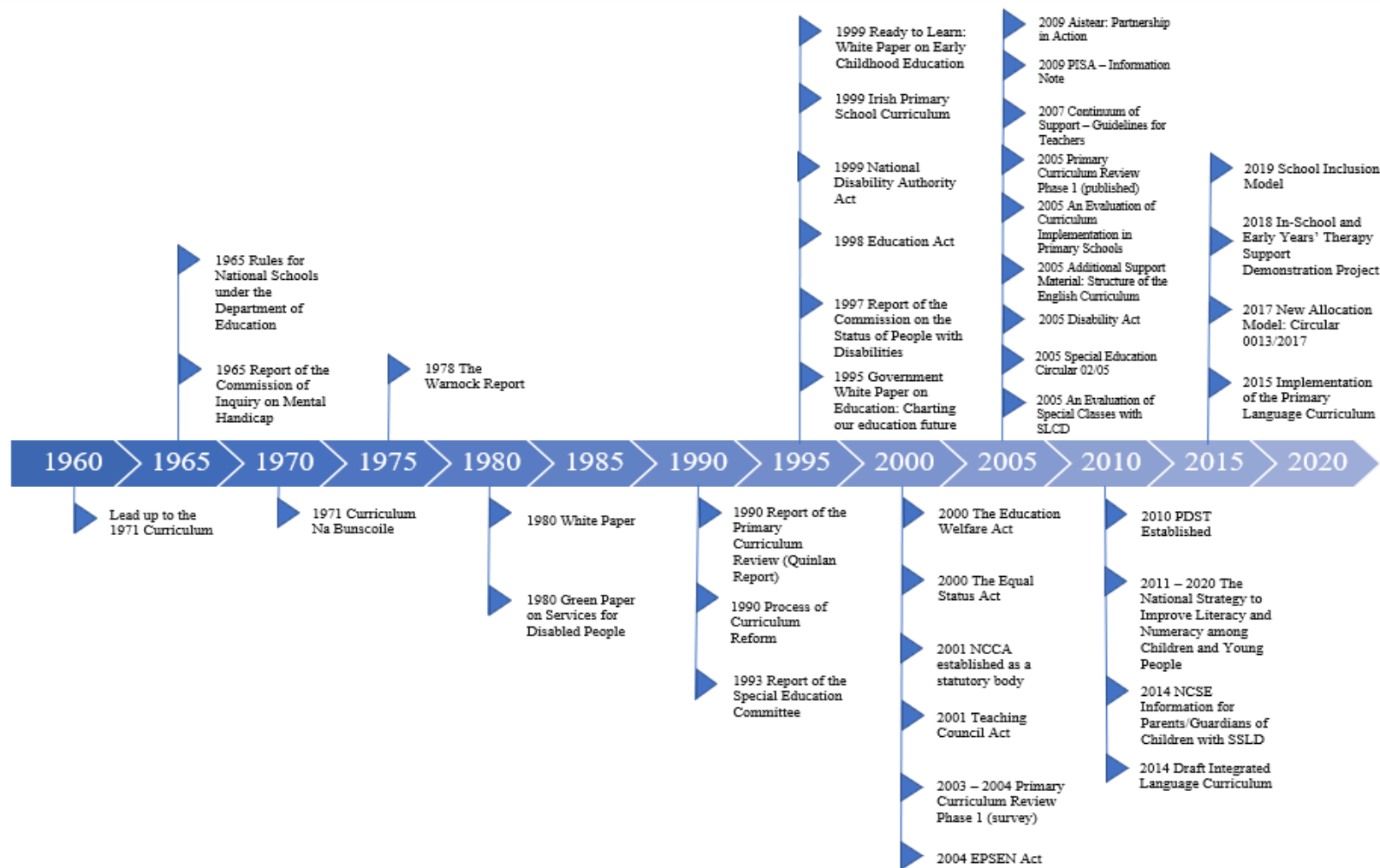


Figure 2.5 Curriculum Timeline

Given the context of curriculum reform, relevant to this study, outlined above, it is now critical to consider the SETAM within policy and practice reform to fully understand the context of this study.

2.7.1 Historical Trajectory of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) report ‘Delivery for Pupils with Special Educational Needs’ (NCSE 2014), highlighted several inadequacies associated with the system for allocating special education teaching resources to schools. The previous model was deemed inequitable given that ‘two schools could have the same number of class teachers, but one school could have high concentrations of students with low attainment, while the other might only have a small number. Yet both schools would receive precisely the same amount of learning support’ (NCSE 2014, p.17). As a result, the NCSE recommended a revised allocation model. The revised allocation model replaced the ‘General Allocation Model’ (GAM) and ‘English as an Additional Language Support’ (EAL) scheme. Previously, a general allocation of resources had been allocated to primary schools annually (DES 2017a).

Conversely, the SETAM (DES 2017a) now ensures that teaching supports are deployed according to identified needs, rather than assignment upon diagnosis of disability (DES 2017a). In turn, this has enabled schools to gain greater autonomy over how they deploy their allocated special education teaching resources. With such an increase of autonomy comes greater responsibility for the school and those implementing policy. The intention behind this needs-based approach is to encourage and support more in-class support and greater collaboration between all key stakeholders, including multidisciplinary teams (DES 2017a). Figure 2.6 outlines the various circulars which have led to the establishment of the SETAM.

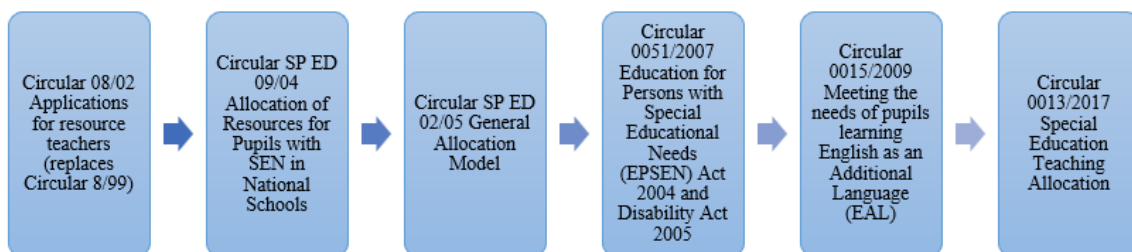


Figure 2.6 Circulars Leading to the Implementation of the SETAM

Each policy document was introduced as a result of the identified limitations and inadequacies of the previous circular. The five DES' Circulars, preceding the SETAM (DES 2017a), have had a significant impact on the formation and development of the current model. Furthermore, the Demonstration Project (DES 2018), to provide in-school specialised support, has also enhanced the teaching and learning supports for students with additional needs, emphasising that interprofessional collaboration is an integral aspect within schools and to acknowledge that such practice is beginning to evolve (Lynch *et al.* 2020).

2.7.2 The In-School and Early Years' Therapy Support Demonstration Project

The first ever government project to provide specialised therapists, bringing Speech and Language Therapists (SLT) and Occupational Therapists (OT) into schools and pre-schools, was launched on the 14th of May 2018. The Demonstration Project (DES 2018) was introduced over the course of the 2018/19 school year and was piloted in 150 schools and pre-school settings. It was developed by the Department of Education and Skills⁵, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Health as part of the government's overall aim to support inclusive education and to help every student reach their full potential. According to the DES 'the purpose of the project is to test a model of tailored therapeutic supports that allow for early intervention in terms of providing speech and language and occupational therapy within educational settings' (2018). Former Minister of State for Disability Issues, Finian McGrath, asserted that 'this new model will complement community provision for children with additional needs and allow health care professionals to work with schools and teachers in a setting familiar to children' (DES 2019a).

The Demonstration Project (DES 2018) encourages collaboration between specialised therapists who usually work separately. The presence of these specialists within the school environment ensures that students' learning needs are met and that a more cohesive and collaborative approach to learning is fostered (Lynch *et al.* 2020). According to the former Minister for Education, Richard Bruton, this project would encourage SLTs along with OTs to 'work together to plan, collaborate, and share their professional knowledge and expertise' (DES 2018). Furthermore, the project places a significant emphasis on early intervention. Minister Bruton asserted that collaboration will enable therapists to use their time more

⁵ The Department of Education and Skills (DES) was renamed the Department of Education (DoE) on 22nd October 2020 (Irish Statute Book 2020). Throughout this thesis, all documents published before this date will be cited as DES and those published after this date will be cited as DoE

efficiently. Thus, enhancing the overall support and instruction provided to students with greater learning needs. Minister Bruton further stressed the importance of this project, implying that ‘the development of children’s speech and language capabilities is clearly linked to their capacity to develop literacy skills, and thus to access the curriculum’ (DES 2018).

As part of this pilot, the HSE recruited nineteen SLTs and twelve OTs. In addition to this, the NCSE recruited two national coordinators to oversee the project. The project was initially piloted in the HSE Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) region 7, which consists of West Dublin, Kildare and West Wicklow. Phase one of the project focused on:

- Early intervention and tailored supports.
- Bringing specialised therapists into schools/pre-schools to provide tailored support to children.
- Collaboration and greater linkages between therapists, parents, teachers and other school and pre-school staff.
- Developing greater linkages between educational and therapy supports.
- Providing professional training and guidance for school and pre-school staff and parents in supporting children’s therapy and developmental needs.
- Maximising the participation of parents in their children’s communication development.

(DES 2018)

In order for the Demonstration Project (DES 2018) to be effectively rolled out in schools and pre-schools, a ‘Multi-tiered Continuum of Support’ was adopted by the NCSE (see Figure 2.7 below).

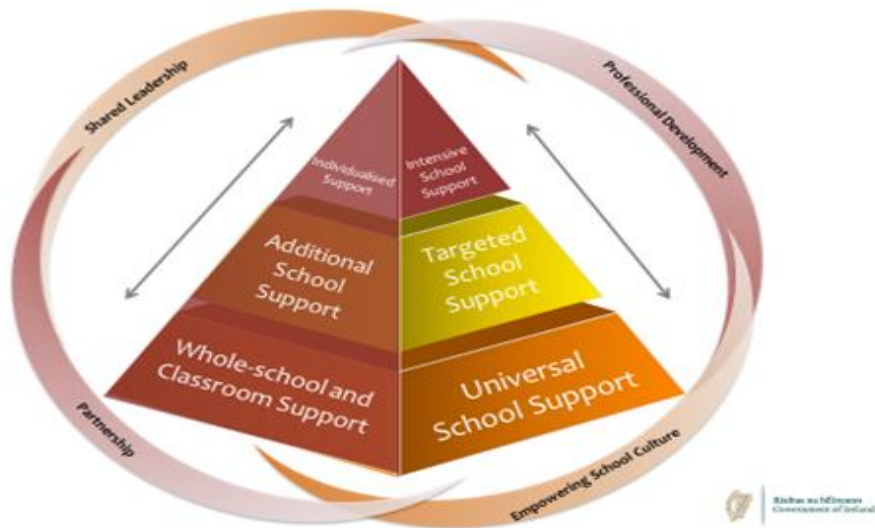


Figure 2.7 Multi-tiered Continuum of Support (Lynch *et al.* 2020, p.21)

This model highlights three levels of support:

1. Universal School Support: At the universal level all students can benefit from SLT, and OT supports.
2. Targeted School Support: At the targeted level students with additional needs can receive extra help where needed.
3. Intensive School Support: At the intensive level students with more complex needs will receive individualised support where needed.

The NCSE emphasises that ‘the agreed model of service delivery is based on a multi-tiered inter-disciplinary model of support to schools along a continuum of provision dependent on need’ (2018, p. 4). As part of this initiative, SLTs and OTs are deployed to support teachers and students across the whole school environment. Depending on the needs prevalent in the school, the teacher, SLT and OT work collaboratively with the class teacher, providing specialised support to these students, be it in the students’ own classroom, in small groups or on a one-to-one basis. Following the review of the SIM, the NCSE welcomed the continuation of the Demonstration Project for the 2020/21 school year (Lynch *et al.* 2020).

2.8 Conclusion

The review examined the current literature pertaining to policy change and curriculum reform within the Irish education system. It presented an overview of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) (DES 2017a) and the Primary language Curriculum (DES 2019a), along with the Demonstration Project (DES 2018), which promotes collaboration to enhance inclusive practices. The historical trajectory of the SETAM and PLC were also discussed in detail which paved the path to the existing policies in effect today.

The subsequent chapter will provide a definition of speech, language and communication, highlight language acquisition and the theories surrounding language development, as well as the range of terminology used to define language disorders. Furthermore, Chapter Three will also discuss the importance of early identification, diagnosis, and assessment for students with SLCD, such as Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and examine how early intervention can prevent long term educational implications.

Chapter Three

Literature Review: Language Development

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with defining language and subsequently Developmental Language Disorders (DLD), while also providing a brief synopsis of typical language acquisition, highlighting theories of key researchers in the field. Theories surrounding language acquisition are central to the understanding of language disorders (Brown 2007; Kaderavek 2011; Leonard 2014; Bishop 2017). Therefore, in connection with these theories of language acquisition, pedagogical issues such as early identification, diagnosis and assessment, as well as early intervention will be explored. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the ambiguity in terminology used when discussing language disorders (Dockrell 2012; IASLT 2017) and the educational implications that arise as a result of a DLD diagnosis (Chow *et al.* 2018).

3.2 Speech, Language and Communication

‘Speech, language and communication skills are all part of daily life and are best practiced in real life settings’ (Egan 2011, p.96). The terms speech, language and communication are all interconnected, yet they have very distinct meanings (Doherty *et al.* 2011). Owens emphasises how the three terms are often interpreted as having ‘similar meanings or as being identical’. He argues that they are all unique and represent different aspects of development and use (2016, p.17). Similarly, Paul *et al.* (2018) assert that although the three do not always go together, deficiencies in one component may subsequently impact the development of another. Thus, it is important to differentiate the meanings of each term so that one fully understands what each entail. The meanings of these terms will be explored below.

3.2.1 Speech

Speech is the verbal means of communication (Owens 2016; Bishop 2017). Hallahan and Kaufmann define speech as the ‘neuromuscular activity of forming and sequencing sounds of oral language ... the most common symbol system used in the communication between humans’ (2006, p.288). Speech consists of specific sounds (phonemes) and sound combinations. It also encompasses other elements such as expression, articulation, intonation and rate. These elements work together to enhance the meaning of what we want to say (Owens

2016). According to Kaderaverk (2011), speech is affiliated with the mechanics of making sounds, rather than the actual language used.

3.2.2 Language

Language is a learned process which one uses in order to be understood by others (Thompson 2003; Owens *et al.* 2007; Owens 2016; Rowland 2013). Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams identify language as the production of a ‘string of sounds that signify certain meaning’ (2017, p.2). According to Bernstein and Tiegerman-Farber (2009), language exists because humans have agreed on an arbitrary system of symbols and rules that determine words and meaning. Bloom and Lahey (1978), highlight how language can be broken up into three elements; form, content and use, yet, all three elements are interrelated and required for linguistic competence. Figure 3.1 below illustrates the interrelatedness of the three elements of language adapted from Bloom and Lahey (1978).

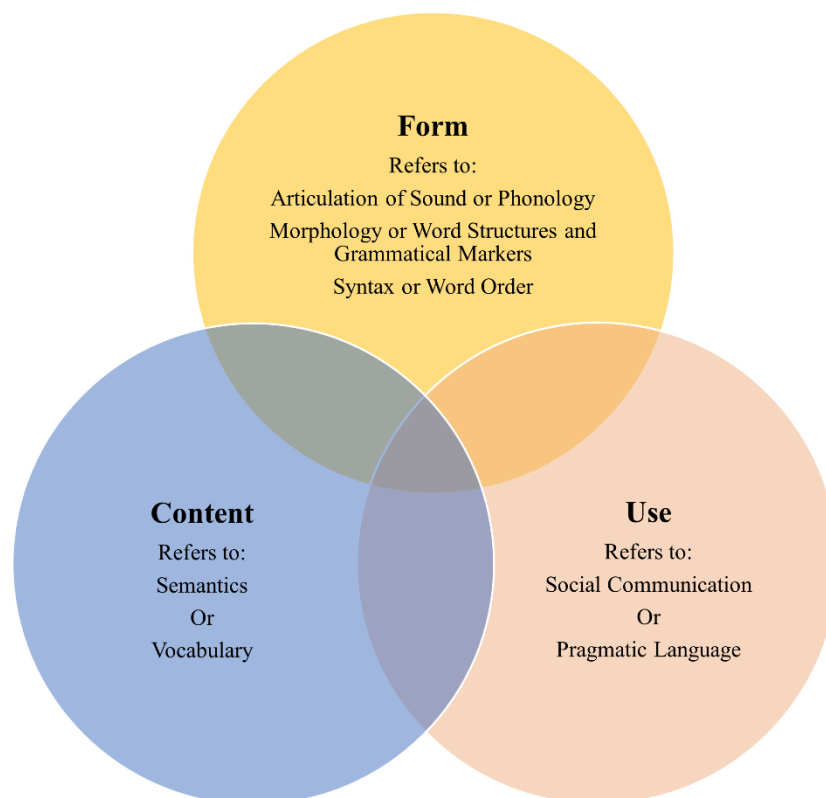


Figure 3.1 Elements of Language Derived from Bloom and Lahey (1978)

Form consists of phonology, morphology and syntax. It focuses on the linguistic elements that connect sounds and symbols with meaning (Bernstein and Tiegerman-Farber 2009).

Content is the element of language that involves the understanding of word meanings (Kuder 2003).

Use is also known as pragmatics. It is concerned with the rules that govern language for social communication. Owens (2016) asserts that pragmatics are the catalyst behind all language.

The interaction of all three elements mentioned above (form, content and use) creates language (Vaughen *et al.* 2007; Levey 2017; Fromkin 2018). Bloom and Lahey's model (1978) depict how aspects of language interconnect and consequently can be identified separately (Martin and Miller 2003). Separating the three elements of language enables us to better understand the language learning process. However, as students acquire a language, these elements are not acquired individually, they are acquired in an integrated manner. Bloom and Lahey's model indirectly explain that language difficulties may arise from difficulties experienced in one specific area or across many (Martin and Miller 2003). Egan (2011) also explains how students can experience difficulties with one or all three elements of language. A deficit in any one of the three elements can have a huge impact on a student's development and may lead to the existence of a prominent language difficulty or disorder. Thus, it is important to note that not all students acquire and use language in the same way. According to McGough, 'the issue for schooling is that language is not just a system to be acquired, it is a resource to be used in constructing knowledge and the nature and quality of children's acquisition of the system will influence their learning across the curriculum and the outcomes they will achieve' (2021, p.5). Therefore, students need to be provided with the appropriate support and correct evidenced-based interventions in order to overcome any language difficulties which may arise.

3.2.3 Communication

Both speech and language are elements of a larger process called 'communication' (Owens 2016; Goldstein and Ozonoff 2018). Communication can be defined as a 'complicated process that demands putting together information from many sources, and expressing thoughts with clarity and relevant content, according to established conventions, and an awareness of our conduct through the reactions of others to what we say and do' (Sage 2006, p.1). Likewise, Kuder (2017) defines communication as a process that individuals participate in, in order to exchange messages. He emphasises that, in order for communication to occur, there must be four elements; a sender and receiver of the message, a shared intent to communicate and a shared means of communication (Kuder 2017). Furthermore, Egan asserts that communication is a 'holistic term' that encompasses language, speech and non-verbal communication i.e.,

facial expressions, body language and gestures (2011, p.97). While language is not necessary for communication, communication is most definitely a crucial element of language. As Owens states ‘without communication, language has no purpose’ (2016, p.27).

The Early Intervention Speech and Language Therapy Service: Policy Brief (Hayes *et al.* 2012), emphasises the importance of being able to communicate. It states that ‘communication is central to the achievement of many milestones and the potential for children to fully participate in their education’ (2012, p.2). Neaum explains how students can experience difficulties in one, some or all aspects of language mentioned above (2012, p.56). Distinctions between speech, language, communication and understanding where students are experiencing difficulties, is crucial from an educational point of view (Ebbels 2013; Kuder 2017). Specifically, identifying these areas can assist class teachers, SETs and SLTs alike. This will ensure that the correct support, guidance and interventions can be implemented so that students can acquire language to communicate.

3.3 Language Acquisition

Language acquisition plays a vital role in the moulding of each individual student. It refers to the learning of spoken languages (Neaum 2012; Horst and von Koss Torkildsen 2019). According to Rowland (2013), language is multi-faceted and involves a whole range of concepts and skills. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) clarifies that: ‘language is the principal means of human communication. Through it, ideas and information are expressed...attitudes and emotions are articulated, and imaginative possibilities are predicted’ (NCCA 1999a, p.43). Language acquisition is a crucial part in ‘the expansion of the child’s conceptual framework and growth of the child’s conceptual knowledge, dispositions and skills’ (DES 2015, p.18). Neaum (2012) emphasises that language acquisition shapes who we are and what defines us as human beings. It allows us to think, learn and participate in society. Similarly, Rafferty asserts that it is ‘one of the best predictors of educational achievement’ (2014, p.4). Therefore, McGough (2021) stresses that language acquisition is fundamental to the holistic development of the student.

Given the complexity of language acquisition, Brown (2007) gives us an insight into how language learning is a continuous process, building on student’s social and cultural experiences as well as their prior knowledge and exposure to language. Experts in the field emphasise that language acquisition is a learned process that occurs during early development (Lightbown and Spada 2001; Clark 2003; O’Grady 2005; Brown 2007). Clark (2016) and

Saxton (2017) are of the opinion that grasping a language falls into place as one is immersed in the language of fluent speakers. However, according to the literature, questions remain regarding how students can absorb their mother's tongue in such a short period of time, usually before the age of five. This question has posed great difficulty to psychologists, linguists and educationalists and consequently, has given rise to a number of important language theories (INTO 2014). Kaderavek (2011) outlines that it is important for one to understand that no theory can fully explain the complexity of language development. They can, however, contribute to our understanding of language and inform the most suitable methods in supporting students with difficulties in language development (Kaderavek 2011). A brief synopsis of the theories posed by the theorists will be discussed below.

3.3.1 The Cognitive Theory

Piaget (1896) was one of the most influential figures in the field of psychology and focused extensively on the cognitive approach to language learning. He proposed the model of cognitive development, examining how students acquire and retain knowledge in response to their experiences (Brown 2007; Brock and Rankin 2008). Piaget believed that in order for students to acquire language, they must understand the elements, structures and functions of language (Martin and Miller 2003). His theory argues that one's overall language development depends on their interactions with their environment (Garcia-Nevarez and Biddle 2021). Brown summarises this as an 'interaction between their developing perceptual cognitive capacities and their linguistic experiences' (2007, p.34). However, the Cognitive Theory is limited in that, as a child moves through Piaget's four developmental stages (i.e., sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational), one cannot observe a persistent and continuous link between language development and environmental interactions (Berk 2013). Moreover, such a focus, would exclude those students who may not be able to fully partake in a given environmental setting (Feldman 2004).

3.3.2 The Behaviourist Theory

The behaviourist approach hypothesised by Skinner (1957), challenged Piaget's theory, stating that language development depends primarily on the environment and consequences of one's actions (Traxler 2011). Skinner disputes that the fundamentals of language are acquired through conditioning, imitation and reinforcement (Mitchell *et al.* 2013; Garcia-Nevarez and Biddle 2021). According to Brown, 'a behaviourist might consider effective language

behaviour to be the production of correct responses to a stimuli' (2007, p.26). Whitehead (2010) concurs with Brown, when he further explains that if a response is reinforced, then it is more likely to become 'habitual, or conditioned' (2000, p.26). While the Behaviourist Theory focuses on language imitation by the child, it fails to account for students who experience difficulties with speech and language, who may not have the ability to imitate. Owens maintains that 'a child could not possibly learn though imitating all the sentences she or he has the potential of producing later. Nor could a child experience all possible sentences in order to become aware of successive word associations, as Skinner suggested' (2008, p.33). Moreover, the Skinner's theory fails to account for parental feedback, or lack thereof and its impact on language development (Owens 2008).

3.3.3 The Nativist Theory

Chomsky (1965) found discrepancies in the behaviourist theory and was primarily concerned with how one acquires their mother tongue. Chomsky argues that language acquisition is an innate process of the human brain, describing it as something that is embedded in us. Concurring with Chomsky, Yellin asserts that as humans, we are born with the ability to learn language, stating that our brains, unlike any others, are 'pre-programmed' to acquire language (2017, p.46). Chomsky classifies this as the 'Language Acquisition Device' (LAD) (McNeill 1966; Bernstein and Tiegerman-Farber, 2009). Yellin outlines how this device operates, enabling young students to communicate 'phrases and sentences they have never heard before, overgeneralizing common forms...and using language in creative ways that go beyond mere imitation of what they have heard' (2017, p.46). Expanding on this, Brock and Rankin suggest that 'language faculty is part of a larger mental system' (2008, p.115). While Chomsky's Nativist Theory is widely considered to be at the forefront of language acquisition theory, like all theories, it has been criticised (Berk 2013). Chomsky's theory gives little weight to human interaction in the role of language development, and thus is seen as a limitation by researchers in the field of language acquisition (Sampson 2005).

3.3.4 The Social Interaction Theory

Contrasting with Piaget's theory, Bruner (1968) presented the Social Interaction Theory implying that students learn language through social interactions (Bradford 2009). They acquire language so that they can socialise and engage with others. According to Bernstein and Tiegerman-Faber, 'social interaction and relationships are deemed crucial because they provide

the child with the framework for understanding and formulating linguistic content and form' (2009, p.16). While Bruner's theory focuses on the learning that occurs when interactions take place, he emphasises the importance of adult communication, asserting that adults who are proficient language users have the ability to effectively pass on these required skills to younger students and scaffold their learning. It could be argued that a limitation of Bruner's Social Interaction Theory is that, like the Cognitive Theory and Behaviourist Theory mentioned above, it places emphasis on adult interaction and fails to account for independent language acquisition in the child.

3.3.5 The Socio-Cultural Theory

The Socio-Cultural Theory posed by Vygotsky (1978) links closely with Bruner's Social Interaction Theory emphasising the importance of human interaction for student's learning. Vygotsky posits that cognitive development occurs through student's interactions with adults, or more capable others, when provided with the appropriate guidance and support (Garcia-Nevarez and Biddle 2021). Vygotsky asserts that it is through one's capacity to use language that enables them to make sense of the world around them (Vygotsky 1978). Vygotsky's devised concept known as the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD), highlights the importance of pushing individuals to ensure that they reach their potential, while finding the 'difference between the level children can achieve through independent learning and the level they can attain with support' (Griffin and Shevlin 2007, p.122). His theory, like Bruner's, conceptualises scaffolding the individual in order for them to flourish socially and academically. Again, the primary focus is on human interaction, and this theory is limited in that it does not account for independent language acquisition. Moreover, Zhou argues that the ZPD theory proposed by Vygotsky does not account for 'the precise learning needs of children or students, their present capability level or their background knowledge, and their motivational influences' (2020, p.86).

Considering the theories of language acquisition and their limitations outlined above, experts in the field agree that no one theory can fully explain how a child acquires language (Kaderavek 2011). It could be argued that Chomsky's Nativist Theory and Bruner's Social Interaction Theory offer the most promise in terms of enabling us to fully understand language acquisition from the perspective of a standalone model. However, the prevailing consensus in the field would suggest that all theories offer unique and valuable insights, and in combination they may enable one to fully understand language acquisition. Developmental theories

acknowledge that ‘not all students learn language at the same rate or with the same ease’ (Wong 2011, p.102). Wong asserts that it is natural for typically developing children to have errors in language. However, Wong (2011) explains that some students experience more pervasive language production errors, despite normal cognitive development, for example, in the case of students with Specific Language Impairments (SLI). While Wong (2011) utilises the term SLI, there has been significant debate regarding terminology and diagnostic criteria in relation to students presenting with language disorders (Bishop *et al.* 2017; IASLT 2017; Gallagher 2019; Keane 2019). Therefore, the subsequent section will discuss the ambiguity in terminology used, while also defining Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), the recommended term applied by the IASLT (2017).

3.4 Ambiguity in Terminology

There has been controversy regarding the terminology used and conceptual issues relating to language disorders evident in the literature (Bishop 2014; Bishop *et al.* 2017; IASLT 2017; Norbury and Sonuga-Barke 2017; Keane 2019). Research reveal that over 7% of students, experience significant difficulty learning language in the absence of a known cause (McLeod and McKinnon 2007; Lindsay and Strand 2016). Gallagher *et al.* (2019) explain how these students were previously referred to as having a Specific Language Impairment (SLI) or a Specific Language Disorder (SLD). However, due to much debate, in 2017 the IASLT adopted the label ‘Developmental Language Disorder’ (DLD) as their official terminology, keeping in line with international consensus (IASLT 2017).

Over the past twenty-five years, Specific Language Impairment (SLI) was the most commonly used term to describe Developmental Language Disorder (Bishop 2017; Norbury and Sonuga-Barke 2017). Despite this, Reilly *et al.* (2014) argue that this label is inappropriate, given that cases of relatively pure language disorders are infrequently presented (IASLT 2017). Similarly, Volkers asserts that the term SLI is ‘too exclusive, failing to account for children who have both language issues and nonverbal IQ scores below eighty-five’ (2018, p.47). The ‘strict definition’ of SLI excludes students with clinically significant problems, preventing them from gaining access to services (Bishop *et al.* 2017; Volkers 2018). Due to significant controversy regarding the terminology of language disorders, the Criteria and Terminology Applied to Language Impairments; Synthesizing the Evidence Project (CATALISE) was carried out by an international group of experts. These experts amalgamated with the aim of determining consensus regarding terminology and diagnostic criteria to identify students with

language disorders (Bishop *et al.* 2017; Volkers 2018). As a result, it was agreed that the term DLD should replace SLI (Bishop *et al.* 2017). However, regardless of the advancements made, the literature pertaining to language disorders, in addition to the associated policy documents, still utilise the term SLI (Keane 2019).

3.4.1 Developmental Language Disorder

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a highly prevalent condition that affects students from a very young age and can have a significant impact on everyday social interactions and academic progress (Norbury *et al.* 2016; Bishop *et al.* 2017; Rinaldi *et al.* 2021). According to Ponari *et al.* (2018), DLD is often referred to as a ‘neuro-developmental disorder’, whereby children typically present with receptive and expressive deficits (e.g., morphosyntax) and cognitive deficits (e.g., attention or working memory difficulties). Bishop *et al.* (2017) explain that DLD is more common than any other well-recognised, neuro-developmental disorder such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Conferring with Law *et al.* (2019), DLD occur when a student’s language skills are considered to be significantly delayed in comparison to his or her peers. Bishop *et al.* (2017) assert that ‘DLD describes a persisting problem with language that emerges in the course of development, and which is not associated with another biomedical condition’ (IASLT 2017, p. 13). Law *et al.* (2019) define DLD as two distinct categories: primary DLD and secondary DLD. Primary DLD occurs when the student’s difficulties are primarily associated with language. These students may also present with other difficulties such as behavioural disorders and hearing impairments. Secondary DLD occurs when the student's difficulties are compounded by a broader condition such as autism or cerebral palsy. As the profile of students with DLD vary in complexity due to its heterogeneous nature, it is important that these students are given the appropriate support to meet their needs (Ebbels 2014; Wright 2014; Thomas *et al.* 2019). Therefore, a multi-disciplinary approach involving key stakeholders i.e., SLTs, OTs, psychologists, and educators is required (Bishop *et al.* 2016). In order to understand how such an approach can be optimised, one must fully comprehend the characteristics presented by students with DLD.

3.4.2 Characteristics and Features of Speech, Language and Communication in Students with DLD

Researchers in the field claim that DLD is not a static or homogeneous condition, but one which is subject to change with age (Carey 2005; Clegg *et al.* 2005; Leonard 2014; Owens 2014; Owens 2016). Students who present with a DLD acquire language atypically. According to Trauner and Nass ‘the hallmark of DLD is that a child with normal intelligence and hearing, fails to develop language in an age-appropriate fashion’ (2017, p1). Owens describes how students with DLD generally experience difficulty with ‘learning language rules, registering different contexts for language and constructing word-referent associations for lexical growth’ (2014, p.38). Furthermore, Owens (2014) and Kaderavek (2011) explain how students who are diagnosed with DLD find that either their receptive language (the ability to derive meaning from and understand what is said or written) or expressive language (the ability to use speech, sounds, words and sentences or other symbols [signs or gestures] in speaking or writing) is affected, or a combination of both (IASLT 2017). Receptive and expressive language disorders will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. Given that many students with DLD struggle to ‘follow instructions, understand written texts and to retain new words’ (Gallagher 2019, p.19), research would suggest that such students are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to accessing, participating in and benefiting from the curriculum (Keane 2019). Therefore, collaborative practice among key stakeholders i.e., class teachers, SETs and SLTs is essential in order to identify and effectively meet the needs of students with receptive language disorder, expressive language disorder or a combination of both (Mulholland and O’Connor 2016; IASLT 2017). According to Gallagher *et al.*, these stakeholders are ‘professionally bound to ensure that children with DLD can achieve and participate fully in school’ (2019, p. 530).

3.4.2.1 Receptive Language Disorder

Despite having normal intelligence and adequate hearing, students who present with a receptive language disorder have difficulties understanding both written and spoken language. They cannot make sense of what they hear, thus causing great distress for the student (SESS 2005). Students with receptive language disorders find it difficult to process and retain auditory information, follow instructions and directions and usually have problems organising their thoughts. As a result, these students may experience difficulty in social settings and attaining

academic achievements (see Section 3.4.3). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2011), students usually develop receptive language before expressive language.

3.4.2.2 Expressive Language Disorder

Conversely, students who present with an expressive language disorder, experience difficulties when trying to express themselves through language. Although the student's understanding of language is likely to surpass their ability to communicate verbally, they do not have the confidence to speak and are hindered to do so. Therefore, students often resort to pointing or gesturing in order to get their message across. According to the Special Education Support Service (SESS), a student's expressive language can 'interfere with the ability to use age-appropriate vocabulary, concepts and grammar to communicate wants, needs, desires, thoughts and ideas'. Moreover, it can also hinder a student's academic or occupational achievements while greatly impacting on their social and communication skills (SESS 2005, p.4). Students with an expressive language disorder have difficulty structuring sentences, use tenses improperly, omit words from a sentence when talking, have a limited range in vocabulary compared to his or her peers and experience difficulty with establishing and maintaining peer relationships (Murphy 2013).

Table 3.1 below derived from IASLT (2017, p.37), outlines some of the possible features of DLD across the age range. It is important to note that the list illustrated below is not a definitive list. Difficulties that are presented in one age range may occur at other ages.

0-2 Years	3-6 Years	6-12 Years	Adolescence
Slow to react to speech Need the support of gestures in order to understand	Late emergence of two-word combinations	Higher-level comprehension difficulty	Use of circumlocution
Slow to acquire first words No or limited expressive language	Difficulties with making sentences and expressing and sequencing ideas	Potential failure in academic subjects involving language interpretations and analysis	Persistent difficulties interpreting language ambiguities such as deceit and humour
Use of echolalia	Poor word retrieval and limited vocabulary	Behind their peers in prior language knowledge with a restricted range of learning strategies	Verbosity
Little communicative use of gesture and babble	Poor phonological awareness	Difficulty understanding concepts, humour and jokes	Experience increased levels of difficulty in language-rich subjects at school
Evidence of drooling and/or problems chewing	Speech difficult to understand	Difficulties in all aspects of literacy including reading and spelling	Difficulties with complex grammar, narrative and expository (school-based) texts and with using technology to learn and communicate
Limited inventory of sounds used	Difficulty initiating and sustaining conversation Difficulty understanding instructions		

Table 3.1 Possible Features of DLD (IASLT 2017, p.37)

As previously mentioned, the speech and language profiles of students with DLD are wide-ranging due to the changing nature of the communication profile from infancy right through to adolescence (IASLT 2017; Rinaldi *et al.* 2021). In describing and diagnosing student's speech, language and communication needs, it is important to note that:

- Labels such as DLD or SSLD are attempts to describe rather than identify a single unified disorder.
- No two people who present with DLD are the same.

- No single theory accounts for all the characteristics of those who are described as having DLD.

(IASLT 2017, p. 20)

Taking the above into consideration, students who present with DLD are at a significant disadvantage when compared with their typically developing peers, if they are not provided with adequate support from external professionals i.e., SLTs (Bishop *et al.* 2017; Gallagher 2019). Research reveals that students with DLD have poorer educational outcomes which persist into adulthood (Dockrell *et al.* 2011; Conti-Ramsden and Durkin 2012; Chow *et al.* 2018; Rinaldi *et al.* 2021). The IASLT emphasise the need for ‘optimal approaches to partnership working’ in order to effectively support students with DLD (2017, p.61). Gallagher *et al.* advocate that meaningful engagement and collaboration among key stakeholders will enable students with DLD to attain ‘improved language, literacy and educational outcomes’ (2019, p.2).

3.4.3 Educational Implications

Language development affects all aspects of development that are crucial to a student’s academic success (O’Connor *et al.* 2011; Gibson *et al.* 2020). Gallagher (2019) emphasises that persistent difficulties in learning language can have significant implications for life and therefore, effective collaborative practices between teachers and SLTs is essential if the needs of students with DLD are to be met. Westwood argues that although there has been extensive research into language disorders over the years, ‘it has not resulted in any major breakthrough in unique teaching methods or instructional resources for struggling learners’ (2011, p.11). According to several researchers, students with DLD ‘are at risk of academic failure when they begin school, because they will not have the basic language skills for reading or writing’, when they are compared to their peers (Owens *et al.* 2007, p.113). Moreover, these students are at greater risk of experiencing exclusion and segregation due to their language difficulties. O’Connor *et al.*, highlight how students with language difficulties find it extremely challenging ‘to interact effectively, to understand situations and to negotiate and develop healthy relationships’ (2011, p.27). This in turn creates an immense amount of distress for the individual student, as well as having a negative effect in other areas of development and learning (Aarts *et al.* 2011; Chow and Wehby 2017). Thus, it is important to comprehend why language is central to learning and the crucial role of collaborative practice between class teachers, SETs and SLTs to combat this issue (Ekins 2015).

Griffin and Shevlin explain that language ‘is the tool that permits the learner to retain, recall, record and communicate information and to shape and control the environment’ (2011, p.174). It is the means in which teachers mediate and through which students access the curriculum (NCCA 2007; McGough 2021). Therefore, it is important that students develop the necessary language skills in order to succeed in school life. One should note that students are presented with a significant amount of new vocabulary on a daily basis. All subjects are language intense, even for less language heavy subjects such as mathematics, art and physical education. Consequently, the school years are particularly challenging for students with DLD, as language is central to learning (Gallagher 2019). Concurring with Chow *et al.* (2018), it is unsurprising that students with DLD are at an automatic disadvantage academically. Without early identification and appropriate intervention from outside professionals such as SLTs, students with DLD are less likely to reach their full potential (Thomas *et al.* 2019).

It is widely recognised that language skills are often regarded as good predictors of academic performance and success (Rice *et al.* 2008; O’ Connor *et al.* 2011). Many studies have engaged in extensive research into the correlation between the development of effective language skills and academic performance (Snowling 2000; Conti-Ramsden *et al.* 2015; Chow and Wehby 2018). Thus, their research would lend credence to the idea that there is a strong relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement. Dockrell and Lindsay emphasise how language development is an ‘integral and interrelated aspect of a child’s socio-cognitive profile and difficulties with language are likely to affect other aspects of development’ (1998, p.117; Dockrell and Lindsay 2001). Tuite (2019) describe how access to the curriculum for students with DLD is greatly hindered by the lack of adequate vocabulary knowledge. For instance, students who present with poor vocabulary skills will inevitably have poor reading comprehension skills, as students who struggle to understand the meanings of words in a text may also struggle to understand the meaning of the text as a whole (Lyons *et al.* 2013). Kaderavek (2011) further explains that the language used in school often differs from the language students use outside of the school environment. Thus, it is crucial that students develop adequate speech and language skills in order to access the curriculum, participate in classroom activities and to benefit from learning. Research suggests that inclusion is more likely to be achieved when collaborative practices are rooted in the culture of the school (UNESCO 2008; Ainscow and Miles 2009). While problems with language have been shown to negatively affect academic success, they adversely impact social, emotional and behavioural development (Girard *et al.* 2016).

3.4.3.1 Social, Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties

Accumulating evidence suggest that there is a correlation between DLD and the development of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) among students (Lindsay and Dockrell 2012; Law and Stringer 2014; Chow 2018; Forrest *et al.* 2018). Students with DLD struggle to manage their behaviour and emotions, in turn, impeding their ability to develop and maintain peer relationships (Markham *et al.* 2009; Charman *et al.* 2015; Frederickson and Cline 2015). According to Salmon *et al.* (2016), these students find it difficult to self-regulate and understand emotions, as these skills are often carried out through self-talk, an internal language-based dialogue. Students who present with DLD need to be explicitly taught how to manage their emotions and behave in certain situations. The inability to self-regulate and communicate effectively has a significant impact on their social engagement with others and their personal well-being (Stanley 2011; Laasonen *et al.* 2018). Often, adults misinterpret students' difficulties with understanding and using language as being 'non-compliance, inattentive or socially withdrawn' (Rice *et al.* 1991). Often, students simply do not understand what is being asked of them. Thus, misconceptions about a student's behaviour can come about as a result of their language impairment (Ripley and Yuill 2005). Therefore, a factor to be cognisant of when examining a student's behaviour with DLD, is the extent to which they understand the instructions given to them (Tuite 2019).

The IASLT stress that 'to achieve meaningful outcomes that increase the capacity of a child with DLD to participate socially, to access the curriculum and to mediate against the effects of secondary or co-occurring anxiety, emotional or behavioural needs, delivery of support across home, clinic and classroom is required' (2017, p.60). A multidisciplinary team approach i.e., class teacher, SET and SLT is necessary to ensure that an individualised plan is put in place and that adequate support is provided to the student in order for them to develop holistically (Starling *et al.* 2012). Therefore, concurring with Thomas *et al.* (2019), early identification and assessment of DLD is vital to ensure that appropriate evidenced-based interventions are implemented, and student progress monitored. Thomas *et al.* further stress how 'early intervention is recognised as key in overcoming the known association between childhood speech and language functioning and negative longer-term effects such as depression, anxiety and general social adaptations' (2019, p.2).

Given the above, Bishop *et al.* (2016) assert that the consequences for students with DLD are substantial and therefore, 'the SLT's expertise in assessment is central in accurately identifying children so that they can access services' (Thomas *et al.* 2019, p.2). DLD has been

demonstrated to be a contributory factor in academic failure and poor emotional and social well-being (IASLT 2017). Thus, collaborative practice among key stakeholders to identify and meet the needs of students with DLD has proven to be beneficial (Lacey 2013; Lynch *et al.* 2020).

3.5 Early Identification

The importance of early identification and assessment for students with DLD has been advocated by many researchers (Law 2013; Westwood 2015; IASLT 2017; Thomas *et al.* 2019). According to Lindsay *et al.* (2010) and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) (2018), up to 50% of students in primary schools with DLD are not known to services, thus, they do not receive speech and language therapy support. Neaum stresses the need for early identification of DLD, asserting that, the sooner educators can identify needs and begin the process of individualised support, the chances of successful intervention are increased (2012, p.58). Moyle *et al.* (2011) further emphasise the importance of early identification to support students with DLD, by tailoring interventions which in turn, prevents the gap widening between themselves and their peers. Under the SETAM (DES 2017a), students with speech, language and communication difficulties can be identified and supported accordingly, without a diagnosis or label, or without segregating the student from his or her peers. The SETAM states that students with the greatest levels of need should have access to the greatest levels of support, by teachers with the most relevant expertise (DES 2017b). The Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools (DES 2017b) outline a wealth of opportunities for collaboration to occur within the application of the SETAM to support the process of identifying needs, planning for students with SEN and monitoring and recording outcomes. Concurring with Curtin (2021), the SETAM focuses on providing support in a collaborative manner by advocating the use of team teaching and small group teaching as effective models of additional teaching support.

According to Westwood (2015), it is vital that students who are experiencing language difficulties, are provided with appropriate support and high-quality teaching from the onset (Strichart and Mangrum 2010; Hallahan *et al.* 2013; Nancarrow *et al.* 2013). Early identification is pivotal to the type of intervention chosen, in order to address the educational needs of the student and to ensure optimum outcomes are achieved (Thomas *et al.* 2019). Therefore, it is of paramount importance that teachers, SETs and SLTs alike establish working partnerships and collaborate regularly to develop a wide range of instructional options to

enhance practice and improve student learning (Hang and Rabren 2009). Successful collaboration among key stakeholders is rooted in the concept of Communities of Practice (CoP), where collective learning is encouraged, valued and shared (Wenger 2011).

As mentioned above, evidence suggests that ‘difficulties experienced at school, if not addressed, may persist into adulthood with a greater risk of psychological problems’ (Kirby *et al.* 2005, p.123). Hallahan *et al.* (2013) argue that unless these students are provided with the necessary support and effective teaching strategies from stakeholders within the school environment and stakeholders outside the school environment, a select group of these students may develop issues regarding their holistic development. These may include serious social, emotional and behavioural issues as well as severe anxiety and low self-esteem associated with experiencing constant correction and failure in school (Westwood 2021). Therefore, students with such learning difficulties must experience success for them to prosper. This will be achieved through early identification and effective instruction from experienced professionals. These two priorities will inevitably improve the students overall educational opportunities (Lerner and Kline 2006).

The former Minister for Education, Richard Bruton, outlined the importance of early identification and effective intervention during the launch of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018). Minister Bruton reiterated the government’s aim, promising that assistance will be provided to support each student in order for them to reach their potential (DES 2018). Minister Bruton emphasised that the development of student’s speech and language capabilities is concurrently linked with their ability to develop literacy skills (DES 2018). It is important to note that if students do not acquire the basic language skills required to access the curriculum, subsequently they will fall behind (DES 2018). Minister Bruton stressed the cruciality of intervening at the earliest possible stage, which has implications for collaboration with class teachers, SETs and SLTs (DES 2018). This project not only aims to highlight the importance of adopting a whole school approach to support students with SEN, but to recognise the power of collaboration amongst therapists and teachers to achieve better outcomes for students (DES 2018).

Research strongly indicates that embedding collaborative practices amongst class teachers, SETs and SLTs, including outside educationalists, increases students’ academic performance and reduces the overall educational implications students may experience (Kimble and Hildreth 2008; Griffin and Shevlin 2011; DES 2016; DES 2017a; Donohoo *et al.*

2018). In order to ensure that students are appropriately supported, effective diagnostic and assessment procedures must be in place.

3.6 Diagnosis and Assessment

Given the complex profile and varied nature of DLD, diagnosis and assessment of students can pose great difficulty and demands collaboration between key stakeholders (Bishop 2017; IASLT 2017; Lindsay *et al.* 2020; McGregor 2020). Gallagher (2019) asserts that the difficulty in diagnosing DLD is due to the ‘invisible’ nature of the condition. She further highlights that students with DLD are well capable of hiding their difficulties by developing coping mechanisms. Therefore, language needs are often missed (McGregor 2020). As previously mentioned, DLD is often characterised by the ‘exclusion of other disorders than on some readily identifiable traits or behaviours’ (Owens 2014, p.37). Therefore, Owens (2014) emphasises the difficulty of clinical identification, stating that diagnosis is generally based on the absence of other contributing factors. While SLTs can diagnose DLD, class teachers, SETs and other key professionals play a crucial role in the process of diagnosis and ensuring that suitable provision is sought for students with DLD (IASLT 2017). The DES issued circulars (SP ED 02/05 and 38/07) which have provided educators with guidelines to support the provision of teaching and learning for students with DLD. Despite this, it is important to note that no two students who present with DLD are the same (Kulack and Archibald 2019). Students with DLD have a continuum of difficulties in a variety of areas, with relative strengths and weaknesses (IASLT 2017; McGregor 2020). Each student has a unique set of needs that require ‘a range of diagnostic assessment and intervention strategies to be carried out by the SLT and supported by multi-disciplinary team members, education teams and parent/guardians’ (IASLT 2017, p.36).

The criteria for students to be diagnosed as having a DLD were identified initially by the SERC (1993) and explicitly outlined in the DES circulars (SP ED 02/05 and 38/07). It bases its criteria on the discrepancy between a nonverbal IQ score of (>90) and a standardised assessment of speech and language development (>-2 standard deviations below the mean). In addition to this, the criteria further states that the student’s language disorder must not be affected by a hearing impairment, emotional and behavioural disorder or a physical disability (SESS 2005; IASLT 2017). Although the identification of exclusionary and discrepancy criteria was used to support the formulation of a diagnosis, it has caused much debate and has been greatly criticised because of its strict cut-off criteria (IASLT 2017; Graham and Tancredi

2019). Unfortunately, as a result, a percentage of students who present with language difficulties are denied access to appropriate support (Travers *et al.* 2010). This is simply because they do not fit the specific diagnostic criteria on paper, irrespective of any other factor (NCSE 2013). This warranted the need for the establishment of the SETAM (DES 2017a). This model recognises the importance of allocating resources to students who present with the greatest needs as previously discussed in Section 2.5. The introduction of the SETAM reduced the need for professional assessments and prevented the diagnoses of students for the purpose of gaining additional resource time in schools (NCSE 2014b; DES 2017a; Raftery and Brennan 2021). Concurring with Curtin, the ‘eradication of the requirement for a label’ has enabled students with additional needs to receive access to support (2021, p.54). Moreover, it has offered greater autonomy to schools whereby decisions regarding the allocation of support can be made at a school-level (DES 2017a). Yet, Travers (2017) stresses how such a shift in practice places significant pressure on principals and raises the question of leadership capacity to ‘manage and deploy additional teaching support’ fairly (DES 2017a, p.2). Based on the above, greater responsibility is also placed on teachers to identify, assess and prioritise students’ needs in order for them to receive adequate support (Curtin 2021). Therefore, McGregor (2020) asserts that clear communication, collaboration and the development of working partnerships is essential to support students with SEN, especially those with DLD. Such practice is advocated in the implementation of the SETAM to achieve effective inclusive practice in schools. According to Thomas *et al.* ‘early referral’ and ‘improved assessment tools’ along with a ‘greater public awareness of DLD’ is required to enhance practice and improve student outcomes (2019, p.1). The assessment process will be outlined hereunder.

3.6.1 Assessment

In Ireland, students who present with a suspected DLD are referred to an Educational Psychologist (EP) and Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) for assessment (O’Toole and Hickey 2012). Early DLD is assessed by a combination of ‘formal assessment, observations of linguistic performance and professional judgement’ (Law *et al.* 2019, p. 3). Recent studies indicate that on average, two in every thirty students in a class will experience a DLD severe enough to hinder academic progress (Norbury *et al.* 2016; Bishop *et al.* 2017; Laasonen *et al.* 2018). Therefore, Thomas *et al.* emphasise the importance of early assessment, asserting that ‘the consequences of a delayed assessment and intervention for children and their families are considerable, yet families often face difficulties in obtaining a diagnosis or the right support in time’ (2019, p.2). Given that language difficulties are often unsuspected, Bishop *et al.* (2016),

further assert that students who pose with psychiatric, behavioural, reading comprehension and listening difficulties should be referred to an EP and SLT for assessment. According to Thomas *et al.*, ‘the SLT’s expertise in assessment is central in accurately identifying children so that they can access services’ (2019, p. 2). Tests such as the CELF 5 (Wiig *et al.* 2013) and the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing-2 (Wagner *et al.* 2013), are carried out by the SLT and used to identify students with a DLD. According to Thomas *et al.* (2019), these assessments are used to rule out disorders such as ASD and ADHD. The IASLT state that ‘it is critical that assessment processes and diagnostic criteria are applied with flexibility in the identification of need and in making recommendations for provision of supports’ (2017, p.21). Due to the changing nature of diagnosis and the limitations associated with standardised assessments, the IASLT assert that ‘no assessment criteria can be applied stringently in the identification of need and when making recommendations for provision of supports’ (2017, p.42). Bishop *et al.* (2016) stress that standardised assessment tools are incapable of capturing the full extent of a student’s language difficulties and their overall functioning ability. She believes that standardised assessments should only reflect one aspect of a comprehensive assessment process (IASLT 2017). Concurring with Bishop *et al.* (2016), Reilly *et al.* (2014) recommend that caution is taken when diagnosing a student’s language difficulties based on an assessment undertaken at a given point in time. In order to gain a holistic and valid picture of the students’ needs, a multidisciplinary approach should be taken (Roy *et al.* 2014). This speaks to the importance of collaboration in the process of diagnosing and assessing students with DLD.

Once a student is identified, assessed and diagnosed with a DLD, it is imperative that an individualised multidisciplinary education plan is put in place (Bishop *et al.* 2017). This plan should be devised collaboratively (O’Gorman and Drudy 2011; Griffin and Care 2014; Mulholland and O’Connor 2016; Travers 2021) to ensure that ‘optimum intervention and effective supports in line with best practice’ is provided to students with DLD (IASLT 2017, p.57). Therefore, concurring with O’Connor *et al.* (2011), the value of early intervention cannot be underestimated. Consequently, if early identification is to be prioritised, one must consider the demands this places on collaboration within multidisciplinary teams. In agreement with McGregor, schools must therefore ‘develop and implement models for prevention and service delivery that take place outside of the school setting and that complement the work of school-based professionals’ (2020, p.990).

3.7 Early Intervention

Early intervention is defined by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) as ‘a range of all necessary interventions-social, medical, psychological and educational - targeted towards children and their families, to meet the special needs of children who show or risk some degree of delay in development’ (2003, p.49). Early intervention and tailored support are key to the success rate and development of students with SEN and language difficulties (Drabble 2013; Westwood 2021; McGough 2021). In recent years, a significant emphasis has been placed on effective collaboration and the provision of early intervention to support students with SLCD (Liberty 2014; Roffey and Parry 2014). The philosophy around early intervention is based on the principle that ‘early treatment of communication disorders has the greatest impact on communication skills, educational skills, educational attainment and socio-emotional functioning in later years’ (Degabriele 2017, p. 44). Koegel *et al.* (2014) assert that the younger the student is when the intervention commences, the greater chance the student has of making optimum progress. Similarly, Roffey and Parry (2014) highlight the importance of early intervention, stating that the earlier a student’s needs are identified and addressed, whereby appropriate programmes are devised and implemented collaboratively, the likelihood of student advancement increases. One possible reason for this, may be that at this stage of development, student’s brains are malleable. Roffey explains that they are more ‘responsive’ and ‘flexible’ to new ways of thinking and working (1999, p.7).

However, in order for an intervention to be effective, it must be appropriately devised (i.e., all relevant stakeholders involved) and correspond with the students’ developmental stage and learning needs (Roffey and Parry 2014). Collaborative practice between the class teacher, SET and SLT to direct and effectively implement the intervention (i.e., language programmes for students with DLD) has proven to be crucial (DES 2021). Concurring with Law *et al.* (2017), the intervention must be specific to the individual in order to promote speech and language development or to eradicate difficulties that the student may have. Thus, it is vital that the student’s needs are seen through a holistic lens in order for the student to be given adequate support. Creating an effective language intervention can be complex and time consuming (Craig 2008) and involves collaboration between outside agencies and school-based professionals (Lindsay and Dockrell 2012; Ebbels *et al.* 2019; Gallagher *et al.* 2019). According to extant literature, successful interventions recognise the importance of multidisciplinary teams collaborating together, to develop a programme that is specifically designed to support the student’s speech and language development (Drabble 2013). A strategic

plan must be implemented, and the target goals must be collaboratively thought through (Hallanhan *et al.* 2020). Effective language interventions require an immense amount of discussion and teamwork. Collaborative decisions must be made by those who work closely with the student to support their overall language development (Starling *et al.* 2012; Archibald 2017; Ebbels *et al.* 2019).

Moreover, Owens (2014) implies that effective early interventions are family centred, where parents are partners with professionals. He firmly believes that involving families has a positive impact on the student's holistic development. Furthermore, Owens argues that family involvement 'fosters a parent's sense of personal control and self-efficacy; and increases a parent's overall satisfaction with intervention services' (2014, p.68). Chao *et al.* (2006) assert that there is strong evidence to suggest that students make greater language gains when parents are actively involved in the intervention. Additionally, research implies that effective language intervention is more beneficial when it occurs in the students' natural environment and involves both parents, teachers and SLTs (Lopez *et al.* 2004; Hallahan *et al.* 2020). As there is an increasing number of students with SEN and learning difficulties being immersed in mainstream class settings, these unified relationships are key for effective inclusion (Friend and Cook 2003).

3.7.1 Intervention Type

There is a substantial amount of evidence supporting the effectiveness of early language interventions in meeting the needs of students with DLD (Glover *et al.* 2015; IASLT 2017; Rinaldi *et al.* 2021). Research advocates the importance of utilising evidence-based strategies when implementing language interventions (Owens 2017). The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) state that 'every child's needs and contexts are different. Some will need ongoing intervention and others may only need a short burst of intervention' (2018, p.4). According to Bernstein and Tiegerman-Farber (2009), there are several approaches to language intervention ranging from high-structured/intrusive to low-structured/nonintrusive. Therefore, when selecting an intervention to support a student's language development, stakeholders must be conscious that 'the goal of intervention is the maximally effective use of language to accomplish communication goals within everyday interactions' (Owens *et al.* 2007, p.133). This, in turn, holds implications for interprofessional collaboration.

According to Law *et al.* (2019), interventions can be carried out directly or indirectly to support students with speech, language and communication difficulties. Additionally, the

intervention can be carried out in a variety of settings such as; in school, at home or in private practices. Research supports the use of both direct and indirect language interventions, asserting that they are crucial in their own right for supporting students' language development (Law *et al.* 2019). The RCSLT (2018) assert that the intervention selected should be considered within the context of the students' needs and should be implemented with the students' best interests at the forefront. Thus, the students' age, the severity and pervasiveness of the language difficulty as well as any co-occurring difficulties must be taken into account when deciding what intervention will be the most effective (Ebbels 2013). Both intervention types will be defined hereunder.

3.7.1.1 Direct Intervention

Direct intervention is an explicit, structured and systematic approach to teaching (Law *et al.* 2017). It focuses on 'isolated skill acquisition to support higher-order processing' (Rosenfield and Berninger 2009, p.101). Direct intervention is characterised by 'precise learning objectives, clear demonstrations, explanations, modelling by the teacher, guided practice, corrective feedback and independent practice by the students' (Westwood 2011, p.190). According to Troia (2011), the effectiveness of direct intervention for students with SEN, in combining multiple ideas using varied syntactic structures, is well supported by research (Saddler and Graham 2005; Andrews 2006). This instructional method has proven to significantly increase student's academic progression and attainment, especially those students presenting with SEN (White 2005; Mitchell 2008; Swain *et al.* 2010). Direct intervention has a positive effect on students' learning. It is particularly effective when it comes to teaching the basic academic skills: reading, spelling and arithmetic.

3.7.1.2 Indirect Intervention

Indirect intervention is recognised widely and is commonly used to support students' speech and language development. This type of intervention is more naturalistic, in that it realises the importance of collaboration with other stakeholders that are already in the students' close environment i.e., parents, teachers and SNAs. (Law *et al.* 2017). This approach aims to optimise communication by directly training professionals and parents who are in close contact with the student. Given that language interventions tend to be relatively short in duration, indirect interventions support the SLT in implementing programmes on an ongoing basis. This type of intervention can be carried out in the student's own environment, whether that be at home or in school. Indirect interventions operate on effective models of collaboration,

emphasising the importance of practitioners and parents working together to achieve meaningful outcomes (IASLT 2017).

Furthermore, the IASLT asserts that ‘meeting the needs of children with DLD requires a continuum of interventions with Speech and Language Therapists working with parents, caregivers and professionals to coordinate services that are family centred, culturally appropriate and comprehensive’ (2017, p. 48). These interactions are crucial for language development, as Law *et al.* (2017) explain that the duration and intensity of the speech and language intervention vary depending on the students' diagnoses and the resources available. In reality, most direct interventions are of short duration and low intensity. Thus, more often than not, the student will not have reached their set targets. As a result, more recent attention has focused on the provision of indirect interventions, as opposed to direct interventions, as it proves to be a more collaborative and functional approach to instruction (Law *et al.* 2017). To achieve meaningful outcomes for students with DLD, a whole school approach in the implementation and delivery of the intervention is also required.

3.8 Conclusion

Contemporary discourse maintains that language acquisition is a complex and multifaceted process that requires continuous support from key stakeholders, building on student’s social and cultural experiences as well as their prior knowledge and exposure to language (Brown 2007). From analysing the literature, it became apparent that there is great difficulty in attempting to reach a consensus regarding the terminology surrounding language disorders (Bishop 2017; Conti-Ramsden and Durkin 2017; IASLT 2017; Thomas *et al.* 2019). Although an extensive range of research has been undertaken in the area of language disorders (IASLT 2017), Westwood (2015) highlights how there has been no major breakthrough in specific teaching methods or instructional resources to support the needs of students presenting with DLD. Therefore, early identification, diagnosis and assessment are of paramount importance in order for a student with DLD to develop the necessary language skills to succeed in school life (Roffey and Parry 2014; Westwood 2015). Furthermore, selecting an appropriate evidenced-based intervention is highlighted in the research as being one of the key strategies to enhance student outcomes (Owens 2016). As this study sets out to unearth collaborative practices between the class teacher, SET and SLT to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD in Irish primary schools, this chapter revealed the importance of cultivating a CoP whereby, all relevant stakeholders work together to improve practice and enhance students’

language development (Kimble Hildreth 2008; Griffin and Shevlin 2011; DES 2016) which is further emphasised in recent policy (DES 2017a), which has implications for CPD.

The following chapter provides a detailed account of the literature regarding Continued Professional Development (CPD) and emphasises the importance of prioritising ongoing professional development to improve teaching and learning. The guidelines which accompany Circular 0013/2017, highlight the significance of staff members engaging in ‘appropriate CPD to develop the capacity of schools to meet the educational needs of all pupils’ (DES 2017b, p.27).

Chapter Four

Literature Review: Continued Professional Development

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will analyse the current literature regarding Continued Professional Development (CPD). It will define CPD, while also signifying the value and purpose of CPD to support teachers in enhancing the quality of instruction and learning to improve student outcomes (Grundy and Robison 2004; de Vries *et al.* 2014; The Teaching Council 2016). Following this, the various models of CPD (i.e., The Transmission Model, Transitional Model and Transformative Model) will be explored (Kennedy 2014). Finally, efforts made by the DES and the Teaching Council to promote and establish high professional standards within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Induction in Ireland will be discussed (The Teaching Council 2016; The Teaching Council 2020).

4.2 Continued Professional Development

Continued Professional Development (CPD) can be broadly defined as a process which encompasses ‘all formal and informal learning that enables individuals to improve their own practice’ (Bubb and Earley 2007, p.3). Similarly, Bolam describes CPD as ‘any professional development activities engaged in by teachers which enhance their knowledge and skills and enable them to consider their attitudes and approaches to the education of children, with a view to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process’ (1993, p.3). In broad terms, CPD refers to the development of an individual in their professional role (Anderson 2000; George and Lubben 2002; Villegas-Reimers 2003; Day *et al.* 2007; Musset 2010).

CPD is an ongoing process whereby teachers build upon their own pedagogies, extending their professional knowledge (Starkey *et al.* 2009; Armitage *et al.* 2012; Wang *et al.* 2014). The Teaching Council refer to CPD as lifelong teacher learning which ‘comprises the full range of educational experiences designed to enrich teachers’ professional knowledge, understanding and capabilities throughout their careers’ (The Teaching Council 2011, p.19). The term ‘professional development’ can refer to either the actual learning opportunities that teachers engage in, or the actual learning that occurs when teachers participate (Feiman-Nemser 2001). There are a variety of ways in which CPD instruction can be delivered and accessed (Lawlor 2014). CPD encompasses a wide range of approaches, teachings and learning

styles in different environments, both inside and outside of the school environment (Mujis *et al.* 2004, p.291). These include attending workshops and lectures, completing online courses, reading professional material, observing other teachers and engaging in staff development or in-service training during allocated Croke Park hours⁶ (Bolam *et al.* 2005; Banks and Smyth 2011; Grimmatt 2014). Additionally, participant engagement levels may vary depending on the particular CPD session. Participants may decide to remain passive or exert themselves by taking on a participative role. According to Friedman and Philips (2004), the concept of professional development can often be quite vague and frequently disputed. CPD is a complex, multidimensional process that needs to be systematically thought through and situated within a framework of social, economic and political trends (Madden and Mitchell 1993; Bodkin 2013).

In recent years, there has been a significant change in the facilitation and delivery of CPD. The traditional model of CPD was primarily focused on the transmission of knowledge through information-giving sessions. These sessions were usually short, one day in-service days, which consisted of outside professionals lecturing teachers in a non-instructive manner, whereby teachers sat passively and listened (Welch *et al.* 2016). Traditional approaches are now evolving into a model that is focused on collaborative learning, which is more productive, interactive and hands-on in its process of CPD (Banks and Smyth 2011). Hence, it is evident that the traditional model of CPD is no longer seen to be appropriate in addressing teachers' learning needs (Dikilitas 2015; LeTendre and Wiseman 2015; Welch *et al.* 2016). Section 4.2.3 will discuss traditional and contemporary models of CPD.

Research would suggest that the dynamic nature of education has led to a change in the delivery of CPD in order to meet policy standards and curricular demands (Curtin 2021). Ball and Cohen describe the traditional model of teacher CPD as 'intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning; fragmented and noncumulative' (1999, p.3). The limitations of the traditional approach have been recognised, allowing teachers to adopt a more collaborative form of CPD, to embrace and adapt themselves to the changing nature of the education system (Fullan 1993). Conversely, some researchers would argue that certain aspects of the traditional model of CPD are still necessary depending on the type of professional development. Research advocates professional engagement in participative

⁶ Under the Croke Park Agreement primary school teachers are required to work an additional 36 hours a year. These are often referred to as Croke Park Hours. These hours are used for parent teacher meetings, staff meetings, school planning and CPD. Croke Park Hours take place after school hours when the students go home so that tuition time is not affected (DES 2016).

methods of CPD, asserting that it has the ability to enhance lifelong learning for educators (Hogan 2010). However, it is important that the service delivery of CPD is dynamic so that it can withstand disruptive challenges, as were present during the Covid-19 pandemic. In a truly dynamic approach, facilitators of CPD should be able to change their model of delivery, be it, the transmissive model, transitional model, or transformative model, to best suit the current circumstances (see Table 4.1).

The provision of CPD is shaped by the nature of society at any given time (Merriam *et al.* 2007). As society becomes more diverse, it is essential that educators are equipped with the latest teaching methodologies and pedagogies to meet the needs of their students. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers engage in meaningful CPD in order to upskill themselves so that they become confident and competent professionals (Starkey *et al.* 2009; The Teaching Council 2016). Armitage *et al.* (2012) and de Vries *et al.* (2014) state that CPD is crucial for improving teaching practices and increasing teacher confidence.

CPD has been the topic of much debate in educational research, with a particular emphasis on inclusive practices (Pugach *et al.* 2014; Holmqvist and Lelling 2021). Of late, CPD has become a ‘major policy priority’ within the education system (OECD 2005; Banks and Smyth 2011; The Teaching Council 2016). According to Banks and Smyth ‘there has been a proliferation of policy documents...aimed at improving the professional development of teachers throughout their careers’ (2011 p. v). Since then, education policy has emphasised the importance and effectiveness of CPD, which has led to the dissemination of a wide range of CPD programs for teachers in Ireland (Coolahan 2003; Coolahan 2007; Sugrue 2011; The Teaching Council 2016). Many recent studies have shown that the increase of teacher engagement in professional development undoubtedly enhances instructional practices, pedagogy and student outcomes (Day *et al.* 2007; Grimmer 2014; Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2017). In a recent study of special classes across 12 Irish schools, Banks *et al.* (2016) found that CPD and the increase in communication and interaction between teachers in similar educational contexts has the ability to cultivate CoP, which are likely to enhance teacher competence and confidence. The sharing of knowledge and skills through mutual dialogue strengthens the capacities of all stakeholders within the CoP to identify and appropriately meet the needs of all students (Ainscow *et al.* 2006; Hargreaves & O’ Connor 2018).

4.2.1 The Value of Continued Professional Development for Teachers

Continuous Professional Development by teachers is a necessary condition for school improvement (Guskey 2000; Guskey 2002; de Vries *et al.* 2014). According to Banks and Smyth (2011) CPD has the ability to improve teacher motivation and morale, while also having a positive impact on teachers' attitudes, knowledge and skills. This in turn leads to successful changes in teachers' practice, enhancing their overall teaching as well as improving student learning and outcomes. However, the significance of professional development is often undervalued (Lieberman 2000). Lawlor (2014) asserts that effective CPD can assist teachers in becoming holistic practitioners. She highlights how teachers are in need of regular professional nourishment in order to adapt to the ever-changing profession. Davis argues that, in order to 'maintain pace with fundamental shifts in local and global societies, it requires teachers themselves to be creative in the ways they conceive and carry out their role and in the ways they develop their key relationships with learners and other stakeholders' (2013, p.52). Thus, Ceatha advocates the use of CoPs as 'a type of learning medium which facilitates reflection with others to explore common interest' (2018, p.85). Lawlor further explains the importance of CPD in teachers' lives, as it enables them to 'reinvigorate their practice through new knowledge and skill development and to replenish the mental, physical and emotional wellspring of their teaching' (2014, p.43). CPD enables educators to learn from one another while also developing a supportive culture for learning (Hargreaves and Aartas 2017). It facilitates collaboration and eliminates the perception of isolation that many teachers experience on a daily basis in their classrooms (Lieberman 2000; Hargreaves and O' Connor 2018). Furthermore, it gives teachers the ability to widen their professional network and develop relationships with other stakeholders. Effective, meaningful and well-designed CPD has the capability to 'unleash new energies, foster fresh enthusiasm, cultivate deeper understanding and fine-hone pedagogical skills' (Hogan *et al.* 2007 p.i). Moreover, Lave and Wenger's theory of Community of Practice (CoP) (1991), as outlined in Chapter Six, is predicated on the existence of an environment in which teachers feel socially and professionally supported, wherein their knowledge is shared and valued (Kennedy 2014). This exemplifies the importance of CPD in establishing and maintaining effective CoP.

While effective CPD facilitates all of the above, Rix *et al.* (2009) maintain that, due to the dynamic nature of education and the increases in students presenting with additional needs (UNESCO 2017), teachers do not see themselves as having the skills, expertise or resources to effectively meet the needs of students with SEN. Ekins *et al.* (2016) and Armitage *et al.* (2012)

highlight the importance of building teacher confidence through CPD in order to effectively develop inclusive practices. According to the INTO, ‘teachers are to the fore in making inclusion a reality’ in schools which emphasises the importance of and sustained need for ongoing CPD (2020b, p.16).

4.2.2 The Purpose of Continued Professional Development

Grundy and Robison (2004) outline three interconnected purposes of CPD: extension, growth, and renewal:

1. Extension occurs through widening teacher’s repertoire of knowledge and skills, introducing them to the most modern teaching strategies and instructional methods to improve teaching and learning. Extension enables educators to upskill themselves and develop greater confidence in a particular area.
2. Growth occurs when educators are exposed to new teaching strategies and explicitly taught how to implement them in their classrooms, by experts who work in the field. It encourages educators to modify existing practices to support curriculum change.
3. Renewal is achieved through transformation and change of knowledge in practice. It encourages professionals to become reflective practitioners in which they rethink and review practices. This in turn enhances teacher practice.

Taking Grundy and Robison’s (2004) interconnected purposes of CPD into account, the primary purpose of CPD is to support teachers in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms. Day and Sachs highlight that CPD is a ‘hugely complex intellectual and emotional endeavour which is at the heart of raising and maintaining standards of teaching, learning and achievement’ (2005, p.3). While CPD fosters the acquisition of professional knowledge, it is important to note the context through which this knowledge is acquired, and subsequently how this knowledge is used hereafter (Eraut 1994). CPD is most effective when a collaborative approach is fostered (Steyn 2017; Flood 2019). Nieto (2003) highlights the importance of collaborative practices as a driving force behind CPD. She asserts that teachers learn more from their colleagues, in comparison to outside professionals. Teachers feel more comfortable conversing with people they know and with whom they can discuss day to day problems with ease. Similar findings were also outlined in The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD 2013). Therefore, research would suggest that effective

teacher collaboration, through the establishment of CoP, can be ‘uplifting’ and ‘transformative’ (Nieto 2003, p.79; Freeburg 2018).

Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) stress the importance of teachers empowering one another to improve classroom practices. They believe that professional learning is enhanced when CoP are established. Over time, relationships are developed ‘free from fear’, enabling teachers to seek help from colleagues, encounter new ideas about instruction and gain honest feedback (Hargreaves and O’ Connor 2018 p.20). The structure of a CoP provides a safe space for teachers to openly discuss challenges and share concerns (Parker *et al.* 2016). Professional development within a CoP is needed to support teachers in responding to the diverse needs of students (Fullan 1993; Steyn 2017), while also meeting policy standards and curricular demands. Brennan emphasises how such practice could ‘support the evolution of schools as research sites, where teachers can collectively build knowledge to develop inclusive practice’ (2017 p.64). Therefore, concurring with Harris and Jones (2010) and Brennan (2017), cultivating on-site professional learning communities whereby teachers engage in collaborative inquiry about their own practice is fundamental in implementing whole-school reform (Pugach *et al.* 2014). Such practice is rooted in the literature for supporting inclusion in Irish primary schools (Travers *et al.* 2010; Shevlin *et al.* 2013; Rose *et al.* 2015; Curtin 2021). According to the NCSE (2013) and INTO (2020b), appropriate CPD opportunities for teachers should be prioritised in order to identify, address and monitor the needs of students in accordance with current policy (DES 2017a). In the context of the SETAM, Curtin (2021) asserts that individualised CPD, which is grounded within the schools’ own context of practice, provides excellent opportunities for teachers to share knowledge, skills and expertise. The introduction of the SETAM exemplifies the importance of professional learning within a CoP. Therefore, it is important to consider the models of CPD available, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.2.3 Models of Continued Professional Development

CPD has evolved significantly over the last number of decades (Hoban 2002; Kennedy 2005; 2014; McGarry 2017). Banks and Smyth suggest that CPD has been forced to evolve as a result of international education reform movements responding to ‘high expectations for student achievement, which require changes in classroom practice by teachers’ (2011 p.5) Banks and Smyth (2011) explain that due to societal demands, CPD is deemed essential if teachers are to meet such expectations. Nonetheless, opinions regarding the models of

professional development for educators vary widely. Some prefer traditional approaches (i.e., The Transmissive Model), while others are in favour of more contemporary approaches (i.e., The Transitional Model and Transformative Model). If the overarching aim of teacher CPD is to deepen professional learning to enhance student outcomes, Brennan argues that ‘the context and manner in which professional development is executed is important’ (2017, p. 51). While various models of CPD exist, research suggests that they can have differing levels of impact on teacher learning (Neuman and Wright 2010; Kennedy 2014). The three models of CPD that will be discussed below are derived from Kennedy’s spectrum of CPD (2014, p.349). Kennedy grouped eight distinct models into three broad categories: Transmissive, Transitional and Transformative. These categories are shown in Table 4.1 and will be used to guide discussion hereunder.

Purpose of Model	Examples of CPD Models which fit within this category
Transmissive	Training Models Deficit Models Cascade Model
Transitional/Malleable	Award-bearing Models Standards-based Models Coaching/Mentoring Models Community of Practice Models
Transformative	Collaborative Professional Inquiry Models

Table 4.1 Spectrum of CPD Models (Kennedy 2014, p.349)

4.2.3.1 The Transmissive Model

The Transmissive Model is often referred to as the traditional approach to CPD, which is perceived as a top-down delivery method (Rose and Reynolds 2006; Welch *et al* 2016). Examples of CPD which fit within this category include Training Models, Deficit Models and the Cascade Model. Information is passed to teachers in a lecture format, for teachers to implement at a later stage. This form of CPD is usually carried out as a one day in-service day and conducted outside of the school setting (Mehigan 2010; DeMonte 2013; Dikilitas 2015; Welch *et al.* 2016). Therefore, the opportunity for teachers to receive feedback on their

implementation of the knowledge gained during CPD, is minimised. According to research, this form of CPD has failed to produce substantive changes in practice (Murchan *et al.* 2009; Dikilitas 2015; Brennan 2017) and thus, it is unpopular amongst educators (Edmonds and Lee 2002; Muijs *et al.* 2004; LeTendre and Wiseman 2015). McGarry emphasises that when CPD is ‘divorced from teachers’ day-to-day teaching and their work contexts’ change in teachers’ beliefs and practices is negligible’ (2017 p.80). Therefore, in agreement with Lawlor (2014), the Transmissive Model of CPD is no longer adequate in addressing teachers’ learning needs.

According to Brennan (2017) this model of CPD has been the predominant form of professional development provided by the DES support services since the introduction of the Revised Primary Curriculum (NCCA 1999). The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)⁷ which was established in 2010 as ‘an integrated and cross-sectoral support service for schools’ (2017, p.4) has continued to utilise this model of CPD. Most recently, the PDST provided schools with a ‘training’ model of CPD to support the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (DES 2019a). Training focused on the delivery of information off site, by a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) (Vygotsky 1978), via one day seminars. Despite the findings that this model of CPD has been shown to have little effect on teaching practices and curriculum implementation (Fraser *et al.* 2007; Murchan *et al.* 2009), the Transmissive Model remains the dominant model used by CPD providers, both nationally (Smith 2015) and internationally (Porter *et al.* 2003).

4.2.3.2 The Transitional Model

The Transitional Model, which is also known as the Malleable Model, encompasses the Award-bearing Models, Standards-based Model, the Coaching/ Mentoring Models and the Community of Practice Models. These four models have the capacity to effectively impact teaching and learning and subsequent practice, depending on the purpose and context of the CPD (Kennedy 2014). The Transitional Model is rooted in building effective relationships and supports teacher autonomy and creativity. It emphasises the importance of teachers being involved in the learning process, not merely recipients of knowledge from an ‘expert’ (Miller and Stewart 2013). Therefore, utilising CoP to deliver CPD has the capacity to transform teaching and learning through the sharing of ‘collective generative endeavours, contributions and understandings’ (Flood 2019, p.57). This form of CPD encourages teachers and other key

⁷ The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) is a generic, integrated and cross-sectoral service in Ireland. It provides CPD and support to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas (PDST 2022).

stakeholders within the CoP to share context specific knowledge that may enhance current practice. The Coaching/ Mentoring Models of CPD, outlined by Kennedy (2014), highlight the value of more experienced teachers engaging in collaborative practices to support Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). In the Irish context, this model is replicated in the Induction Model for Newly Qualified Teachers 'Droichead' (The Teaching Council 2017). Boreham (2000) asserts that 'the added value of learning in communities, viewing the existence of individual knowledge and the combinations of several individuals' knowledge through practice, as a powerful site for the creation of new knowledge' (Kennedy 2005, p.244). The Transitional Model focuses on professional renewal through the cultivation of CoP and has 'the capacity to support underlying agendas compatible with either The Transmissive Model or The Transitional Model' (Kryvonis 2013, p.122).

4.2.3.3 The Transformative Model

The Transformative Model supports educational change (Hoban 2002; *Fraser et al.* 2007). It involves the combining of a number of processes and conditions as outlined in the various models above (Kennedy 2014). It is important to note that The Transformative Model 'is not a clearly definable model in itself; rather it recognises the range of different conditions required for transformative practice' (Kennedy 2005, p.246). Unlike the Transmissive and Transitional models, Transformative CPD does not occur in one place at one time. Instead, it relies on teachers sharing knowledge and adapting practice continuously (*Fraser et al.* 2007). According to Little, The Transformative Model supports teachers individually and collectively to 'act as shapers, promoters and well-informed critics of reform' (1994, p.1). Mockler (2005) further defines this model as one which has the capability to transform teacher professionalism. She asserts that, transformative teachers 'collaborate at a deep level with colleagues, students and other stakeholders' (Mockler 2005, p.742). Transformative Models of CPD (i.e., The Collaborative Professional Inquiry Model) further support the shaping of education policy and practice (Kennedy 2014) and is proven to be most effective when it 'involves teachers from the same school collaborating on real problems of practice' (Brennan 2017 p. 56). Research carried out by Piggot-Irvine (2006), offers criteria for effective professional development which aligns with Kennedy's Transformative Model of CPD stating that, CPD should be 'deep, collaborative, active and sustained' (Sangster *et al.* 2013, p.5). *Fraser et al.* conclude that the Transformative model of CPD has 'strong links between theory and practice' and has 'the capacity to support considerable professional autonomy at both individual and profession-wide levels' (2007 p.8). Given the above, when Transformative CPD is effective, the potential

outcomes for both teachers and students are significant (Fraser *et al.* 2007; Kennedy 2005; Kennedy 2014)

With this in mind, various studies have assessed the efficacy of the different models of CPD. Yet, all of these studies conclude that there is a need for greater interrogation of both the purpose and the potential outcomes of CPD structures (Kennedy 2005). Different forms of CPD display different results (Lawlor 2014). Thus, it is crucial that there is a purpose for such engagement. While each model describes a specific set of characteristics, it is vital to realise that they do not stand alone. In order to gain an understanding of the different models of CPD, Kennedy asserts that it is important that one, not only looks at the ‘structural characteristics, but also the underpinning influences, expectations and possibilities’ associated with the type of CPD (2005, p.247). Lawlor (2014) reiterates Guskey’s (2000) belief stating that CPD ‘should be a systematic process, envisaging change over an extended period of time that takes into account all levels of the organisation and accommodates individual and organisation development’ (p. 51). Moreover, Guskey (2000) advocates the importance of embracing the involvement of other adults within the school community i.e., SLTs to enhance professional development.

In conclusion, research suggests that if we are to address the complexity of improvements in the education system, we need to move away from the transmissive approach to CPD and focus on contemporary methods, which have been shown to result in improvements, such as, the Transformative Model (Lawlor 2014; Flood; 2019). Ideally, CPD should no longer be perceived as ‘something done to teachers by outside ‘experts’...as something done with and/or by a teacher in response to their pedagogical needs and concerns’ (Mc Garry 2017, p.81). Therefore, the Transmissive Model approach to CPD is ineffective in meeting the varying needs of individual schools (Lawlor 2014). Collaborative inquiry models such as professional learning communities and CoP support flexibility in the design of CPD while also supporting the learning needs of teachers (Flood 2019). Therefore, research advocates the use of in-school CoP to support professional learning and to enhance inclusive practice (Ainscow and Sandhill 2010; O’ Gorman and Drudy 2010). In agreement with Opfer and Pedder (2011), collaborative CPD through CoP promote ownership and ensure that specific school contexts are catered for. Both the Transitional Model and Transformative Model support the establishment of CoP, whereby members learn from one another within a shared domain and work together towards a collective goal (Hargreaves and O’ Connor 2018). Bodies that support the provision for CPD

have therefore attempted to tailor the delivery and facilitation of professional development so that the knowledge and skills of stakeholders are integrated and transferred in practice.

4.3 Efforts to Promote and Establish High Professional Standards within Teaching

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) have placed significant value on establishing high professional standards within teaching. The establishment of The National Framework for Teacher's Learning 'Cosán', the provision of Initial Teacher Education and The Integrated Professional Induction Framework 'Droichead', have shown a commitment by the DES to promote high quality learning and professional development for all stakeholders and will be explored in greater detail hereunder.

4.3.1 Cosán: The National Framework for Teachers' Learning

Reform of CPD provision for teachers has been a priority for the DES at national level and this has subsequently led to the establishment of Cosán, the National Framework for Teacher's Learning (The Teaching Council 2016). The Teaching Council developed Cosán as a flexible framework to promote ongoing professional development (Rawdon *et al.* 2020). It places significant value on reflective practice to improve teaching and learning and focuses on transformative models of professional development as described by Kennedy (2014). Cosán is the Irish word for 'pathway' and is designed to reflect the 'continuation of a journey'. This journey commences when teachers enter initial teacher education (The Teaching Council 2016, p.2), and builds on the progress made by Droichead, the integrated professional induction framework (The Teaching Council 2017).

Through Cosán, the Teaching Council seeks to foster a culture of 'powerful professional learning' so that teachers actively engage in their own learning, not only for their benefit, but for the benefit of their students (The Teaching Council 2016, p.3). It recognises that teachers are active participants who are 'intrinsically motivated to take ownership of their professional development and steer the course of their own learning journeys' (The Teaching Council 2016, p. 6). According to Sherrington, professional development is 'part and parcel of a teacher's working life' (2014, p.79). Cosán accredits teacher learning both individually and collaboratively and recognises teachers' dedication in upholding the quality of their own professional practice to improve student outcomes.

Additionally, Cosán ensures that professional development is relevant in the context of practice and advocates teacher professional collaboration to enhance school reform. Based on the above, Figure 4.1 below illustrates the key elements of Cosán, highlighting the values, principles and standards that guide teachers' learning and reflection (The Teaching Council 2016, p.27).

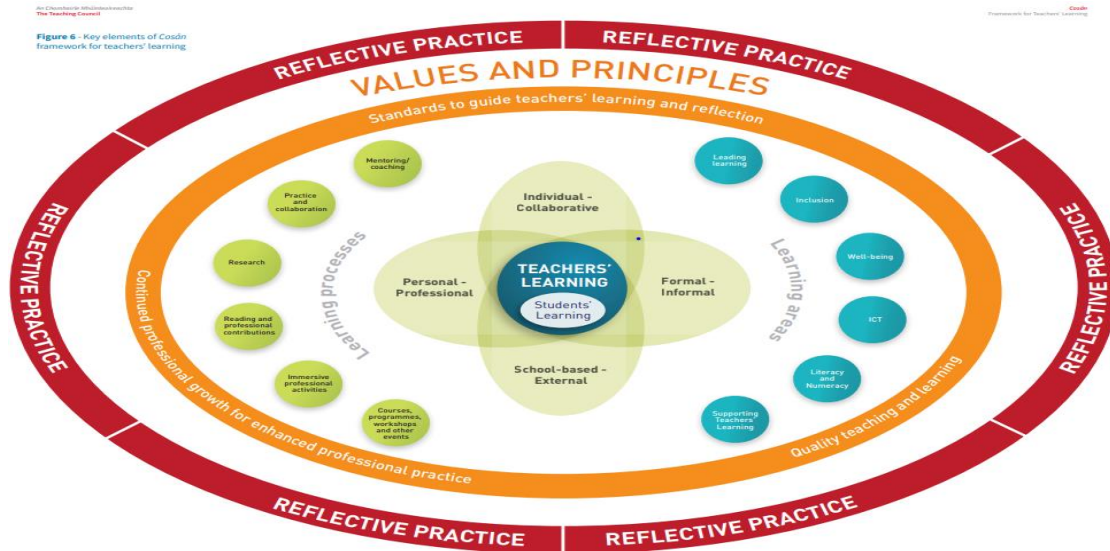


Figure 4.1 The Key Elements of Cosán (taken from The Teaching Council 2016)

4.3.2 Initial Teacher Education and Induction

In recent years initial teacher training has caused a substantial debate in both academic and policy contexts (Clark *et al.* 2012). This may be due to the fact that there has been an unprecedented level of change regarding Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Ireland since 2012 (O' Donoghue *et al.* 2017). Harford and O' Doherty (2016) assert that significant reform commenced in 2011 when the duration of the Bachelor of Education degree was extended from a three year to a four-year programme. This amendment ensured that student teachers were given additional time in the classroom, while also engaging in school-based professional development. (OECD 2013). Student teachers now spend twenty five percent of their overall degree immersed in a primary school setting. The extension of school placement has provided greater opportunities for both class teachers and student teachers to engage in collaborative practices, 'to share their professional expertise and to observe and be informed about a variety of approaches to teaching and learning' in a meaningful manner (The Teaching Council 2013, p.9). Such practice gives student teachers a realistic insight into the teaching profession (Hick

et al. 2019). This change has come about as a result of international influences (Smyth *et al.* 2016).

ITE is considered one of the most important elements in the founding of a well-established public education system (Howe 2006). This concept is outlined in the ‘Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland’ (DES 2012), and aligns with other OECD countries such as Australia, Singapore, Korea, Canada and Finland. These countries are considered to have ‘strong performing’ education systems. Evidence suggests that these countries have ‘systematically invested in enhancing the initial education of their teachers’ to improve instruction and the overall standards in schools. This investment ensures that teachers commence their career with a solid foundation, ensuring that they are equipped with the necessary skills and teaching methodologies required to become an effective teacher (DES 2012; The Teaching Council 2020).

Multinational studies (Bracey 2003; Britton *et al.* 2000) have investigated the importance of providing effective teacher induction so that teachers are not left to ‘sink or swim’ when they commence their teaching career (Howe 2006, p.289). O’ Donoghue *et al.* assert that there is a ‘growing body of evidence underpinning the importance attached by many academics and education planners to having a well-qualified and professional teaching force’ (2017, p.180). Therefore, the importance of providing effective ITE is crucial. Howe reiterates this argument, asserting that there are many benefits attached to effective ITE. Some of these include ‘attracting better candidates, reduced attrition, improved job satisfaction, enhanced professional development and improved teaching and learning’ (2006, p.281). Inevitably these benefits assist with the improvement of teacher quality and student outcomes.

The teaching profession is one which attracts a high achieving calibre of students (Harford 2010; Hyland 2012). It is perceived to be an attractive career choice, thus, raising the bar and increasing the competitiveness of gaining entry (Morgan and Burke 2011). According to the Sahlberg Report on Initial Teacher Education in Ireland, ‘the academic standard of applicants is amongst the highest, if not the highest in the world’ (Sahlberg 2012, p.19; Coolahan *et al.* 2017). Coolahan (2003) asserts that ITE in Ireland attracts the top fifteen percent of Leaving Certificate candidates. This emphasises the highly competitive nature of the profession.

From examining teacher training programmes that are prevalent in Australia, Canada, Finland, Japan, New Zealand, UK and the USA, it is not surprising to find many common attributes among these programmes. They all ‘include opportunities for experts and neophytes to learn together in a supportive environment, promoting time for collaboration, reflection and acculturation into the profession of teaching’ (Howe 2006, p. 287). This collaborative practice supports student teachers as they learn from one another, developing their own teaching methodologies and broadening their perspectives on instruction. These common attributes shared by the countries mentioned above, ensure that teachers are supported from the initial stage of induction and continued right throughout their teaching career (Fullan 1992).

Providing high quality, effective teacher training and induction for student teachers is crucial (Bracey 2003; Harford and O’ Doherty 2016; O’ Donoghue *et al.* 2017; The Teaching Council 2020). Howe believes that ‘teachers need a gradual acculturation into the profession with a structured and well-supervised clinical induction period’ (2006, p. 292). They also need to be given time to self-reflect as well as collaborate with colleagues (The Teaching Council 2020). Howe asserts that with this collaboration, ‘tacit understanding and wisdom in the practice of teaching can be uncovered and better understood’ (2006, p.297).

4.3.3 Droichead: The Integrated Professional Induction Framework

Based on international trends, the Teaching Council established the Integrated Professional Induction Framework ‘Droichead’ to provide whole school support for teacher induction (Smyth *et al.* 2016). The programmes’ main objective is to ‘offer systematic professional and personal support to newly qualified teachers’ during their first year of teaching (The Teaching Council 2013). Droichead is now the sole route of induction in Ireland since September 2020. Droichead forms part of the continuum of teachers’ professional development in Ireland (The Teaching Council 2011) which comprises of Céim (2020): Standards for Initial Teacher Education and Cosán (2016): the National Framework for Teachers’ Learning. The introduction of the Droichead programme represents a collaborative approach towards the professional development of NQTs, ‘laying the foundations for subsequent professional growth and learning for the next phase of their career’ (The Teaching Council 2017, p.3). Figure 4.2 below illustrates the continuum of teacher education outlined by the Teaching Council.

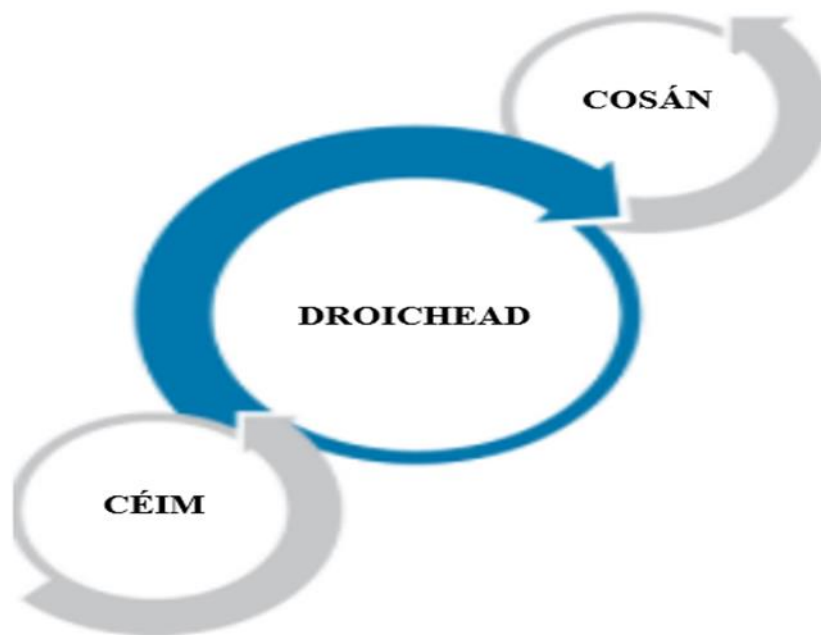


Figure 4.2 Continuum of Teacher Education (The Teaching Council)

Droichead recognises the ‘effectiveness of the reconceptualised programmes of initial teacher education and particularly the extended school placement, in the professional preparation of student teachers’ (The Teaching Council 2017, p.3). The programme focuses on the development of teacher professionalism through ongoing collaborative practices at a whole school level. The Professional Support Team (PST), which usually consists of the principal, a mentor and other members of staff, who have received training provided by the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT), support NQTs ‘in the identification of their professional learning needs and in planning opportunities to address these needs’ (Smyth *et al.* 2016, p.1). Unlike previous induction methods, Droichead signifies the importance of collaborative practices and the cultivation of in-school CoP to ensure that NQTs are effectively supported and integrated within the school community. It does this by providing NQTs with the opportunity to be both observed and observers (Smyth *et al.* 2016). Such practice facilitates professional conversations between NQTs and mentors (i.e., class teachers or SETs) and has the ability to enhance the development of professional relationships, which subsequently becomes a catalyst for establishing and maintaining a CoP (Uí Chonduibh 2018).

4.4 Conclusion

Effective professional development increases and maintains the quality of teacher instruction and improves student outcomes (Fraser *et al.* 2007; Kennedy 2005; Kennedy 2014). Ivanova states that ‘CPD is an essential part of teachers’ professional life and an important prerequisite for high quality and sustainable development in education’ (2017, P.205). Both national and international policies have, therefore, targeted the importance of increasing collaborative practices between NQTs and experienced teachers as part of their CPD after ITE. The push towards cultivating Communities of Practice (CoP) through ‘joint enterprise, shared repertoire and mutual engagement’ (Lave and Wenger 1991) to implement effective teaching and learning strategies to meet the diverse needs of all students within the school environment is of paramount importance (Lave and Wenger 1991). The following chapter will discuss the current literature regarding collaboration and inter-professional practice, as well as outlining the many benefits and challenges to implementing effective collaborative practices in Irish primary schools.

Chapter Five

Literature Review: Collaboration

5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to define collaboration along with the researcher's own understanding of collaboration in light of the literature reviewed. It explores inter-professional practice, while also outlining the many benefits and challenges to its implementation. Following this, the need for a whole school approach is justified. This chapter will establish the importance of several key stakeholders (principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs) in identifying needs, meeting needs and monitoring and recording outcomes (DES 2017b) for students with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD). Their specific roles and responsibilities will further be examined and their engagement in collaborative practices to support teaching and learning will also be elaborated upon. Given that Speech Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD) are both a national and international concern (Dockrell *et al.* 2017), SLT services in other jurisdictions will be explored. While the advantages of collaborative practice are interwoven throughout this chapter, the literature highlighting the challenges schools face in cultivating collaborative environments are explicitly outlined.

5.2 Defining Collaboration

A definition of collaboration that everybody agrees on remains controversial and elusive (Dillenbourg 1991; Woodland *et al.* 2013; Griffiths 2021). Friend *et al.* (2010) and Vangrieken *et al.* (2015) discuss the complexity of conceptualising collaboration and the confusion with other related terms being used in practice. At a basic level, collaboration is broadly defined as 'a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together' (Dillenbourg 1991, p.1). Friend and Cook define collaboration more specifically as 'a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work towards a common goal (2000, p.6). Lacey (2013) described a continuum of collaboration, in which she defined three 'process-based terms': liaison, coordination and collaboration, that represent degrees of collaboration between professionals, see Table 5.1 below.

Lacey's Continuum of Collaboration	
Liaison	Organisations and professionals make contact but take specific actions to not hinder each other's work. It is the minimum degree of collaboration.
Coordination	Organisations and individuals work together when necessary. They streamline services for the benefit of students and their families.
Collaboration	Organisations and individuals share knowledge and skills, engage in joint assessment, mutual training and have established trust with one another. It is the maximum degree of collaboration

Table 5.1 Lacey's Continuum of Collaboration (2013, p.11)

In more recent years, collaboration within the context of education has been described as a 'powerful tool for the implementation of effective inclusive practice' (Mulholland and O'Connor 2016, p.1079) and a 'force that positively influences the whole school community' (Mora-Ruano *et al.* 2019, p.1). For the purpose of this study, collaboration will be defined in tandem with Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of CoP, as a process involving two or more individuals who:

'Share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in the area by interacting on an ongoing basis'

(Wenger *et al.* 2002 p.4).

Through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire participants experience 'meaningful and transformative learning' (Glazier *et al.* 2017, p.5). Having provided a working definition of collaboration, the following section will highlight the importance of inter-professional practice (Mulholland and O'Connor 2016), analysing the need for collaboration among key stakeholders i.e., class teachers, SETs and SLTs to enhance instruction and improve student outcomes.

5.3 Inter-Professional Practice

Over the past decade, inter-professional practice has been a dominant theme in the field of education, health and social care (Mecrow *et al.* 2010). The emphasis on fostering

collaborative practice to support student learning and development has been at the forefront of both international and national reform agendas (Lawson 2004; Forbes and McCartney 2010; Mulholland and O'Connor 2016; Glazier *et al.* 2017; Quigley 2018). Internationally these include: the No Child Left Behind Act in the US, the Every Child Matters agenda in England and A Fair Future for Our Children Policy in Wales (Forbes and McCartney 2010). Nationally, these include: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020 (DCYA 2014), Literacy and Numeracy for Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 (DES 2011) as well as the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 (DES 2016), DEIS plan 2017: Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools (DES 2017c) and the Demonstration Project on In-School and Early Years Therapy Support (DES 2018). All of the above aim to enhance collaboration among key professionals to address improvements in systems, practices and decision-making (Quigley 2018).

The term inter-professional practice tends to be used interchangeably throughout literature and policy documents. Terms such as multi-disciplinary, multi-professional, collaborative practice, partnership working, integrated services, multi-agency working, inter-agency and teamwork are echoed as other related terms (Morrison and Glenny 2012; Perreault and Careau 2012; Nancarrow *et al.* 2013). Given that there is such a discrepancy in the language used and meanings implied to describe different entities, researchers claim that the conceptualisation of the term is problematic and has caused great confusion (Leathard 1994; Slater 2004; Reeves *et al.* 2011; Vangrieken *et al.* 2015; Wilson *et al.* 2015). Moreover, due to the many interpretations of the term 'inter-professional practice', practitioners working together have multiple views and opinions on what they consider inter-professional practice to be and what it entails (Robinson and Buly 2007; Weddle *et al.* 2019). These range from vague infrequent meetings and dialogues to very specific, thorough collaborations and conversations (Lima 2001; Ray 2002; Quigley 2018). The discontinuity in terminology, as well as one's own epistemological understanding of inter-professional practice can encumber the outcome of effective collaboration. Thus, it is crucial that practitioners, working together, have a shared understanding of the meaning, purpose and value of inter-professional practice prior to engagement.

Inter-professional practice refers to 'a team of individuals, with different training backgrounds, who share common objectives but make a different but complementary contribution' (Littlechild and Smith 2013, p. 53). Inter-professional practice occurs when two

or more professionals learn from and with each other to enable effective collaboration and to enhance student outcomes (WHO 2010). According to Ravet (2012), the key purpose of inter-professional practice is to cultivate effective partnerships across professions by working collaboratively. Carpenter and Dickinson (2008) believe that learning together unites professions, equipping them with a better understanding of each other's strengths and values and what they can bring to the partnership. Borg and Drange (2019) add to this by asserting that inter-professional practice requires joint effort, shared responsibility and mutual respect from those involved in order for desired outcomes to be achieved. However, inter-professional practice is a complex process and often difficult to achieve (Cameron 2011). Yet, there has been a significant increase in literature pertaining to the benefits of such practice (Quigley 2018) and the need for greater collaboration between health professionals and educational professionals (DOH 2013; DES 2018).

5.3.1 Benefits of Inter-Professional Practice

Inter-professional practice has been promoted extensively across multiple sectors and professions with a greater emphasis on collaboration among educational practitioners, such as teachers and SLTs (Morrison *et al.* 2011; Ainscow 2016; Mulholland and O'Connor 2016; Wilson *et al.* 2016; Archibald 2017; DES 2018; Gallagher *et al.* 2019). Researchers in the field claim that collaborative practice is integral to improving student's learning and well-being (Tollerfield 2003; Hartas 2004; DuFour 2007; Lindsay *et al.* 2010; Wilson *et al.* 2016). There are many benefits associated with inter-professional practice (Korth *et al.* 2010). According to Lawson (2004), McGee (2004) and Mitchell (2015), sharing knowledge and expertise results in capacity gains for all involved i.e., teacher and SLT. Such capacity gains range from 'improved working conditions, breakdown of hierarchical relationships, clarification of role and responsibilities, reinforcement of competence, to more effective reporting between professional and implementation of decisions' (Quigley 2018, p. 71).

Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that when knowledge and skills of teachers and SLTs are integrated and competencies transferred, the benefits gained are significant (Lacey 2001; Sanders and Harvey 2002; Jago and Radford 2017; Donohoo *et al.* 2018; McLean 2021). Collaborative practice enhances teaching and learning instruction for all, while reducing the feeling of isolation among professionals. According to Sunguya *et al.* inter-professional practice has the ability to break down the professional wall between disciplines, change individual attitudes, and reduce stereotypes between professions (2014, p.1). Research suggests

that effective inter-professional practice between teachers and SETs can lead to ‘more creative solutions of shared problems, a more holistic approach to addressing children’s needs and an increased sense of personal and professional support’ (Quigley 2018, p.71).

Inter-professional practice is crucial in supporting students with language difficulties as it enables professionals to achieve more together than they would individually (Wren *et al.* 2001; Blask 2011; Green and Johnson 2015). Thus, effective inter-professional practice is key in delivering services to these students (Wright and Kersner 2004; McKean *et al.* 2017). Based on the findings of a qualitative case study carried out in England by McKean *et al.* (2017), it became apparent that highly collaborative forms of co-practice bring many benefits to both practitioners and students with SLCD. McKean *et al.* found that ‘communication and language development involve a complex interplay amongst child, family, community and societal factors, changing in significance as children develop’ (2017, p. 515) and therefore, recommend prioritising the development of strong working relationships and networks of trust across multi-disciplinary teams from the onset. In assessing the evidence in this area, it is important to acknowledge that the complexity of language learning and communication cannot be tackled by professionals in isolation. When supporting students with SLCD, it is crucial that the teacher and SLT combine their skills and expertise to support teaching and learning (Starling *et al.* 2012; Archibald 2017; Gallagher *et al.* 2019). In a truly holistic approach, teachers would share their knowledge on language and literacy relating to the curriculum as well as different teaching methodologies and pedagogies. Similarly, SLTs would share their expertise of language structures, language development and language difficulties (Glover *et al.* 2015; Quigley 2018). Wilson *et al.* (2015) and Gallagher *et al.* (2019) explain that sharing this type of information with one another can have a significant impact on student learning, especially those with SLCD.

When individuals of different professions work together, improved outcome for students can be achieved. Thus, in recent years recommendations to introduce inter-professional practice within educational practice i.e., among class teachers, SETs and SLTs, has been advocated (DES 2011; Goldberg 2015; Wilson *et al.* 2015; Mulholland and O’Connor 2016; DES 2018). The roll out of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018) in particular, has placed significant emphasis on the benefits of inter-professional practice and the need for it to become more prevalent in schools nationwide (see Section 2.7.2). The Demonstration Project (DES 2018) highlights the importance of ‘bringing together therapists and educational professionals who have until now often operated separately’, to support students with additional needs (DES 2018). Former Minister for Health, Simon Harris, reiterated the

significance of its implementation stating that ‘it is exciting to see such positive interagency collaboration between the health and education sectors that will result in the delivery of increased and better co-ordinated therapy supports for vulnerable children’ (DES 2018). Effective implementation of inter-professional practice among teachers and SLTs will help bridge the gap between these knowledge silos (Anaby *et al.* 2019). Although there are many benefits associated with inter-professional practice, there are also many challenges in implementing it (Ware 2004; Pinkus 2005; Holsey 2009; Cameron 2011; Weist *et al.* 2012; Mulholland and O’Connor 2016; Archibald 2017). These challenges will be discussed in detail hereunder.

5.3.2 Challenges to Implementing Inter-Professional Practice

There are many challenges identified for successful inter-professional practice across the education and health sectors (Quigley and Smyth 2021). These challenges have been consistent across much of the literature concerning inter-professional practice (Little 1990; McCartney 1999; Borg and Drange 2019; Drudy and Kinsella 2009; Glover *et al.* 2015). According to Quigley, ‘what appears in theory to be a simple knowledge swap within inter-professional practice leading to a plethora of benefits, in practice can be difficult to achieve and fraught with epistemological challenges’ (2018, p. 72). In a qualitative study involving 29 participants (SLTs (N=8), teachers (N=5), parents (N=9) and students with DLD (N=7)) in Ireland, Gallagher *et al.* found that the challenges teachers and SLTs face, regarding inter-professional practice, are usually related to ‘professional/philosophical differences’ (socio-relational level) and ‘practical/logistical issues’ (organisational level) (2019, p. 2). Evidence suggests that at a socio-relational level (i.e., coordinating work through relationships) the lack of shared understanding, values and responsibilities among class teachers, SETs and SLTs hinders the implementation of effective inter-professional practice (McCartney 1999; Marshall *et al.* 2002; Sadler 2005; Glover *et al.* 2015; Dockrell *et al.* 2017; Gallagher 2019). Wilson *et al.* argue that this may be as a result of teachers and SLTs training separately and having no experience of working together pre-qualification to develop ‘the shared knowledge, perceptions and attitudes required’ (2015, p.1). They come from different professional fields and do not typically work in the same setting once qualified (Travers *et al.* 2010; Kinsella *et al.* 2014; Gallagher 2019). More often than not, these practitioners work independently and have very little interaction with one another. Therefore, teachers and SLTs are more likely to encounter challenges when trying to develop shared goals, an awareness of differences, trust and a sense of belonging (McCartney 2000; Hammick *et al.* 2007; McKean *et al.* 2017; Higgins

2021). Gallagher *et al.* (2019), explain that the ramifications of the lack of shared language and understanding between teachers and SLTs, is that student learning is impeded, in particular students with SLCD.

According to Gallagher *et al.*, ‘many collaborative encounters between SLTs and teachers are one off, time-limited events, involving practitioners who are unfamiliar with one another’ (2019, p.2). Hartas (2004) concurs with Gallagher *et al.* (2019), highlighting that there is insufficient time available for good quality liaison between practitioners and how SLTs are often seen as ‘visitors’ within the school. This perception creates problems for effective collaboration to occur between teachers and SLTs. At the organisational level, challenges that practitioners encounter are often related to ‘shared organisational vision and philosophy, formal organisational structures and co-ordination of administrative processes’ (Gallagher *et al.* 2019, p.30). Thus, issues around management, leadership and governance prove to be problematic (Lynch *et al.* 2020). At this level defining roles, clarifying expectations and responsibilities between practitioners can be challenging (Glover *et al.* 2015). Such difficulties were prominent in the Evaluation of the Demonstration Project with regards to ‘management, supervisory and professional/clinical support arrangements for individual therapists’ (Lynch *et al.* 2020, p.127). Gallagher *et al.* assert that the problem is that these professionals do not have experience working together in a ‘sustained way’ (2019, p.2). Glover *et al.* (2015), would submit that this is due to current policies, practices, and the delivery of services to support students with SLCD in primary schools and is not necessarily the practitioner’s fault. Taking the above into account, it is important to note that within an Irish context, teachers and SLTs are not employed by the same body. The Department of Education and Skills employs teachers while the Department of Health employs SLTs. Both entities have ‘distinguishable frameworks of operation, practices, priorities and expectations’ (Quigley 2018, p.72). Thus, one can understand why effective inter-professional practice is difficult to achieve, given the management, leadership and governance challenges that emerge across independent departments. Moreover, Green and Johnson would submit that ‘the process of building a culture of collaboration is not exactly methodical, is somewhat organic, and requires a great deal of practice and nurturing’ (2015, p.6). In establishing this, research advocates the need for a whole school approach (D’Amour *et al.* 2008).

5.4 Whole-School Approach

A whole-school approach is ‘a cohesive, collective and collaborative action in and by a school community that has been strategically constructed to improve student learning’ (Western Australia, Department of Education 2009). In Ireland, the Education Act of 1998 states that a school must ‘ensure that the educational needs of students, including those with disability or special needs, are identified and provided for’ (Government of Ireland 1998, p.13). Therefore, a whole school approach to the provision of students with SEN must be instilled nationwide (Ainscow *et al.* 2006; Florian 2014; Coolahan *et al.* 2017). The Board of Management (BOM) are primarily responsible for the development of a whole school plan, which clearly outlines the ‘objectives of the school relating to equality of access to and participation in the school and the measures which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives’ (Griffin and Shevlin 2011, p. 256). The school plan should also reflect the unique culture, ethos, strengths and needs of the school (Long 2017). In addition to this, each school must devise a school policy regarding the process of support and inclusion of students with SEN (NCSE 2011; DES 2017a). These are legislative requirements (Government of Ireland 1998) and must be reviewed and regularly evaluated (Winter and O’Raw 2010). Developing such policy is most effective when it is completed collaboratively, involving all significant stakeholders within the school community (DES 2007; DES 2017a).

Additionally, schools need structures in place to ensure, firstly, that collaboration occurs within the school and secondly, that it becomes an interactive process at a whole school level to support teachers in identifying, meeting and monitoring the needs of students with SEN (O’Neill and Logan 2012). According to researchers in the field, schools with effective inclusion policies already have these structures secured to promote collaborative and inclusive practices within the school and class setting (Vila *et al.* 2008). Therefore, it is important to note that in order for the provision of special education to be successful, the whole school community i.e., parents, principals, class teachers, SETs, SLTs and SNAs have a responsibility to collaborate with one another to ensure that best practices are implemented (DES 2017a). O’Neill and Logan (2012) concur that a group of people achieve more when they work as a team rather than in isolation. Likewise, McCarthy asserts that collaboration is an effective educational approach, arguing that ‘teachers planning, teaching and assessing a programme of work collaboratively will achieve more than teachers doing so alone’ (2011, p. 22). The adoption of a whole school approach benefits both the students and the teachers involved (Harty 2001; Goddard *et al.* 2010; Hattie 2015; DES 2017a), ensuring that ‘less fragmented

instruction' is provided to students with SEN (O'Neill and Logan 2012, p.423). The SETAM policy reiterates that 'the effective inclusion of pupils with special educational needs requires a whole-school approach' (DES 2017a, p.20), advocating the importance of collaboration between key stakeholders.

Moreover, effective planning is crucial to the process, so that students with SEN are appropriately supported in their learning (Ainscow *et al.* 2006). Griffin and Shevlin maintain that a whole school approach to support students with SEN consists of 'the development of strategies for early identification and prevention of difficulties in learning; the design of appropriate and inclusive assessment procedures, the clarification of staff roles and responsibilities, the establishment of effective communication with parents and outside agencies and services; and the provision of opportunities for students with special educational needs to access a broad range of activities within the school' (2011, p.256). Consequently, when collaborative practice are successful within a school community, there is a greater mutual understanding of how to best support the students' learning needs (Long 2017). This comes about as a result of educators and practitioners becoming more aware of the difficulties experienced by individual students. O' Connor *et al.* (2011) assert that collaboration within a school community leads to increased knowledge for all parties involved. Roffey (1999) highlights the importance of clarity for effective collaboration. She explains the necessity for professionals to know exactly what they are supposed to be doing, how to do it and with whom. This is essential to remove inappropriate expectations of students, repetition of work, unsuitable interventions and inappropriate referrals. Each professional has a role to fulfil and corresponding responsibilities to uphold. Thus, it is of utmost importance that their duties are fulfilled in order to facilitate the teaching and learning of students with SEN so that they can reach their potential.

5.4.1 Collaborating within Professional Learning Communities

Over the past number of years, expanding literature confirms the positive impact collaborative professional communities have on teaching and student learning (Levine and Macus 2010; Gallagher *et al.* 2019; Hansen *et al.* 2020). Due to the demands of the modern-day classroom, there is a greater need for collaboration amongst stakeholders and the development of Professional Learning Communities (Morgan and NicCraith 2015; Chitiyo 2017). When people work together towards a common goal, teaching and learning is significantly enhanced (Ervin 2011; McCarthy 2011; Westwood 2021). Thus, collaboration

and teamwork are key elements of effective instruction and intervention (Wren *et al.* 2001) Friend 2007; Ainscow 2016). Florian (2014) and Gallagher (2019), assert that collaboration between teachers and SLTs is essential for ensuring that the needs of all students are met, while also ensuring they are appropriately accommodated in all aspects of school life. More often than not, collaborative practice enables stakeholders to share resources and ideas while also discussing solutions to problems that may be encumbering the students' progress (Mitchell 2008; Pella 2011). This type of interaction enhances work relationships, building on individuals' strengths and knowledge. Equally, it implies mutual respect, support and responsibility, thus reducing professional isolation (Snell and Janney 2005; Gallo-Fox 2010; Hargreaves and O' Connor 2018).

While educational policies and research is packed with recommendations for collaborative approaches to educational provision for students with SEN, what happens in practice among stakeholders can often be very different (Thousand *et al.* 2006; Robinson and Buly 2007; Quigley 2018). Although schools usually have a 'congenial atmosphere' between the class teacher and SET, McCarthy asserts that 'an atmosphere of congeniality must not be mistaken for one of collegiality' (2011, p.28). She further highlights that teachers consulting with one another 'briefly' is simply not collaboration. Swick (2003) as well as Bush and Grotjohann (2020) maintain that collaboration involves much more than this. It is a process in which individuals (two or more) voluntarily work together in shared decision making, towards a common goal (Bush and Grotjohann 2020). Those involved must have opportunities to observe, plan, discuss, reflect and share their expertise with one another in order to cultivate successful collaboration (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2002; Jago and Radford (2017). While human relationships are seen as the catalyst to collaboration, they can also be viewed as barriers to collaboration. Thus, it is important to note that 'collaboration is only as good as the people at the table' (O' Leary *et al.* 2012, p.S81). Everyone involved must want the best for the students in question. Day believes that 'the building of joint, authentic purpose, trust and mutual understandings, and the provision of support and continuity of relationships through sustained interactivity are so important for success' (1999, p.188).

Teacher collegiality and collaboration are essential to ensure that the methodologies and pedagogies in place are of the highest quality, and that student attainment is the primary concern. A study by Hanssen *et al.* (2020), involving seven case studies in Denmark, found that cross-professional collaboration is key in strengthening inclusive school developments. According to Hansen *et al.*, when 'many different professionals with various educational

backgrounds, knowledge, skills and competence’ work collaboratively together and are fully committed, the chances of success for students is significantly greater (2020, p.48). This claim is further supported by Westwood (2015) and McEwan (2009). Westwood (2015) identifies ‘commitment’ on the part of all stakeholders involved as an essential component to successful collaboration. According to McEwan, working together is ‘the only way a diverse faculty with diverse students can hope to achieve the alignment of content standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment that are needed to raise the achievement bar for all students (2009, p.96). The subsequent section will explore the international context of SLT collaboration.

5.5 Collaborative Practice: SLT Services in Schools - The International Picture

According to Dockrell *et al.* (2017), speech, language and communication difficulties are not only a national concern but an international one. A significant number of the global student population experience these difficulties (Law *et al.* 2012) and commence school with poor language skills (Norbury *et al.* 2016). Therefore, it is evident that there is a need for educational professionals to collaborate with health professionals in an effective way to support students to reach their potential (Nugent 2007; Pring *et al.* 2012; Shevlin *et al.* 2008; Jago and Radford (2017). While inter-professional collaboration between SLTs and teachers has been recognised by contemporary policy as essential, sustained service delivery and collaboration among these stakeholders to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD is rarely found in practice (Gallagher *et al.* 2019). Many researchers claim that there are barriers which impede successful collaboration among these professionals, and these barriers can be caused by individual and organisational issues (Hartas 2004; Wright and Kersner 2004; Glover *et al.* 2015; Archibald 2017; Gallagher 2019). These will be discussed in greater detail in section 5.6.1.

Given that ‘teachers and SLTs have different, but complementary skills in developing children’s language and learning’ (Glover *et al.* 2015, p.6), this section will discuss international models of practice regarding interprofessional collaboration between teachers and SLT in other jurisdictions, focusing primarily on practice in the UK, Australia and USA.

5.5.1 SLT Services in Schools in the UK

There are more students presenting with speech, language and communication difficulties in the UK than any other type of SEN (Department of Education 2015), which is significant. Approximately ten percent of students in the UK have long term, persistent speech,

language and communication difficulties (Law *et al.* 2000; Law *et al.* 2012). A national review of services for students with SLCD highlighted that the most common model of SLT practice in schools was ‘consultative’, whereby service delivery is delegated to other staff members within the school setting (Baxter 2018). This form of delivery lacks shared responsibility, placing additional pressure on teachers to deliver SLT programmes in schools to support students with SLCD (Dockrell and Lindsay 2001; Marshall *et al.* 2002). Therefore, one can appreciate the potential benefit of having SLTs placed in educational settings, as it many enable them to plan and deliver support collaboratively with teachers.

In the UK, SLTs are employed by the National Health Service (NHS). According to the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), there are approximately 17,000 practising SLTs in the UK working in a variety of settings. The NHS provide services for children with the highest level of speech, language and communication needs. This support has been guaranteed by legislation enacted in law across all constituent nations of the UK:

- England and Wales - Every Child Matters legislation
- Northern Ireland – Special Educational Needs and Disability Act
- Scotland – Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

(McCartney 2018)

However, there is a significant group of students who are not entitled to receive on-going support under the NHS unless they have an Education, Health and Care Plan. This includes students who enter school with delayed listening and language abilities, or students who have persistent language and communication difficulties, which impact their learning, literacy and social communication. Therefore, speech and language therapy must be sought from outside the school environment in order to support those who are not eligible. ‘I CAN’ is an example of an external service to support students' speech, language and communication difficulties in the UK. ‘I CAN’ is a children’s community charity whose mission is to ensure that no student gets left behind because of a difficulty speaking or understanding. Through their various programmes and services in the UK, ‘I CAN’ supports parents, practitioners and students experiencing speech, language and communication difficulties (I CAN 2020).

5.5.2 SLT Services in Schools in Australia

Similar to the UK, the majority of SLTs in Australia are employed by Health Departments (Health Workforce Australia 2014). They are usually employed by, or

independently contracted to a school (McCartney 2018). SLTs are allocated to schools based on the needs prevalent in the school setting. Therefore, ‘formal cross-agency procedures’ to support inter-professional collaboration between stakeholders can be difficult to achieve (Dockrell *et al.* 2014; Glover *et al.* 2015, p.179). Such findings were highlighted in a mixed-methods study carried out by Glover *et al.* (2015), involving 14 teachers and 6 SLTs in Australia. Glover *et al.* (2015) maintain that, in order for most students to access school-based language therapy services, they first need to be eligible for funding. The funding is allocated based on the severity of the students’ difficulties. SLTs are then employed to support the needs of the funded students. However, research reveals that there are long waiting lists for children to access service due to SLT shortages in Australia (McLaughlin *et al.* 2008; Ruggero *et al.* 2012). According to Ruggero *et al.*, Australian legislation ‘does not specifically recognise children with communication disorders as requiring minimum access to therapy’ (2012, p.340), with each state having differing policies in place regarding funding and SLT services (Glover *et al.* 2015). McLeod *et al.* (2010) maintain that this has implications for early identification and intervention.

Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania employ SLTs in schools through their education departments. However, the role and numbers of these SLTs vary. According to Davies (2017), other states and territories do not have SLTs employed by the Department of Education. Therefore, they have individual budgets they can utilise in order to employ private SLTs. Some states provide additional support within the school system, while others do not. Those that do not provide support leave teachers to bear the challenge of supporting students who do not meet the criteria to receive individualised support (McLeod and McKinnon 2007; McLeod *et al.* 2010). This often leads to parents paying large amounts for private speech and language therapy services (Senate Community Affairs Committee Secretariat 2014). Research conducted by Ruggero *et al.* (2012) argue that a government funded national and comprehensive review to help establish national legislation regarding SLT services is required. This national legislation, if it were to be established, should aim to recognise the needs of all students with SLCD (McLeod *et al.* 2010).

5.5.3 SLT Services in Schools in the USA

In the USA, SLTs are employed in schools, often through private companies, to work with ‘diagnostic and educational evaluation teams to provide comprehensive language and speech assessments’ for students presenting with SLCD (ASHA 2010). Under the Individuals

with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), all students with disabilities are guaranteed a free and appropriate education. SLTs are obliged to remain compliant with federal and state regulations that apply to their school district (Ireland and Conrad 2016). The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) (2010), emphasise the importance of SLT and teacher collaboration to effectively meet the needs of students with SLCD by combining their unique perspectives, skills and knowledge (Whitmire 2002). Most of the SLTs work is carried out individually or in small group settings, in classrooms or when engaging in team teaching. SLTs have an integral role to play in supporting students with SLCD and are viewed as essential members who work within the school environment (Archibald 2017). Inter-professional collaboration and regular communication between the SLT and teachers ensures that multiple resources are employed to define and solve problems (Whitmire 2002; Brandel and Loeb 2011; Wilson *et al.* 2015). The allocated time and activities completed by the SLT are determined by the students' individual plan which is devised in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders (ASHA 2010).

Provision of resources to employ SLTs was legally supported under the 'No Child Left Behind Act 2001', which aimed to improve the academic achievement of the economically disadvantaged. It primarily focused on closing identified gaps, by providing students with the appropriate instruction and support so they can experience success (ASHA 2010). While school based SLTs are responsible for carrying out assessments and interventions to improve student outcomes, the ASHA (2010) highlight how they are also responsible for curriculum development and programme design, providing training and support to parents and other professionals through CPD, while also supervising and mentoring new professionals. Given the substantive changes that have occurred in schools in recent years in the United States, inter-professional practice between teachers and SLTs is now evident in practice.

Given the above, the need for greater collaboration among key stakeholders to identify and meet the diverse needs of all learners is rooted in the literature (Morgan and NicCraith 2015; Chitiyo 2017). Considering the importance of collaboration between stakeholders to meet the needs of students with SEN, one can now consider the role each stakeholder plays in this process.

5.6 The Role of Key Stakeholders in Supporting Students with Speech Language and Communication Difficulties

Principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs all have a significant role to play in supporting students with SLCD. Effective collaboration and partnerships among these key stakeholders enhance inclusive practices for all (Sutton and Shouse 2016).

5.6.1 The Role of the Principal

The principal plays a crucial role in ensuring that the educational needs of all students are met, especially those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Banks *et al.* 2016). Research shows that the primary role of the principal is considered to be administrative and managerial in nature, with an emphasis on leading learning (Lillis and Flood 2010). Under the SETAM (DES 2017a), the principal's leadership role is central to the provision of support to students with SEN. According to the Guidelines for Primary Schools, *Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (DES 2017b) principals are responsible for the following:

- Developing inclusive whole-school policies and monitoring their implementation.
- Assigning staff strategically to teaching roles, including special education roles.
- Co-ordinating teachers work to ensure continuity of provision for all pupils.
- Ensuring that whole-school procedures are established to facilitate the effective involvement of parents, pupils and external professionals/agencies.
- Ensuring that effective systems are implemented to identify pupils' needs and that progress is monitored methodically.
- Facilitating Continued Professional Development (CPD) of all teachers in relation to education of pupils with SEN, and ensuring that all school staff (class teachers, SETs and SNAs) understand their roles and responsibilities.

The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN)⁸ have highlighted the challenges encountered by school leaders in fulfilling their role and the increased responsibilities and accountability associated with their position (IPPN 2014). According to McGovern, principals are 'carrying the weight of imposed changes, juggling management tasks, attending meetings,

⁸ IPPN was established in 2000 and is the professional body for primary school principals in Ireland.

securing resources, overseeing policies, dealing with stakeholders, organising budgets and staffing arrangements' (2015, p. 67). Thus, in order for successful leadership to be instilled within a school, collaborative practice must be embraced by all stakeholders involved (Flick 2010; Donohoo *et al.* 2018; Triegaardt 2018). McGovern asserts that 'by facilitating a school culture where decisions are shared, visions are expressed and leadership for learning devolved, school principals are helping to preserve positive conditions for learning in the present and also the conditions in schools for the development of leaders of the future' (2015, p.67). Likewise, Lambert believes that educational practitioners 'become fully alive when their schools and districts provide opportunities for skilful participation, inquiry, dialogue and reflection' (2003, p.422). Engaging in such practice has benefits for all, especially when teaching students with SEN (Ainscow and Miles 2009; McGovern 2015; Pratt *et al.* 2017; Hansen *et al.* 2020).

5.6.2 The Role of the Special Education Teacher

The term Special Education Teacher (SET) has evolved from what was previously referred to as Learning Support (LS) and Resource Teachers (RT). Prior to the implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a), the delivery of learning support and resource teaching in schools was very similar. They both involved individual support, team teaching and/or small group instruction. According to Weir *et al.* the main difference between RT and LS was that 'the characteristics of pupils in receipt of resource provision are qualitatively different to those pupils in receipt of learning support' (2014, p.2). Students who had severe learning difficulties and had a formal psychological assessment were supported by the RT. Whereas, students who had specific difficulties in relation to literacy and numeracy were supported by the LS (Griffin and Shevlin 2007). As a result of the implementation of the SETAM (DES 2017a) (see Section 2.4 above) which replaced the General Allocation Model (DES 2005a), both LS and RT now fall under the one umbrella term 'SET'.

SETs provide fundamental support to students with SEN and learning difficulties, while also providing crucial support to the class teacher (Rose *et al.* 2015). The SET is for the most part, responsible for administering assessments with his or her students, drawing up Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) or School Support Plus Plans⁹ in conjunction with the class teacher, parents and students (where appropriate), as well as implementing interventions to support

⁹ Under the SETAM (DES 2017a), IEPs are now referred to as School Support Plus Plans (SSPs). However, both terms are used throughout this thesis as it became apparent during interview conversations that many teachers continue to call these plans 'IEPs'.

student learning (Bateman and Cline 2016). The SET is required to cater for a variety of learning needs within the whole school environment. This can be completed in a variety of ways through a combination of ‘team-teaching initiatives, co-operative teaching, early intervention and small group or individual support’ (DES 2017b, p.13). Depending on the students’ needs as well as the resources available to the school, the class teacher and SET will determine which type of support is most suitable. More often than not, the school will try to implement a balanced approach to support. i.e., a mixture of in-class, group and individual support. According to the guidelines for primary schools ‘the level and type of support should reflect the specific targets of individual pupils as set out in their support plans and be informed by careful monitoring and review of progress’ (DES 2017b, p.18). Mulholland and O’Connor submit that this duo of teaching expertise ‘represents an opportunity for whole-school and classroom-based approaches to successful collaborative, inclusive practice’ (2016, p. 1070).

In more recent times, there has been a shift in practice, with a greater emphasis placed on promoting in-class support as opposed to withdrawal (Mulholland and O’Connor 2016; Curtin 2021). Weir *et al.* (2014) reiterate the importance of involving the class teacher and SET in the students’ own classroom to support student learning. The inspectorate (DES 2005) in particular, has recommended a more harmonised and integrated service for students with SEN, encouraging class teachers and SETs to engage in collaborative practices on a more formal level to support the delivery of instruction to students with learning difficulties (Weir *et al.* 2014). Although the provision of in-class support is advocated in the literature (DES 2017a), sometimes when students present with SLCD, such as DLD, in-class support does not suffice. Often students with such difficulties require one to one support or small group instruction on a withdrawal basis due to their particular needs (Friend and Bursuck 2012; Curtin and Egan 2021). Therefore, the withdrawal model of support remains a common approach to providing support to students with SEN, in particular students with DLD (Kinsella *et al.* 2014; Casserly and Padden 2018).

5.6.3 The Role of the Speech and Language Therapist

Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) work with students who have speech, language and communication difficulties and are key in the provision of support for students with DLD. According to the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), ‘Speech and language therapists take both a primary preventative and a more targeted approach to improve the communication and interaction skills of children with delayed or disordered

speech or language to give every child the best start in life' (2011, p.1). SLTs usually work in community clinics, schools, hospitals or special needs settings. Dockrell *et al.* (2014) submit that the role of the SLT has developed in a way which allows them to provide more support to the students they work with, within the school environment. This change has given SLTs the opportunity to provide students with direct therapy on an individual basis as set out in the Demonstration Project previously discussed in section 2.7.2. When the service delivery is school based, the SLT can consult with the class teacher and SET and can contribute to the students' IEP¹⁰, which is now referred to as the SSP in the Irish context (see Section 2.4.2) (Lindsay and Dockrell 2012; Roulstone *et al.* 2012; Lynch *et al.* 2020).

According to the IASLT (2017), SLTs are specifically concerned with the assessment, diagnosis, intervention and management of students with a variety of communication and swallowing disorders. SLTs work in conjunction with the class teacher, parents and carers providing advice and support so that students can develop effective communication skills. By collaboratively working together, the SLT aims to promote optimum access to the curriculum and to reduce social exclusion for students (RCSLT 2011). According to Hartas (2004) and Hansen *et al.* (2020), SLTs are knowledgeable practitioners who are responsible for providing advice to teachers and parents on specific language interventions that the SLT may be implementing. SLTs are trained to 'take a linguistically analytical approach to language' (Wright and Kersner 1999, p.201). They work alongside the educational team to 'maximise student's access, participation and achievement of competencies in interpersonal communication, literacy, numeracy and key learning areas (Department of Education and Training 2010, p.5).

Although SLTs have a fundamental role in the development of students' speech and language, SLT resources in Ireland are stretched (Conroy and Noone 2014). McCartney (2018) claims that targeted and universal SLT services are under researched and lack evidence of effectiveness and thus, stresses the importance of the current measures undertaken in Ireland to introduce specialised support within the school environment i.e., the Demonstration Project (see Section 2.7.2).

Wilson *et al.* assert that 'the lack of effective classroom-based collaboration among SLTs and teachers may be partly attributed to the adoption of service delivery models that

¹⁰ Individual Educational Plans are now called School Support Plus Plans under the SETAM (DES 2017a). Both terms are used throughout this thesis.

provide limited opportunities to blend their respective areas of expertise’ (2015, p.2). McCartney (2018) reiterates this point by stressing that the primary role of the SLT in classroom-based service delivery is to provide learning materials and activities for the teacher to implement. Concurring with research undertaken by Hansen *et al.*, professionals such as SLTs ‘represent different sub-practices, perspectives and positions’ (2020, p.51) and therefore, have the specific knowledge, skills and competencies to provide specialised support to those with SLCD. In order to transform practices, Hansen *et al.* believe that ‘differences in ideas, values, beliefs and meaning’ among key stakeholders need to be eliminated (2020, p.55). They claim that in order to ensure inclusive practices are embedded within the school environment ‘collaboration needs to focus on all the sub-practices’ which would entail coordination between principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs alike (2020, p.51). However, Glover *et al.* (2015) argue that there is insufficient time allocated to the sharing of knowledge and expertise between these practitioners. Thus, it has long been suggested that, in order for effective collaborative practices to occur between teachers and SLTs, ‘the field of health and education need to converge’ (Lindsay and Dockrell 2004). Wilson *et al.* agree that ‘the blending of knowledge, perspectives and experiences to create new knowledge has been highlighted as an essential part of true collaboration (2015, p. 2). A study undertaken by McKean *et al.* established that, when practitioners worked collaboratively together in schools, practice was enhanced, asserting that ‘where practitioners and services were highly collaborative and engaged in complex practices...clear benefits arose. These included greater capacity to individualise practice for the child, and a greater potential to harness and implement the resources distributed amongst members of the co-professional team’ (2017, p. 526). Therefore, providing opportunities for collaboration between schools and SLTs is essential to meet the diverse needs of all students (Rix *et al.* 2009; Chitiyo 2017). The next section will explore the importance of working together to improve student outcomes while also looking at the challenges schools face in attempting to cultivate collaborative environments.

5.7 Working Together to Improve Student Outcomes

When stakeholders work together as part of a team and develop relational trust, teaching and learning is significantly enhanced and inclusion is inherently fostered (Coady 2011; Lacey 2013; Wilson *et al.* 2015; Jago and Radford 2017; Hansen *et al.* 2020). Hargreaves and Fink (2012) submit that such practice increases motivation for improvement and enhance students’ achievements. According to Gallagher ‘involvement of multiple stakeholders is particularly

important in research about speech and language therapy services to schools, because achieving positive outcomes for the child with DLD relies almost entirely on the collaborative efforts of an SLT, a teacher and a parent' (2019, p.33). Dockrell and Howell (2015) and Glover *et al.* (2015) maintain, if stakeholders do not acknowledge the importance of collaboration and prioritise the student's learning needs, student advancements are unlikely to occur. In agreement with the OECD (2016) stakeholders must have mutual respect for one another and feel valued in order for changes to be implemented. Florian and Camedda (2020) and Hansen *et al.* (2020) emphasise how teachers are unable to provide adequate support to students with speech, language and communication difficulties as they lack the knowledge and skills that SLTs have. Thus, SLTs are essential to support instruction and enhance student outcomes (Wilson *et al.* 2015). Data emanating from a large-scale study of 816 schools by O'Gorman and Drudy (2010), emphasised the need for close collaborative links to be established with external agencies at a school and system level, so that the needs of students with SEN are fully met. This finding has been reinforced in recent research carried out by Glover *et al.* (2015) and Gallagher (2019).

Literature suggests that there is a lack of shared responsibility between SLTs and teachers (Dockrell and Lindsay 2001; Glover *et al.* 2015), as well as poorly coordinated support for students presenting with SLCD such as DLD (Band *et al.* 2002; McLeod and McKinnon 2007). Subsequently, these inadequacies have a significant impact on student learning. Therefore, clarity is needed for both parties involved (Wilson *et al.* 2015). The IASLT encourage key stakeholders to work together so that 'students with DLD are assured of the best outcomes for health and well-being and full participation in education, employment and society' (2017, p.9). Much of the literature pertaining to speech and language therapy has highlighted the difficulties encountered in receiving support due to the narrow set of criteria established by the DES to determine eligibility, and the long waiting lists to access speech and language therapy (Duncan 2014; O'Brien 2014; IASLT 2017). This results in long term implications for students with language needs. While the literature reiterates the importance of collaboration and inter-professional collaboration, there are many challenges schools face in attempting to cultivate collaborative environments. These challenges will be discussed hereunder.

5.7.1 Challenges Schools Face in Attempts to Cultivate Collaborative Environments

The need for collaboration among key stakeholders has been addressed extensively over the past thirty years (Korth *et al.* 2010; McCarthy 2011; Hargreaves 2019; Mora-Ruano *et al.* 2019). Yet, effective collaboration that truly support teaching practices and learning to improve student attainment, have only been exposed in recent times (Gersten *et al.* 2010). This has come about as a result of further research undertaken into the impact of teacher collaboration in the field of education. Cultivating collaborative environments is essential for enhancing learning opportunities for all (Mulholland and O' Connor 2016). While research highlights a plurality of benefits in cultivating collaborative environments, many challenges are encountered when attempting to establish them. Some of these include school culture, leadership, time, human resources as well as emotional and relational issues (McCarthy 2011; Glover *et al.* 2015; Archibald 2017; Gallagher 2019; Higgins 2021).

5.7.1.1 School Culture

Deal and Peterson explain that 'school culture is a developing concept that is associated with different meanings and dimensions' (2016). According to Dufour *et al.* 'the culture of a school shapes how teachers think, feel and act. It explains their view of the world, reinforces their interpretation of events and instructs them in appropriate conduct' (2004, p.173). Thus, the school culture plays a crucial role in establishing collaborative environments. McCarthy argues that 'whether or not a school has the capacity to develop a collaborative culture will depend on its existing culture' (2011, p. 42). School cultures can be positive, which influence learning and development, or negative, which subsequently impacts the everyday functioning of the school (Peterson 2002; Hinde 2004; Leadbeater 2005).

Schools with a positive culture are places of work where both teachers and students feel comfortable, supported and encouraged. Staff are motivated and committed to their students by getting involved, taking risks and trying out new initiatives. Fostering a love of learning is at the forefront (Deal and Peterson 2009). Whereas a school with a toxic or negative culture are places where teachers are not valued or supported and 'negativity dominates conversations and planning; where the only stories recounted are of failure' (Hinde 2004, p.3). According to Peterson, toxic school cultures 'lack a clear sense of purpose, have norms that reinforce inertia, blame students for lack of progress, discourage collaboration, and often have actively hostile relations among staff' (2002, p.11). Inevitably, staff members do not feel comfortable in their

workplace and do not become fully immersed in their work. Consequently, this type of school culture inhibits student learning and student advancements (Goddard and Goddard, 2007; McCarthy, 2011).

Depending on the school culture and the practitioners involved, cultivating collaborative environments can be difficult to achieve (Hargreaves 1994; Stoll *et al.* 2006). If schools adopt a positive culture, there is a greater chance that effective collaboration will occur, and change will be willingly accepted (Bolam *et al.* 2005). Teachers will be comfortable working together, sharing ideas and resources, all with the intention of enhancing practice and instruction. Contrary to this, if schools have negative cultures, collaborative practices will be non-existent, teacher isolation will prevail and learning will be hindered (McCarthy 2011). Hinde describe school culture as ‘being similar to the air we breathe. No one notices it unless it becomes foul’ (2004, p.4). Therefore, in order to bring about change, a pre-emptive understanding of school culture by all leaders in the school environment is crucial to avoid catastrophe.

5.7.1.2 Leadership

There is a correlation between leadership practices and styles, and successfully influencing a collaborative school culture (Leithwood 2019). According to the literature pertaining to school effectiveness, ‘principal leadership plays a vital role in school success’ (Liu *et al.* 2020, p.5), and is a ‘catalyst for improved student achievement and wellbeing’ (Preston and Barnes 2017, p.6). The principal’s style of leadership has a significant impact on effective change in schools, ‘whether or not the school promotes democratic involvement and shared decision-making or if it promotes an authoritarian-dictatorial style of leadership’ (Hinde 2004, p.6). While leadership styles vary from school to school, it is the principal's own characteristics, beliefs, values and experiences that determine the type of leader he or she will become.

According to McCarthy ‘strong leadership is an essential factor for change to occur in schools, but the ability of principals to be innovators of change is limited by the amount of time each principal has available in the already overloaded day to day administration and management of the school’ (2011, p.60). The OECD (2008) recognises that there is a growing concern that the role and responsibilities of school principals are becoming unsustainable. Thus, there is a greater need to develop collaborative cultures and positive relationships within the school environment. According to the literature, this can be achieved by adopting a distributive

approach to school leadership (Harris *et al.* 2007; Carpenter 2015; Liu *et al.* 2020). Distributive leadership ‘requires school principals to share leadership with teachers and other stakeholders’ (Liu *et al.* 2020, p.6). It is vital ‘in creating the type of school in which teachers share knowledge, demonstrate mutual support, and develop a collective responsibility for improving teaching and learning’ (Liu *et al.* 2020, p.6). Principals have the power to enhance collaborative practice by providing staff with multiple opportunities to collaborate, communicate and to distribute roles and responsibilities to teachers (Leithwood and Mascall 2008; Orphanos and Orr 2013).

According to Paulsen *et al.*, it is the principal’s responsibility to provide staff with ‘opportunities for participating in decision making, working with them as partners and devolving authority and power, thus building leadership capacity for all’ (2015, p. 757). In order to alleviate pressure and to empower teachers, distributive leadership needs to be employed. Liu and Printy (2017) assert that empowering teachers encourages collaborative practices and enhances teacher satisfaction, thus leading to better school outcomes. While there are many advantages to adopting a distributive style of leadership, some principals find it very difficult to allow others to take on roles of responsibility. They are simply ‘unwilling or unable to delegate meaningfully or to relinquish genuine responsibility and accountability’ to others (Lárusdóttir and O’Connor 2017, p.431). This issue highlights how some leaders have difficulty with developing trusting relationships and thus, prefer to work in isolation (Lumby 2013). This hinders collaboration and the development of professional learning communities and subsequently Communities of Practice (CoP).

Nonetheless, principals have the ability to improve school culture in the way they manage a school. Ensuring that staff members are supported and inspired has a significant impact on teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Bellibas and Liu 2018). Establishing a supportive school culture where staff feel respected and valued in their work environment, inevitably results in school improvements for all. Glazer and Hannafin (2006) explain that, planning and preparation time should also be factored into the school day to allow for reciprocal interactions among class teachers and SETs to occur and to promote a collaborative school culture. However, it is not always possible to accommodate the additional time requirements to support these activities given the existing time constraints detailed below.

5.7.1.3 Time

Time constraints are repeatedly cited in the literature as a barrier to collaboration (Hartas 2004; Hall 2005; Blecker and Boakes 2010; Travers *et al.* 2010; Mulholland and O' Connor 2016; Pratt *et al.* 2017). Bush and Grotjohann categorise these time constraints as 'a lack of personal time' and 'a lack of collegial time' (2020, p.2). McCarthy (2011) and Ware *et al.* (2011), submit that there is a very small percentage of time set aside for staff members to participate in collaborative practice within the school day. The onus is on the teacher to make time for collaboration with their colleagues and is often completed outside of school hours, after the students go home. Similar findings were reported in a study of 90 teachers across 10 primary schools in the west of Ireland (Mulholland and O' Connor 2016). Mulholland and O' Connor found that the challenges of collaboration were 'broadly encapsulated as a significant time issue' (2016, p.1077). Due to the 'scarcity of time', educators find it difficult to 'plan more thoroughly, to commit oneself to the effort of innovation, to get together with colleagues, or to sit back and reflect on one's purposes and progress' (Hargreaves 1994, p.15). McCarthy (2011) proposes that this is a consequence of the way schools are organised. Thus, leadership and management have a significant role to play in alleviating these time constraints.

Hargreaves (2019) confirms that restrictive measures introduced by the government, prevent stakeholders' capacity to collaborate efficiently. These measures include 'increasing class sizes and associated individual workloads and reducing preparation time' (Hargreaves 2019, p.168). Teachers prioritise time with their students in class. Thus, there is minimal time available to do any other work as 'they have such an extensive curriculum to cover' and multiple learning needs to be differentiated for (McCarthy 2011, p.63). Unsurprisingly, the pressure and workload teachers endure can lead to teacher burnout (Talmor *et al.* 2005). Equally, SLTs feel the same pressures with excessive caseloads being a major issue (IASLT 2017). Therefore, they also have very little time to collaborate effectively, communicate or build relationships with teachers (Glover *et al.* 2015). Thus, Hartas (2004) argues that effective collaboration cannot occur due to the lack of time given to professionals to engage in collaborative discussions, and this in turn impedes student advancements.

The main priority of cultivating collaborative environments is to 'meet the demands of both curriculum and therapy' (Glover *et al.* 2015, p.6). Due to the demands of the twenty-first century, classroom teachers need time now more than ever to collaborate with their colleagues and outside professionals (SLTs) in order to meet the needs of their students.

5.7.1.4 Human Resources

A significant number of Irish schools have ‘human resource’ issues, with teacher shortage being a massive concern. According to an article published in *The Irish Times* on the 10th of September 2019, ‘latest figures show some 7,000 unregistered or unqualified individuals were employed last year to fill gaps for short-term absences’ (O’ Brien 2019). O’ Brien explains that these figures have seen an increase in comparison to those of previous years. Due to the increase in teacher shortages, schools often find it difficult to find substitute teachers to fill these positions. As a result, schools are grappling with the ramifications of teacher shortages and thus, SETs are often redeployed to fill the gaps (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond; 2019; Donnelly 2021). Principals have to find a compromise between the needs of the many, the whole class, and the needs of the few, the students who need additional support. This is a position principals should never find themselves in. According to a survey published by the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN 2018), principals often had no other options available, and insisted that they redeployed SETs to keep the classroom running. Not only does this practice directly contravene the policies and guidelines set out by the DES, but it also places an emotional strain on the principals, teachers and students alike.

Furthermore, the lack of human resources available makes it difficult to cultivate collaborative practices among staff members. For example, a class teacher is unable to establish an effective working relationship with the SET, as he or she is not acting within his or her assigned role. As mentioned above, they are often unable to provide adequate support to their assigned students due to filling in for absent class teachers. This is further exacerbated by the fact that class teachers are under severe pressure to ensure that all students can access, participate in and benefit from the curriculum. When students with SEN miss their allocated support time, it can disrupt the student’s routine and thus, it becomes very difficult for the class teacher to support the student fully. Students with SLCD require consistent and effective support in order for them to thrive. McCarthy reiterates the importance of having sufficient and appropriate human resources when she states, ‘Building high-functioning teacher learning communities is a slow steady process that requires time, space and resources, including human resources’ (2011, p.60).

5.7.1.5 Emotional and Relational Dimensions of Collaboration

Emotional and relational dimensions of collaboration play a significant role when it comes to cultivating collaborative practice within the school environment (Higgins 2021).

Mutual trust, respect and support among colleagues are considered crucial components in attempts to develop collaborative working environments (Hall 2005; Ekornes 2015). McKean *et al.* (2017) maintain that collaborative practice is very much based around the social interactions of professionals and therefore, assert that working relationships are crucial to its success. Moreover, they argue that ‘forging strong reciprocal relationships based on sharing norms and trust are key to people getting by and getting on’ (McKean *et al.* 2017, p.516). While such practice may seem straightforward, the emotional and relational dimensions of collaboration and teachers’ working relationships are much more complex and are therefore, cited in the literature as one of the greatest challenges to effective collaboration (Hargreaves 2001; Achinstein 2002; Higgins 2021). Concurring with Higgins (2021), issues around professional confidence, respect, trust and fear of conflict often prevent collaboration occurring. Borg and Drange argue that different professionals have different ways of dealing with challenges and thus, can lead to ‘conflicts, territoriality and ineffective use of time and energy’ (2019 p. 253). The emotional and relational demands of collaboration can place significant pressure on teachers, whereby their own competencies are exposed and their practice open to criticism (Higgins 2021). The fear of being judged or lacking the requisite knowledge by other teachers, particularly in the case of team-teaching, can affect collaborative practice. Therefore, Friend and Cook (2013) maintain that effective communication is essential in order to develop trust and professional confidence among teachers. In doing so, respectful working relationships are established and teachers feel safe to ‘challenge and disagree with one another and acknowledge the limits of their own knowledge and skills without any reduction in the respect afforded them by others’ (McKean *et al.* 2017, p.523). While current policy advocates the need for greater collaborative practice to support inclusion (DES 2017a), the emotional and relational dimensions of collaboration such as those outlined above, need to be addressed for true collaboration to occur (Higgins 2021).

5.8 Conclusion

In summary, collaborative practice and inter-professional collaboration are rare in practice (Gallagher *et al.* 2019). Thus, the literature suggests a need for extensive research to be carried out in relation to collaboration between these two disciplines i.e., teachers and SLTs. According to Glover *et al.* ‘there is limited research which has investigated the views of teachers and SLTs current practice and service delivery models, and preference for practice and service delivery, within mainstream schools for students with SLCN’ (2015 p.7). Gallagher

et al. maintain that no researchers, to date, have explored inter-professional practice between SLTs and teachers, stating that there is insufficient understanding regarding ‘the nature of their differences in perspectives and what, if any, implications these differences have for successful IPC between SLTs and teachers’ (2019, p.33).

Prior to the introduction of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018), there has been little change in the nature of collaboration between class teachers and SLTs. The practice of ‘sending the SLT assessment and diagnostic report with recommendations to the school’ still stands (IASLT 2017, p. 51). Furthermore, the IASLT asserts that ‘access to intervention supports continue to lag behind assessment services and requires urgent addressing’ (2017 p.52). Thus, meeting the needs of students with SLCD requires effective inter-professional collaboration and communication between multidisciplinary teams (Liston 2004; Miller 2007; Battilana *et al.* 2010). All stakeholders involved must collaborate to enhance student learning. Similar to Glover *et al.* (2015), the researcher identified a gap between practices among key stakeholders namely class teachers, SETs and SLTs. Gallagher *et al.* (2019), assert that if effective collaborative practice are not implemented, students with SLCD are unlikely to be able to participate in school, inevitably impeding their development. With this in mind, it is important to understand what stakeholders perceive as effective support and how services can be implemented successfully. Allowing stakeholders to express their opinions and listening to their concerns can inform future practices which may lead to improved services for students with SLCD.

Taking the above into consideration, the literature presented in this chapter provides a rationale for adopting the theoretical framework of Lave and Wenger ‘Community of Practice’ (1991) for this study. Lave and Wenger’s theoretical framework highlights the importance of collaboration, communication and the process of learning from one another. Thus, the researcher would assert that Lave and Wenger’s theoretical framework was most appropriate for analysing collaborative practices in school settings. This framework, ‘Community of Practice’ (CoP) will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

Community of Practice: Theoretical Framework

6.1 Introduction

Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice (CoP) theoretical framework provided a conceptual direction for this investigation regarding collaborative practice between the class teacher, SET and SLT to identify and meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD) in Irish primary schools. The CoP framework coincides closely with this research area and enabled the researcher to identify and understand how effective collaboration, interaction and communication between relevant stakeholders can enhance teaching and learning.

6.2 Historical Development

Communities of practice and the associated concept of legitimate peripheral participation 'are the most influential concepts to have emerged within the social sciences in recent years' (Hughes *et al.* 2013, p.1). These concepts developed from a paradigm shift centring on the notion of 'situated learning'. Together, these ideas have transformed the assumptions guiding the study of learning (Wenger 2000; Hughes *et al.* 2013).

It is important to appreciate that the CoP ideology is not a new establishment, but a concept in which people automatically engage in, whether formally recognised or not (Wenger *et al.* 2002, p.5). It was first introduced by anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) while studying apprenticeship as a learning model (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Their studies looked at how participants transitioned through the stages of a trade. Starting out as a novice apprentice through to succeeding as an experienced master. They concluded that 'learning did not primarily occur with the transmission of facts in the master-apprentice relationship. Rather, learning was best facilitated within a community of apprentices and more experienced workers' (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.65). This relationship facilitates the transfer of knowledge and ensures continuity within the community (Jin *et al.* 2010). CoP advocates learning as a process of social participation (Wenger 1998; Boven 2014; Macphail *et al.* 2014), asserting that one gains a greater depth of knowledge from participating in activities, engaging in conversations and interacting with more competent others. Thus, CoP provides a foundation for sharing knowledge (Li *et al.* 2009).

As humans, we belong to a number of CoPs, at home, at work and at school. Mortier *et al.*, assert that engaging in CoPs are ‘an inherent part of our daily lives’ (2010 p.345). Yet, Brown implies that as individuals, we have different roles to play depending on the community setting. He asserts that ‘some members will be core, long-term leaders, while others will be newcomers often with a peripheral role’ (2013, p. 1). Despite this, each individual brings specific skills, knowledge and expertise to the table, which in turn advances the CoP.

6.3 Defining Communities of Practice

According to researchers in the field, there is a wide range of existing definitions and characteristics associated with the concept of CoP (Handley *et al.* 2006; Lindkvist 2005). For the purpose of this study, it is important to first discuss these key definitions in order to provide an ontological background for this research.

Community of Practice is a theory of learning, with the process of social involvement being the primary premise (Wenger 1998). It combines ‘community (learning as belonging), identity (learning as becoming); and it addresses both meaning (learning as experience) and practice (learning as doing)’ (Mortier *et al.* 2010, p. 345). According to Hoadley, CoP is ‘an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge’ (2012, p. 289). CoP involves individuals taking collective responsibility for collective learning in a shared domain (Lave and Wenger 1991). This allows one to construct meaning, understand knowledge and learn through experiences. It is a practice which focuses on how learning is ‘an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations’ (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.50). CoPs are ‘collaborative, informal networks that support professional practitioners in their efforts to develop shared understandings and engage in work related knowledge building’ (Hara 2009, p.3). Similarly, Lindkvist describes CoPs as ‘tightly knit groups that have been practicing long enough to develop into a cohesive community with relationships of mutuality and shared understandings’ (2005, p.1191). Moreover, Wenger *et al.* define CoPs as ‘groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis’ (2002, p.4). This explanation captures the essence of CoP and warrants the requirement for further research within educational practices.

According to Dawson, ‘the term learning communities and communities of practice are often used interchangeably, as both concepts relate to the process of learning and the socialisation that serves to facilitate learning’ (2006, p.154). As CoP is rooted in the social nature of learning it is often referred to as having the characteristics of a social learning system

(Wenger 1998; Wenger *et al.* 2002; Effron 2008). Therefore, it is important to note that CoP cannot exist on its own. According to Wenger, CoP ‘is part of a broader conceptual framework for thinking about learning in its social dimensions’ (2010, p.1). In order for CoP to work effectively, there are three crucial characteristics involved, the domain, the community and the practice (Wenger *et al.* 2002; Sánchez-Cardona *et al.* 2012). Fundamentally, it is the combination and development of these three components that underpins the principles of CoP (Wenger *et al.* 2011) (See Figure 6.1). ‘Domain provides a common focus; community builds relationships that enable collective learning; and practice anchors the learning in what people do’ (Wenger 2004, p. 3). Each component will be discussed in greater detail hereunder.



Figure 6.1 Architecture of Communities of Practice

6.3.1 The Domain

CoPs are formed when there is a shared domain of interest (Wenger 2011). The domain is considered the starting point of any CoP. It is what motivates individuals to get involved from the very beginning (McDonald and Cater-Steel 2016). Wenger *et al.* defines the domain

as a common ground of interest, something which ‘inspires members to contribute and participate, guides their learning and gives meaning to their actions’ (2002, p.28). The domain keeps the CoP focused and ensures that it remains relevant to its members. Furthermore, the domain gives meaning and identity to the group. It is important to highlight that as the CoP develops, the domain may be ‘refined’ and altered to suit the members interests (McDonald and Cater-Steel 2016, p.10). According to Wegner (2012), this is to ensure sustainability of the CoP. However, once the interest in the domain starts to wilt or verge completely towards a new concept the CoP may cease in its existence.

The domain of any CoP has the ability to bring together individuals who share similar interests. These individuals share their expertise and competencies with one another through meaningful interactions and conversations (McDonald and Cater-Steel 2016). It is the domain which differentiates a group of friends or a network of people to a CoP. CoP have a defined identity based on the members interests and values. The members select a specific area of knowledge in which they feel they can ‘explore’ and ‘develop’ further (Wegner 2004, p.3). Commitment (to the domain) is a crucial factor in order for CoP to exist. The community is created through the interactions of individuals within the domain.

6.3.2 The Community

The community consists of individuals with similar interests amalgamating within a social structure. These individuals become members of the community by engaging in meaningful discussions, joint activities and by sharing ideas. They learn from one another, develop relationships and support each other’s actions (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). ‘The community creates the social fabric of learning...it fosters interactions based on mutual respect and trust. It encourages a willingness to share ideas, expose one’s ignorance, ask difficult questions, and listen carefully’ (Wenger *et al.* 2002, p. 28). The community component of a CoP has a significant role to play regarding the learning that occurs within a CoP. Without the commitment and enthusiasm of its members, CoP lacks purpose and is ineffective (Wenger *et al.* 2002).

6.3.3 The Practice

The practice can be defined as ‘a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories and documents that community members share, i.e., the practice is the specific knowledge the community develops, shares and maintains’ (Wegner *et al.* 2002, p.29).

The practice can be considered the driving force behind keeping the members of the CoP motivated and interested. According to Riberio, 'practice defines the core by which a community of practice is known' (2011, p.38). It is important to highlight that practice cannot take place without knowledgeable practitioners working together, exchanging information and supporting one another. It is the element within the CoP that 'crystallizes' the participants' experiences and shared knowledge (McDonald and Carter-Steel 2016, p.11). McDonald and Carter-Steel (2016) advocate that 'practice' emerges as time and genuine commitment is invested in the CoP. When sincere consideration is given to the CoP and relationships are formed, members are able to work together accumulating practical knowledge to ensure a strong practice is fostered.

The interaction of the three components; domain, community and practice is what defines a CoP. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) argue that a community is cultivated when these three components are practiced simultaneously. For instance, to create a dynamic learning environment for CoP to function effectively, all elements must be present. There must be evidence of a joint enterprise (domain), mutual engagement (community) and a shared repertoire (practice) (Wenger 1998). If one of these elements is absent, the overall operation of the CoP is affected (McDonald and Cater-Steel, 2016). Wenger confirms that 'without the learning energy of those who take initiative, the community becomes stagnant. Without strong relationships of belonging, it is torn apart and without the ability to reflect it becomes hostage to its own history' (2002, p.5). Thus, the three elements are crucial to the effective operation of the CoP. Table 6.1 below outlines the three elements of a CoP and how they can be applied for the purpose of this research.

Element:	Explanation	Application
Domain	The domain is what brings people together and guides their learning (shared interest/common goal). It also defines the identity of the community	Collaborative practice and SEN ‘How can we support students with speech, language and communication difficulties?’
Community	The community consists of a group of people who interact, learn together, build relationships and in the process develop a sense of belonging and commitment.	A network of stakeholders – i.e., Principals, Class Teachers, SETs, SLTs, whole school community working together to identify, meet and monitor the needs of students with SLCD
Practice	The practice supports innovation. It is the process and knowledge produced by the community. Members of the community share their expertise.	Shared Knowledge How the relevant stakeholders go about supporting these students – What do they do?

Table 6.1 Applying CoP Structural Model to the Current Study

The literature implies that due to its evolving nature, the concept of CoP can be adapted to widely differing contexts (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). This research examines how class teachers, SETs and SLTs collaborate to support students with SLCD in Irish primary schools, using CoP as a lens for analysing collaborative practice.

6.4 Use of Community of Practice within an Educational Setting

Many educational theorists have promoted the idea of learning as a social construct (Dewey 1916; Vygotsky 1987; Lave and Wenger 1991). These theorists assert that one learns when immersed in informal contexts, given opportunities to interact with more knowledgeable others (MKOs) as well as engaging in meaningful conversations (Quennerstedt and Maivorsdotter 2016). CoP operate on this premise, given that they promote innovative learning through collaborative practice. As previously mentioned, CoP has a wide range of practical applications in organisations, businesses and educational settings (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). For the purpose of this research, the researcher will primarily focus on the practical application of CoP within an educational setting, i.e., a primary school. The study examines how the class teacher, SET and SLT interact and collaborate around the ‘domain’ of ‘collaborative practice’ to support students with SLCD to access, participate in and benefit from the PLC. It will analyse data within the theoretical framework of CoP (Lave and Wenger

1991), to see if such practices are happening on the ground in schools and if so, do they have an impact on student outcomes.

Evidence suggests that participating in a CoP is integral to the learning process and has a significant impact on both teaching and learning (Barson 2004; Kosnik *et al.* 2015). It provides a foundation for collaboration and reduces the feeling of isolation (Patton and Parker 2017). More specifically, it encourages stakeholders to ‘look at practice in new ways, ask questions and develop new criteria for competence’ (Wenger 1998, p.218). Thus, participating in a CoP within a primary school can have a positive impact on ‘performance, communication and goal accomplishment’ for all stakeholders involved, according to Wenger *et al.* (2000). O’Kelly further infers that the use of CoP within education has become an increasingly valuable framework for ‘sharing of practice, resources and ideas’ (2016, p.5). Many researchers stipulate that ‘the richness and usefulness of the concept of communities of practice lies in its real-life value and in its ability to capture the depth and complexity of human interaction and learning’ (Mortier *et al.* 2010, p.346). Colucci *et al.* (2002) believe that CoP is more than a method for educational team collaboration, asserting that it focuses on establishing partnerships to develop new ways of learning to support shared work.

According to Mortier, the CoP framework is an ‘alternative knowledge model that is worth exploring when pursuing inclusive education’ (2020, p. 3), which has the potential to address some of the impediments to inclusion that students with SLCD face. It focuses on how knowledge is developed and transmitted through the process of social transformation (Wenger 1998; Mortier 2020). Barak *et al.* (2010) and Macphail *et al.* (2014) firmly believe that the learning that occurs amongst members of a CoP is considerably more powerful than individual learning. Patton and Parker reiterate this by asserting that ‘participation within a community provides a space for authentic conversations, where members find reinforcement in and challenge each other’s experiences and stories’ (2017, p.352). CoP promote professional growth by creating an environment wherein educators learn from one another (Hadar and Brody 2010). CoP are inevitably trying to ‘break down walls of solo practice’ (Byrk 2016, p.469), moving towards a more collaborative approach to learning.

Within an educational setting, CoP are particularly worth exploring as they have the potential to significantly support students with specific learning needs. Class teachers, SETs and SLTs are given the opportunity to discuss students’ needs and progress. Based on their specific professional knowledge, these stakeholders give their opinions on how to best support

the individual student (Fagan and Taylor 2002). New knowledge is then created based on their interactions. Subsequently, it is this acquired knowledge that helps practice to move forward. Thus, this collaborative practice enhances student learning and engagement, supports positive behaviour, increases teacher efficacy, while also creating a more positive working environment (Burke and Hodapp 2014; Francis *et al.* 2016). The structure of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) embraces this approach, encouraging collaborative practices to support language learning for all. It highlights the diverse needs in all classrooms and supports the improvement of students' learning.

6.5 Community of Practice and the Primary Language Curriculum

It could be argued that Community of Practice (CoP) is embedded in the structure of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC). CoP cultivates the idea that through collaboration and the exchange of information and experiences among stakeholders, one will acquire the greatest knowledge. CoP enables educators to develop personally and professionally, whilst gaining a greater insight into the practices of others (Lave and Wenger 1991). The PLC aims to support this professional collaboration in order to enhance language learning for all students, regardless of ability. Its structure supports a more differentiated and individualised approach to learning, focusing on where the student is at and looking at where they want to go. Research suggests that it is through conversing with others and listening to ideas that our practices as educators are enhanced (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger *et al.* 2002). Thus, communication and collaborative practice are of paramount importance in order to gain specific knowledge in the field. Within the education profession, research advocates that we can learn a great amount from one another (Nunan 1992). For example, Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) can learn from More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs) and vice versa (see Section 4.3.3). The process of sharing knowledge and putting it into practice supports student learning and attainment. Some examples of CoP can be observed in the following classroom environment learning patterns:

- Teachers learning from teachers
- Students learning from teachers
- Students learning from their peers in inclusive settings
- Teachers learning from outside professional educationalists (psychologists, SLTs and OTs etc.) to support the needs of students in the class

The extent of knowledge shared amongst stakeholders can be optimised as Wenger *et al.* assert that ‘communities of practice connect people and in the process, they knit the whole system together around core knowledge requirements’ (2002, p.6). Meaningful learning in social contexts involves two parties (i.e., teacher and student), who interact with one another. Wenger (2002) firmly believes that by engaging in these noteworthy experiences it enhances the student’s motivation and willingness to learn. The PLC (DES 2019a) promotes collaborative practice by bringing stakeholders together to discuss the students’ language development. Teachers, along with their colleagues (SET), explore these learning outcomes and identify the relevant progression milestones. At this point, they can plan how to best support their students’ needs with the aim of reaching the next milestone by referring to the progression steps (DES 2015, p.13). The class teacher works in conjunction with the SLT to specifically support students with SLCD. This type of collaboration supports instruction, ensuring that targets are set and that the needs of the students are met. Such collaborative practice map naturally onto Lave and Wenger’s CoP, given that these stakeholders are mutually engaged, share repertoires, and are involved in a joint enterprise (see Figure 6.1).

As previously stated, Wenger (1991) views CoP as a social learning system. He believes that it is part of a broader conceptual framework for thinking about learning (1991). Therefore, it provides a useful lens for analysis in this study. Figure 6.2 below outlines the process of CoP in a school environment.

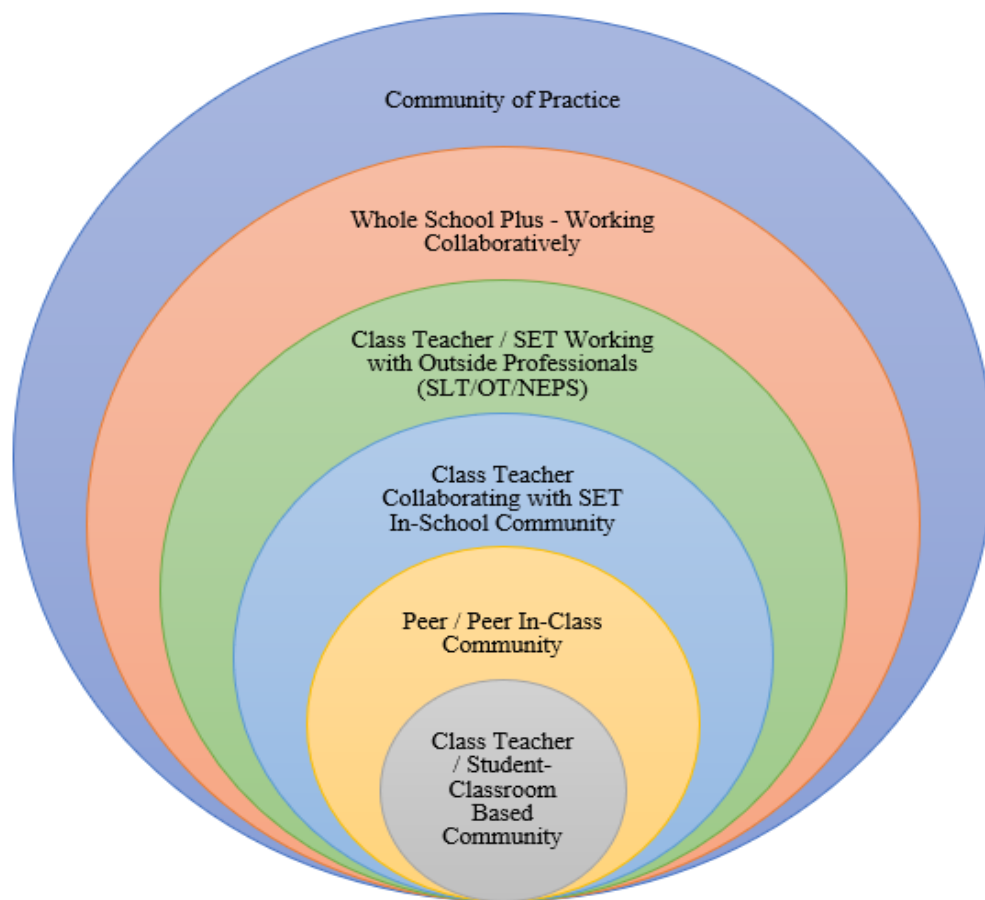


Figure 6.2 Community of Practice in a School Environment

According to Effron (2008) and Wenger (1998), it is crucial to value the importance of personal connections in generating and transmitting knowledge. Effron (2008) and Wenger (1998) argue that knowledge stems from and is diffused through social interactions amongst one another. The diagram above illustrates how various stakeholders interact on a regular basis to meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties in Irish primary schools. Each layer differs due to the nature of the interaction.

6.6 Community of Practice and the Demonstration Project

The Demonstration Project is centred around the establishment of effective CoP. This initiative led by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) aims to provide specialised support (SLT and OT) to assist principals, class teachers, SETs and families in meeting the needs of all students, especially those with additional learning needs. It promotes the ideology of creating Professional Learning Communities to enhance ongoing collaborative practices,

thus leading to continuous school improvement (Jones *et al.* 2013). Introducing SLTs and OTs to collaborate and work alongside class teachers and SETs will inevitably support current practices in schools. When teachers have difficulty identifying students' needs or selecting strategies which best support students' language development, collaborating with these professionals to problem solve will undoubtedly increase students' attainment and teacher self-efficacy. O' Kelly asserts that this type of collaboration is a 'coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem' (2016, p.27). The Demonstration Project encourages SLTs and OTs to share their knowledge and experiences with staff members. They are the MKOs when it comes to supporting students with SLCD and can provide support to teachers in a variety of ways. This support may be in the form of engaging in collaborative planning, modelling, lessons, implementing new resources or by simply demonstrating activities that can be carried out with the whole class. By effectively working together to plan and deliver support, SLTs and teachers are enabled to tackle the difficulties students with SLCD face when learning in schools and thus, improve speech, language and communication outcomes (Starling *et al.* 2012; Archibald 2017; Gallagher *et al.* 2019). The SLT or OT may work with students in small groups settings or on an individual basis depending on the student's needs. The class teacher along with the SLT and/or OT will identify and discuss which support is more suitable. Building relationships with these professionals while creating a supportive learning system is necessary in order to support all students within the school community. Cultivating a CoP reduces teacher isolation and self-doubt (Ainscow and Sandhill 2010; Parker *et al.* 2016). Teachers often question themselves as to whether or not they are doing the right thing. Thus, having an SLT and OT at their disposal may help them to overcome these doubts.

While the literature documents a plurality of benefits for engaging in effective CoPs for school improvement (Jones *et al.* 2013; O'Kelly 2016), it is important to note that cultivating a CoP does not happen overnight. It takes time and effort to develop as membership is voluntary and participants often come and go (Wenger *et al.* 2002). Effective CoPs are developed organically with the right people in the right environment (Roberts 2006; Vincent *et al.* 2018) The next section explores the developmental stages of a CoP.

6.7 Communities of Practice: Development Stages

CoPs evolve continuously through successive transformations (Wenger *et al.* 2002). Although it is considered an ever-changing process, there is still a distinct set of stages that CoP go through. Wenger *et al.* (2002) outline a five-stage developmental model enabling one to clearly see the different changes that occur within a CoP. Wenger *et al.* (2002) define these five developmental stages as: potential, coalescing, maturing, stewarding and transforming. It is important to understand that although these stages are presented in a sequential manner, CoP can experience these in a variety of ways. Gaining an understanding of the different stages helps a community to deal with issues that may arise. Figure 6.3 below illustrates the five stages derived from Wenger *et al.* 2002.

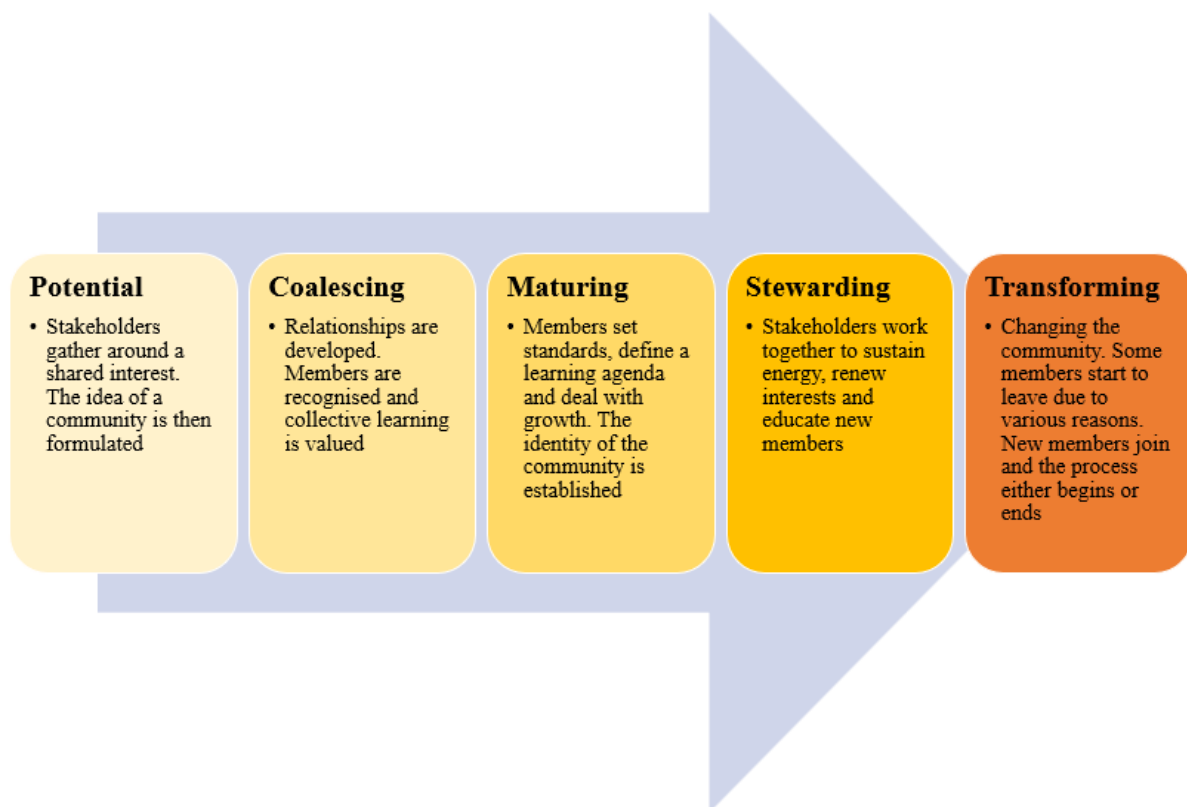


Figure 6.3 Five-Stage Developmental Model for Communities of Practice adapted from Wenger *et al.* (2002)

Stage 1: Potential

This is the initial stage regarding the development of a community. At this point, the community is not fully formed. It is rather, a loose network of people who recognise common interests around a key issue. These individuals discuss the idea of forming a community and it is then, by engaging in meaningful conversations, that they begin to see their relationships

through a different lens. As the sense of a shared domain develops, individuals within the community engage in more systematic interactions (Wegner *et al.* 2002). In doing so, a number of individuals go forward to carry out the responsibility of initiating the development of the community. Once these responsibilities have been established the CoP advances to the next stage 'coalescing'.

Stage 2: Coalescing

According to Wegner *et al.*, a community is ready to move on to the coalescing stage when it 'is able to combine a good understanding of what already exists with a vision of where it can go' (2002, p. 82). At this stage, the community is officially established. During this time relationships are formed, knowledge is shared, and values are recognised. Members gain sufficient trust and recognise the value in participating. However, in stating the above, it is important to highlight that this process of coalescing requires a substantial time and effort investment from the participants. Through this process, strong bonds are developed, and momentum is generated, thus enabling the community to continue to take shape.

Stage 3: Maturing

During this stage the community elucidates its focus, role and boundaries. Members set standards, define a learning agenda and deal with expansion. They are actively involved in developing practice by continuously sharing knowledge and developing relationships with one another. Collaboration is key during this phase. According to Wenger (2002) the community has enough resilience to survive at this point.

Stage 4: Stewardship

The community is well established at this stage and acts as the steward of its domain (Wenger 2002). The members may expand the focus of the community, explore new interests and tackle new problems, enabling the community to evolve. Members engage in shared practices and support new members.

Stage 5: Transforming

At this stage, the community begins to transform. The focus of the community may no longer be relevant, thus resulting in less interactions between its members. More importantly the knowledge that was created by the participants still exists, but the members of the community begin to move on (Ray 2006). Wenger asserts that sometimes the community just

fades away. This can be as a result of several different factors. He further implies that CoP are like all living things, they must come to an end in order to allow for new life. According to Hoadley and Pea, 'CoP are diverse in nature, and, like organisms in ecological niches, they originate, evolve, and may become extinct' (2002, p.326). It is important to keep in mind that CoP depend on the passion of its members. The CoP does not necessarily have to become non-existent. It may just alter its focus depending on the existing members, whether they be old or new. Understanding the different stages of CoP is crucial, as the contextual factors influence it in different ways depending on the stage of the CoP. Developing and nurturing CoP are catalysed by effective collaboration and collegiality (Jones *et al.* 2013). CoP depends 'primarily on the voluntary engagement of their members and on the emergence of internal leadership' (Wenger *et al.* 2002, p.12).

6.8 Developing and Nurturing Communities of Practice

CoP play a crucial role in developing a positive learning environment where knowledge is shared with the aim to enhance teaching, learning and innovation within the organisation (Swan *et al.* 2002). Glazer and Hannafin maintain that 'teachers become empowered by teaching, learning from, and supporting one another during the school day' (2006, p.180). While research indicates that successful CoPs develop naturally and are part of organisational life, Wenger *et al.* (2002) believe that the contrary is more accurate. They claim that CoPs must be cultivated by organisations but should not be over-managed. Cultivating CoPs in this manner has many benefits for both the members and the community, resulting in 'powerful tools to generate sustainable advantages' as noted by Loyarte and Rivera (2007, p.67).

In order to fully understand the importance of developing and nurturing CoP, Wenger *et al.* aptly refer to cultivation metaphorically in a horticultural sense. They do this effectively by using the metaphor of a growing plant to convey the development of a CoP, commenting that 'a plant does its own growing, whether its seed was carefully planted or blown into place by the wind. You cannot pull the stem, leaves, or petals to make a plant grow faster or taller. However, you can do much to encourage healthy plants: till the soil, ensure they have enough nutrients, supply water, secure the right amount of sun exposure, and protect them from pests and weeds' (2002, pp.12-13). Wegner *et al.* (2002) clearly depict an image of how CoPs are developed and nurtured by highlighting the important role the organisation plays in creating a working environment where members can 'prosper' and develop. Wenger *et al.* explain how this can be effectively implemented through the community by 'valuing the learning they do,

making time and other resources available for their work, encouraging participation and removing barriers' (2002, p.13). Establishing such working conditions enables communities to work together effectively, empowering members to voice their opinions and concerns, thereby enhancing overall participation. Within a CoP, the 'design and development are more about eliciting and fostering participation than planning, directing and organising their activities' (Wenger *et al.* 2002, p.13). Wenger *et al.* emphasise the importance of negotiation within a CoP, commenting that 'you cannot act unilaterally' (2002, p.14). Being part of a CoP requires members to understand the process and dynamic of the organisation. Members have to be actively involved and take pride in their work in order for the CoP to develop. If members are not fully aligned, cracks begin to appear, and the CoP starts to deteriorate. Consequently, Wenger *et al.* describe the cultivation of a CoP as a form of art, but further states that 'communities of practice are not a universal silver bullet' (2002, p.14). All CoPs are unique and vary depending on the organisation, according to theory.

While the literature stresses the damaging effects that over management has on a CoP, Loyarte and Riva (2007) assert that some form of internal leadership or management is required. With regards to management strategies within a CoP, Wenger *et al.* emphasise the importance of striking a balance. They explain that management structures develop organically within the CoP (2002, p.13). Wenger insists that in order for CoPs to be effective 'managers and others must work with communities of practice from the inside rather than merely attempt to design them or manipulate them from the outside' (2008 p.7). He asserts that this form of internal management simultaneously supports the CoP's structure and protects it from over management from outside influences.

In order to cultivate an effective CoP, the community requires a valued member or members to make decisions, set conditions and initiate strategic conversations (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). These individuals act as the CoP coordinators. They ensure that consistent engagement occurs and that the CoP is maintained. They are the driving force behind the success of the CoP, according to Wenger *et al.* (2002). Effective coordinators know how to minimise conflict as well as handle and approach various situations that the organisation may encounter. Thus, the metaphor, comparing CoP to a growing plant, is apt and illustrates the detrimental effect of excessive over management on a developing CoP, which, according to the literature requires nurture from such leadership.

6.8.1 Five Strategies to Nurturing Communities of Practice in Organisations

According to Wenger (2008), there are five key strategies to nurturing communities of practice in organisations. These include legitimising participation, negotiating their strategic context, being attuned to real practices, fine-tuning the organisation and providing support (see Figure 6.4) Each strategy will be discussed briefly hereunder.



Figure 6.4 Five Strategies to Nurturing a Community of Practice

Legitimising participation:

Legitimising participation is a key component to nurturing CoP. Organisations support CoP by valuing their members, providing them with time to participate in activities and by giving them a voice. Members within a CoP must be given multiple opportunities to engage with one another, while offering their expertise. This participation contributes to the organisation as a whole.

Negotiating their strategic context:

Negotiating strategic context means reconciling short term project goals with long term CoP participation. In the short term, members are able to focus on project goals but in the long term they internalise the learnings they have attained during team-based project work and use this to improve their own CoP. Therefore, it is important that any type of organisation understands this process of learning, how it affects CoP within their organisations and how it can be used to improve outcomes in future projects.

Being attuned to real practices:

In order for organisations to be successful, they must be aware of existing CoP within their environment. Instead of relying on traditional training methods, organisations need to foster and encourage collaboration as this has been shown to increase competency at a faster pace. Wenger (2008) asserts that the knowledge organisations need is usually already present in some form within the organisation itself.

Fine-tuning the organisation:

Organisational management and culture can often foster or inhibit a CoP. Wenger asserts that CoP must be self-organising and 'intrinsically self-sustaining' (2008, p.8). Therefore, it is not easy to couple a self-driven CoP with existing organisational reward mechanisms, as this would introduce a layer of management to the CoP. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of management within the organisation to adapt organisational procedures such as performance reviews to reflect an individual's contribution to the CoP. While this is an important aspect of fine-tuning the organisation, management must ensure that they do not 'inadvertently penalise the work involved in building communities' by micro-managing (Wenger 2008, p.8).

Providing support:

Members within a CoP can benefit greatly from one another when provided with effective coaching and support. The CoP representative/coordinator makes sure that all members are provided with the opportunity to meet key members while also encouraging members to establish links with other communities. When such support is provided the CoP develops and matures, in turn leading to enhanced participation within the organisation. A CoP is a team effort, ensuing that the correct support is provided is crucial (Wenger 2008).

According to Wenger and Snyder 'the strength of CoP is self-perpetuating. As they generate knowledge, they reinforce and renew themselves' (2000 p.143). In order for a CoP to

be successful the five key strategies mentioned above must be incorporated. While CoPs differ depending on the organisation, they all revolve around the same characteristics of effective collaboration and communication, for example, within school, which can be termed Professional Learning Communities.

6.9 Professional Learning Communities

The term Professional Learning Communities represents a wide variety of school, teacher and student interactions (O' Kelly 2016). According to the literature, Professional Learning Communities are characterised as a group of people (educators) that work together regularly over a period of time, who share expertise and work collaboratively to enhance teaching and learning for all (Curry 2008; Jones *et al.* 2013). Professional Learning Communities promote teacher collaboration, continuous improvement in staff performance as well as increased student achievement (Owen, 2014).

Professional Learning Communities are embedded in Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of Community of Practice (CoP). While their work does not specifically focus on teachers, it has a significant relevance to the establishment of Professional Learning Communities within an educational setting (Owen 2014). According to Owen, the 'establishment of professional learning communities has been indicated as effective in building skills and knowledge for working in innovative contexts across teacher and leader teams and networks' (2014, p.55). Research suggests that when individuals engage in Professional Learning Communities (teachers, SETs and SLTs), there are a plurality of benefits attached (Jones *et al.* 2013). According to Jones *et al.* (2013), the main advantages of Professional Learning Communities can be described as:

- Building productive relationships that are required to collaborate, partner, reflect and act to carry out school improvement programs.
- Engaging educators at all levels in collective, consistent and context-specific learning.
- Addressing inequities in teaching and learning opportunities by supporting teachers who work with students requiring the most assistance.
- Promoting efforts to improve results in terms of schools and system culture, teacher practice and learning.

(Jones *et al.* 2013, p. 358)

According to Smith *et al.* Professional Learning Communities are ‘infinitely adaptable to different kinds of curricular and co-curricular settings...educators can shape and reshape the strategy around specific curricular or student needs’ (2004, p.22). Thus, they are highly effective when utilised correctly. Professional Learning Communities act as a form of professional development. They encourage practitioners to engage in reflective practice to enhance teaching and learning for all. This aligns with the Teaching Council's objective to foster reflective practices that will improve student outcomes. The Teaching Council asserts that ‘reflective practice is essential for each teacher, and for teachers as a professional learning community, in enabling professionals to make the best decisions in the interests of their students’ (2010, p.5).

Moreover, the Teaching Council supports the establishment of Professional Learning Communities with the introduction and dissemination of the integrated professional induction framework ‘Droichead’ (see Section 4.3.3). This new induction programme acknowledges the benefits of experienced teachers (MKOs) mentoring NQTs as they embark on their teaching career. This integrated induction framework ‘promotes the idea of schools as professional learning communities, where mentoring and the sharing of ideas for good practice become normal features of teacher’s professional work’ (2010, p.18). Engaging in such practice supports professional learning for all, thus leading to greater school improvements.

6.9.1 Developing and Sustaining Professional Learning Communities

Developing and sustaining Professional Learning Communities is crucial, yet, they often pose many challenges (Jones *et al.* 2013). According to research undertaken by Fullan (2008), many schools promote the establishment of Professional Learning Communities within their work environments. However, their school culture does not reflect this collaboration and collegiality, which are essential attributes of a functioning Professional Learning Community. In order for schools to develop and sustain Professional Learning Communities, Blankstien (2004) outlines six principles which are key to their formation (see Figure 6.5 below).

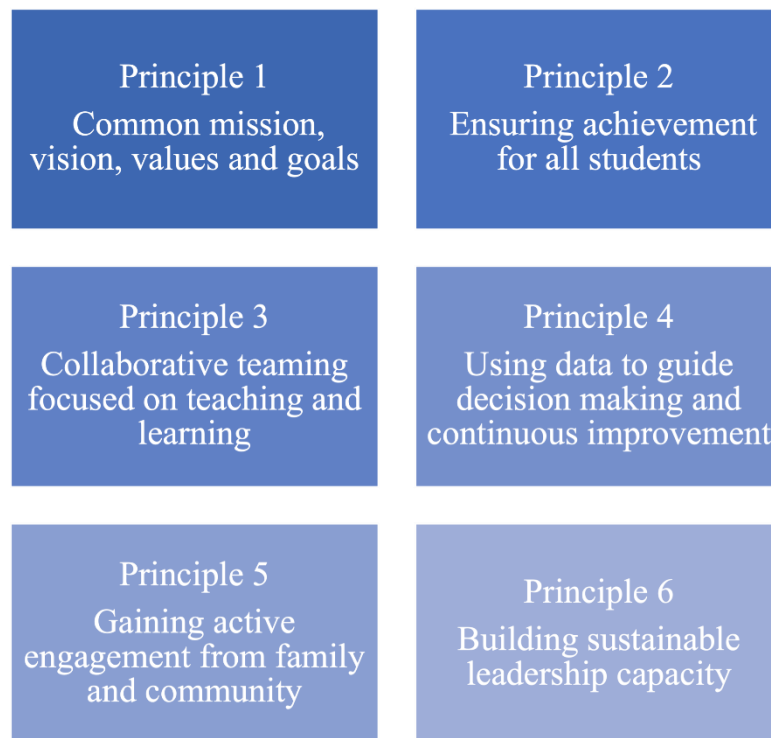


Figure 6.5 Six Principles for Developing and Sustaining Professional Learning Communities (Blankstein 2004, p.56)

When educators incorporate the six principles mentioned above, effective collaboration and professional learning occur. Jones *et al.* stress the benefits of engaging in Professional Learning Communities, asserting that ‘there is so much value in teachers collaborating as it relates to instructional strategies and practices focusing on the needs of learners’ (2013, p. 358). According to Darling-Hammond *et al.*, ‘professional learning communities work when they are sustained, school-based and embedded in the daily work of teachers’ (2009, p.7). Establishing an environment in which professional interactions can occur with the support of school management acts as a catalyst for professional development within the workplace. Bolam *et al.* believe that ‘the key purpose of professional learning communities is to enhance staff effectiveness as professionals, for the ultimate benefit of students’ (2005, p.10). As discussed previously in Chapter Four, professional development has a significant role to play in equipping practitioners with the latest teaching methodologies and pedagogies, while bridging the gap between theory and practice.

6.10 Promoting and Sustaining Collaborative Practice among Key Stakeholders

In the context of this study, teachers, SETs and SLTs all play a significant role in facilitating inclusive and collaborative practices to enhance the provision of education for students with SEN. According to Lerner (2003), working collaboratively as part of a team or as a Professional Learning Communities is vital in supporting stakeholders to perceive and understand the individual student at a holistic level. Collaboration prevents professionals from formulating their own perspectives and judgements in terms of the students' learning disability. Therefore, it is important that as educators we promote and attempt to sustain collaborative practice in our classrooms. In order to do so, Coady (2011) outlines six factors which underpin effective collaboration. These are illustrated in Figure 6.6 below.

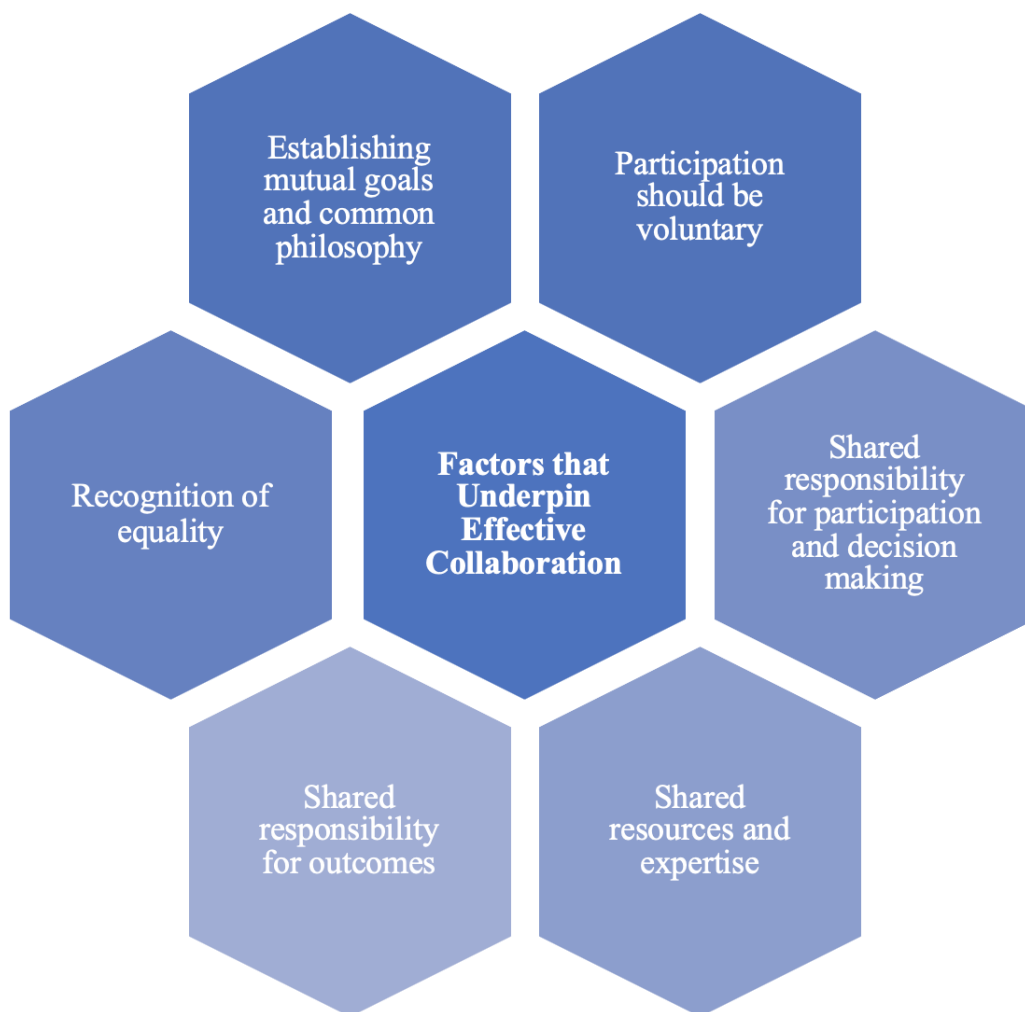


Figure 6.6 Factors that Underpin Effective Collaboration (Coady 2011)

According to Conderman *et al.* (2009), collaboration is a strategy that advances inclusion and enhances the likelihood of its success. Due to the rapid change in the educational landscape and the greater diversity of students integrated into mainstream classes, Hansen *et al.* (2020), maintain that it has never been more appropriate for teachers to engage in reflective and collaborative practice to support inclusion. While the literature highlights the benefits of stakeholders engaging in professional learning communities or CoPs (Loyarte Rivera 2007; McKean *et al.* 2017), Kerno (2008) indicated there are many limitations attached.

6.11 Limitations of Communities of Practice

In recent years, a significant volume of literature has been published regarding the positive impact CoP has on various organisations (Takahaski 2001; Wenger 2007). While the literature veers more towards the benefits of establishing effective CoPs, it is important to also acknowledge that there are limitations noted in the literature (Haneda 2006; Roberts 2006; Kerno 2008). Wenger *et al.* claim that the ‘very qualities that make a community an ideal structure for learning - a shared perspectives on a domain, trust, a communal identity, long-standing relationships, an established practice- are the same qualities that can hold it hostage to its history and achievements’ (2002, p.141). Kerno claims that there are several difficulties associated with CoPs that are not easily recognised in individual CoPs. He asserts that these difficulties are usually experienced at the ‘structural, ecological and cultural level of organisational analysis’ (2008, p.73). These include time constraints, organisational hierarchies/ power and predispositions and regional culture.

6.11.1 Time Constraints

Time constraints have a significant impact on the development of effective CoP. In order for a CoP to be successful, members need to be provided with sufficient time to engage in meaningful conversations and collaborative practices with one another. Unfortunately, due to increased work demands, members within specific organisations are not given time for such interactions. Due to immense pressure, the effectiveness of the CoP is lessened (Kerno 2008). Therefore, CoP are less likely to produce optimum outcomes when time constraints are present.

6.11.2 Organisational Hierarchy

While CoP are often established within existing work environments, organisational hierarchies still have a substantial role to play within organisational structures (Leavitt 2003).

More often than not, organisational hierarchies have a negative impact on CoP and impede the establishment of successful CoP. According to Kerno, when organisational hierarchies are imposed ‘community of practice efforts are not likely to produce any substantive progress or benefits’ (2008 p. 75). The potential negative impacts can be mitigated if there is competent coordinator within the CoP (see Section 6.8).

6.11.3 Regional Culture (Socio-Cultural Characteristics)

Kerno (2008) explains that the performance of a CoP can depend on the wider socio-cultural influence in which the CoP operates. To explain this assertion, Kerno provides a table in which he compares what are traditionally referred to as ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ societies. In this comparison, Kerno asserts that a western society may approach argumentation as a ‘debate’ to be had between two adversaries. Kerno mirrors this to eastern societies, in which argumentation may be approached through the lens of conflict resolution and in pursuit of harmony (2008). While analysis of culture and tradition is beyond the scope of this research, the impact individual cultures and traditions have on their participation in a CoP must be considered.

Although the research highlights potential limitations, there are far more advantages associated with establishing effective CoP. According to Roberts (2006), this approach to knowledge management is still evolving. Thus, CoP warrants further research especially in the field of education. Roberts (2006) further asserts that ‘despite these limitations, a community of practice does provide a useful and valuable alternative to more traditional knowledge management approaches’ (cited in Kerno 2008, p.77). Therefore, from scrutinising the literature it is important to remain vigilant of such challenges and how organisations can overcome these if given the appropriate support and guidance from the onset. With this in mind, the researcher believes that it is crucial to examine the different forms of CoP in a variety of settings in order to fully understand their application.

6.12 Conclusion

Wesley and Buysse (2006) maintain that effective and sustainable CoPs have the ability to close the gap between research and practice by altering the direct, top-down relationship between those who produce knowledge and those who use it. CoPs can have a significant impact regarding teaching and learning for all stakeholders involved. According to Freeburg (2018) classrooms represent a specific type of CoP. He explains that by turning school

environments into adapted CoPs, stakeholders are situated to move beyond the traditional approach to teaching and learning (Freeburg 2018). This research utilised Lave and Wenger's (1991) CoP theory as an analytical tool to analyse data emerging from principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs alike. This research aims to gain a greater understanding of the internal dynamics of a CoP in a primary school setting by applying Lave and Wenger's conceptual framework. In doing so, the researcher hopes to refine or extend its theory into practice to enhance the teaching and learning of students with SLCD. The following chapter will outline and discuss the chosen research methodology adopted for the purpose of this research.

Chapter Seven

Research Methodology

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methodological procedures taken to carry out the investigation. In order to set the research in context, the chapter begins with a brief description of the research topic and outlines the research question and embedded questions which directed the study. The subsequent section presents the rationale for the chosen research paradigm and the qualitative design adopted for the study is explained in detail. Approaches to data analysis are presented and the ethical considerations undertaken by the researcher outlined. Figure 7.1 below graphically illustrates the outline of this chapter.

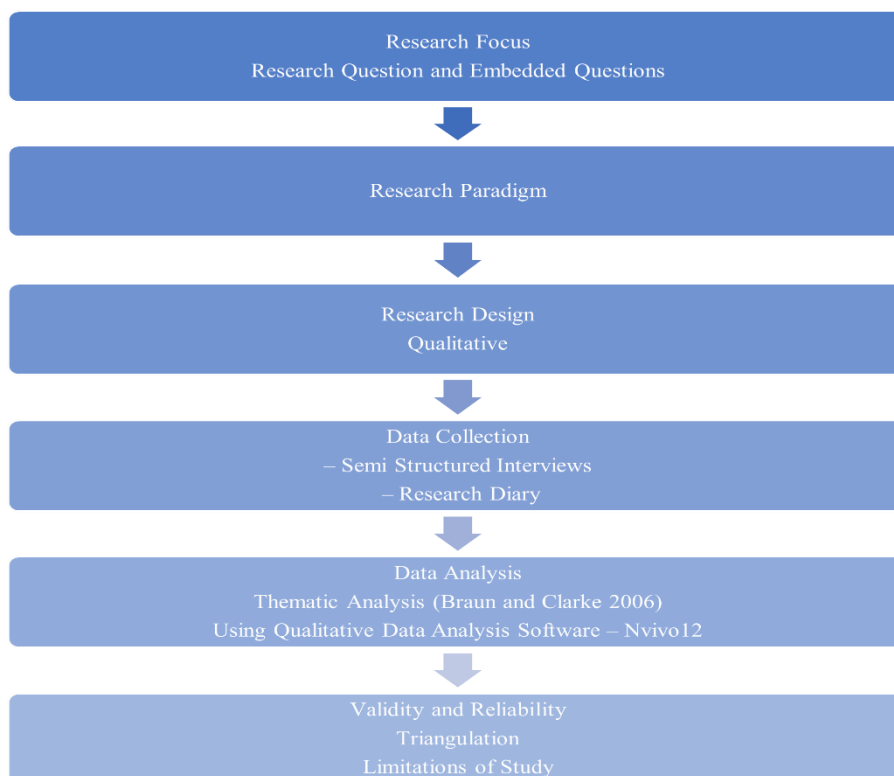


Figure 7.1 Current Study Outline

7.2 Research Question

The research question guiding the study is:

An Investigation into Collaborative Practice between the Class Teacher, Special Education Teacher (SET) and Speech and Language Therapists (SLT) to Identify and Meet the Needs of Students with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD) in Irish Primary Schools.

The researcher adopted a constructivist paradigm, which guided the researcher's approach to the overall investigation. The following are the questions posed to address the overall aim of the study.

7.2.1 Embedded Questions

As this study seeks to bridge the gap in our knowledge of collaborative practice and the impact it has on teaching and learning, the following embedded questions were used to guide this study:

- Do classroom teachers, parents, SETs and SLTs collaborate to meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties?
- If so, how is this negotiated?
- Who are the key stakeholders in this collaboration?
- Do these stakeholders make use of the Primary Language Curriculum in their planning to meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties in their classrooms? If so, in what ways?
- Who is involved in the School Support Plus plan for students with language needs at the School Support Plus stage?
- What are the benefits of collaboration in identifying and meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties, if any?
- What are the challenges encountered when engaging in collaborative practice?

The researcher had specific objectives in mind when considering these questions, looking in particular at the framework for the process of the research. The overall structure and aims of the study led to the establishment of the researcher's personal paradigm which is presented below. Mertens (2015) emphasises the importance of the researcher identifying their own

philosophical assumptions, beliefs, and orientation prior to placing their research into one of the identified paradigms.

7.3 Research Paradigm

A paradigm refers to a set of beliefs, outlooks and views that guide one's research. Having examined the literature involved and given the axiological philosophy of this study, the research was formed and based on a social constructivist paradigm (Cohen *et al.* 2018; Creswell and Poth 2018). According to Mertens (2015), it is important for the researcher to select a paradigm that reflects the way one looks at the world and 'how we seek knowledge and use it' (Thomas 2009, p.73). A social constructivist approach emphasises the world of experiences as lived, felt, and undergone by people (Schwandt 2007). Ultimately, it highlights how researchers gather knowledge and interpret it (Ní Aogáin 2018). According to McKinley (2015), constructivism maintains that human development is socially situated, and that knowledge is constructed through interactions with others. Similarly, Robson asserts that 'meaning does not exist in its own right; it is constructed by human beings as they interact and engage in interpretations' (2011, p.24).

This research is primarily concerned with the social interactions of educators and SLTs to identify and meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties. Furthermore, it is concerned with the implications of these social interactions. It focuses on the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (NCCA 2019) consistently throughout, looking at individuals' experiences and perspectives on curriculum planning and implementation with a focus on inclusion. As a result, this study adopted a social constructivist approach so that the various perspectives and multiple realities of participants were identified and validated (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Flick 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark 2018; Creswell and Poth 2018). By recording and interpreting the participants' viewpoints, the researcher will construct a reality that will serve as the context for this study (Robson 2011).

The researcher believed that a social constructivist paradigm was the most appropriate way of exploring the above research question, as her research was predominantly based on open-ended queries which provided valuable qualitative data (Creswell and Poth 2018). In this context, using qualitative methods enabled a reality to be constructed from interaction with the participants, who are principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs in Irish primary schools. By utilising an inductive approach in this study, the researcher was able to make sense of the studies outcomes without 'imposing pre-existing expectations' (Mertens 2015, p. 236). In turn,

such an approach ensured that the researcher examined the observations made, to allow ‘the categories of analysis to emerge from the data as the study progresses’ (Mertens 2015, p.236). Moreover, Silverman (2015) believes that qualitative research is relatively flexible in nature. Qualitative research encourages researchers to engage in reflexive practice to ensure the reliability of their research is upheld (Roulston and Shelton 2015; Creswell and Poth 2018). According to Berger, reflexivity can be defined as a ‘process of continual internal dialogue and critical evaluation’ (2015, p.220) which in turn, can enhance the research process and subsequent outcomes.

Qualitative research examines what individuals do in their natural environments and also studies processes as well as outcomes, while looking at meaning and causes (Hammersley 1992). According to Ritchie, qualitative research enables the researcher to ‘interpret the social world of the participant’s perceptions, experiences, and attitudes’ (2013, p.4). This approach allowed the researcher to gain more insightful responses from participants and served to enrich the overall study and provided a distinct rationale for design.

7.4 Research Design

The selection of a research design depends on ‘the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed, the researchers’ personal experiences and the audiences for the study’ (Creswell 2009, p. 22). The identification of a methodological approach or research design gives structure to the research process (Creswell and Poth 2018). To answer the research question, an in-depth qualitative investigation was deemed optimal by the researcher. The main asset in adopting a qualitative approach to this study was that it explored attitudes and personal experiences of relevant stakeholders i.e., principals, teachers, SETs and SLTs. More specifically, qualitative research empowered individuals, giving them a voice and minimising the power relationship that exists between the researcher and the researched (Creswell and Poth 2018).

7.4.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research involves looking at meaning, social context, and personal experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). It can also be seen as a journey of induction, discovery, exploration and theory generation (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Qualitative research seeks to reveal ‘the authenticity of human experience’ (Silverman 2010, p.6). Moreover, Brantlinger *et al.* define qualitative research as ‘a systematic approach to understanding

qualities, or the essential nature of a phenomenon within a particular context’ (2005 p. 195). Subsequently, Silverman (2015) argues that selecting research methods depends on the study at hand and what the researcher wants to discover. Therefore, given the nature of this research, the researcher believed that collecting qualitative data was the correct approach in order to address the research question appropriately. The qualitative methods utilised by the researcher in this study included: semi-structured interviews and the maintenance of a research diary (Cohen *et al.* 2018). These methods of data collection are outlined in the following section.

7.4.2 Data Collection

‘The central, totally indispensable, part of real word enquiry is the collection of data’ (Robson 2002, p.385). As there are a number of data collection instruments available to researchers, generally, researchers attempt to employ the most appropriate and effective data collection tool to carry out their research (Bogdan and Biklen 2007). Often, researchers are bound by their choice due to the practicalities of their research design (Robson and McCartan 2016). Consequently, experts in the field believe that it is the nature of the research which determines the choice of paradigm, which in turn influences the research design and data collection methodologies (Robson and McCartan 2016). Considering this, the researcher selected data collection instruments that best suited the social constructivist approach (semi-structured interviews and a research diary). Subsequently, these instruments aided the researcher in the gathering of valuable data and are outlined hereunder.

7.4.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

In order to address the research question, semi-structured interviews were carried out by the researcher. Robson and McCartan (2016) claim that interviews are a crucial source of data collection in qualitative research. The researcher believed that this data collection instrument was the most effective and efficient tool in order to receive the highest quality of data, while gaining an insight into stakeholders’ perspectives on the research question, outlined above. Consequently, semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method used in this study.

Semi-structured interviews have the potential to yield valuable insights into peoples’ life experiences, attitudes, opinions and aspirations (Rose and Grosvenor 2013). They are flexible and adaptable in nature and are an efficient way of gathering high quality data (Robson and McCartan 2016), in ‘context-specific settings’ (Golafshani 2003, p.600). Coinciding with

Long (2017), an acceptable understanding of the term ‘interview’ for the purpose of this research, is that of ‘a conversation with a purpose’ (Kvale 2006, p. 483), an ‘inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest’ (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015, p.209) or a ‘guided conversation’ (Yin 2009, p.106). The above definitions accurately represent the researchers own approach to semi-structured interviews in this study.

Mertens (2015) and Robson and McCartan (2016) promote the use of semi-structured interviews when one wants to delve deeper to fully understand individuals' outlooks and experiences on a particular topic. According to Oppenheim (2000), interviews cater for this as the respondents are enabled to ‘say what they think and do so with greater richness and spontaneity’ (Opie and Sikes 2004, p.111). Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to ‘elicit ideas, perspectives, and experience that may not be immediately accessible to the participant’ (Galletta 2013, p. 72). Employing face to face interviews has several advantages. First and foremost, it offers ‘the possibility of modifying one’s line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives’ in a way that other data collection methods cannot (Robson and McCartan 2016, p. 286). Furthermore, face to face interviews have ‘the ability to open one’s mind and heart to diverse perspectives, including those that could challenge one’s own expertise and status’ (Shirley 2015, p127). In agreement with Shirley (2015), the researcher asserts that the knowledge elicited from the interviews was critical to the study, highlighting the importance of valuing teachers’ perspectives on collaborative practice. Shirley maintains that ‘...it is not simply greater voice that may be needed in educational change today, but rather greater skills in listening to our students and attending to our colleagues’ (2015 p.127). Thus, the researcher recognised the significance of interviewing teachers and other key stakeholders who have first-hand experiences, giving them a voice and in turn enhancing the overall quality of the data.

7.4.2.2 Undertaking the Interview

As part of this research, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with four main cluster groups. Each group represented a Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1991) which was composed of school staff, i.e., principal, class teacher and SET as well as one SLT from the corresponding schools, see Figure 7.2 below.

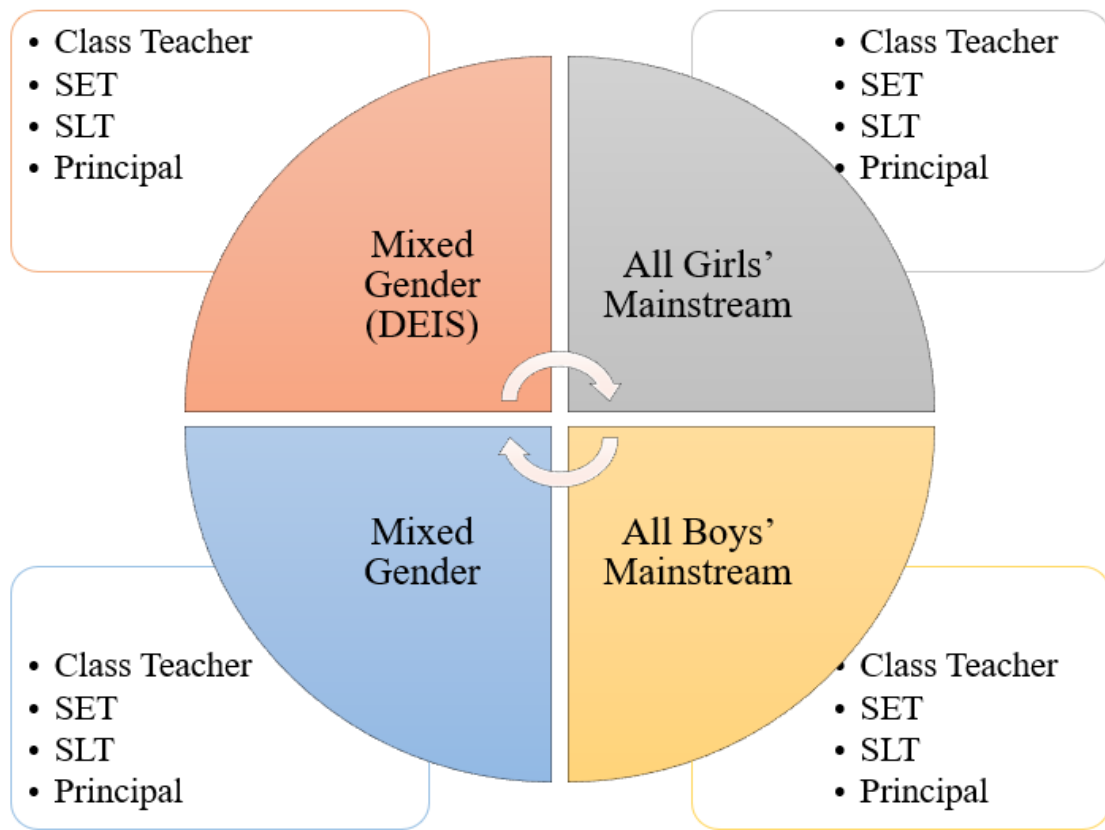


Figure 7.2 Semi-Structured Interview: Four Main Cluster Groups

Prior to the commencement of the interviewing process, the researcher had to conceptualise the interview topic and strategically plan the entire process. She did this by following the ‘seven stages of an interview inquiry’ proposed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009 p. 102), outlined in Figure 7.3 below.

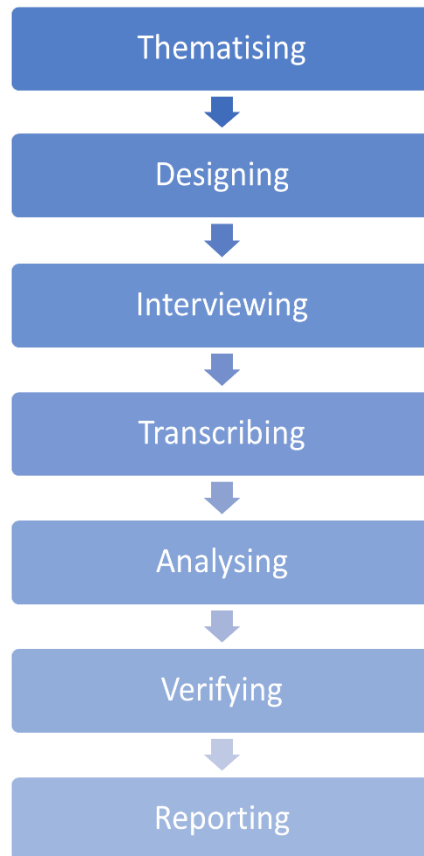


Figure 7.3 The Seven Stages of an Interview Inquiry (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009)

This idealised sequence supported the researcher on her interview journey as well as ‘retaining the initial vision and engagement throughout the investigation’ (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 103). Firstly, the researcher had to select the type of interview which best suited the research context. The researcher selected semi-structured interviews. The researcher selected semi-structured interviews, as opposed to structured interviews, as it allowed the participants to develop their answers naturally and without constraint (Merriam 2009; Creswell and Poth 2018). The researcher was critically aware of her decision and opted for this form of interview as she wanted her participants to express their true experiences (Galetta 2013).

Subsequently, the researcher had to then select and recruit her participants. Once she successfully completed this step, the researcher was then faced with the challenge of devising questions that would encourage her participants to talk openly (Brenner 2006; Mertens 2015). The questions devised for this research were influenced by the extensive range of literature reviewed in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five. Similar to most semi-structured interviews, the researcher opened the interview by asking general, conversational style questions. She then focused her questions, working towards more precise details that addressed the research

question and thematised them accordingly. This made the later stages of collating and analysing data more efficient.

The interviews were conducted in the participant's place of work to ensure that the participants were accommodated at a time that best suited them, while also ensuring that they felt comfortable during the interview process. As previously mentioned, the researcher devised an interview schedule which guided the researcher to ask the same questions to all participants involved. She categorised her questions to ensure that answers could be given by the participant in a flexible manner. This meant that participants could cover a range of questions in any one of their responses. When the participant had finished, the researcher scanned through her interview schedule to ensure that each question was answered. This flexible style of questioning gave the researcher the opportunity to go back to a question that had not been answered or to ask for further clarification. It also reduced interviewer bias (Braun and Clarke 2013). The open-ended style of questioning created opportunities for new areas of interest to arise that had not been considered prior to the interview process. The cumulative and iterative nature of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to analyse the collection of responses while subsequently drawing findings from them. According to Galletta, 'this created the space for a continuum of structure' (2013, p.72).

In order to gain experience and to ensure that the interview schedule was devised appropriately, the researcher piloted her interview questions prior to commencing the initial stage of data collection (Appendix 1). The pilot provided valuable feedback, which enabled the researcher to review her questions and tailor them accordingly.

7.4.2.3 Piloting the Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews have predetermined questions which can be modified. The order and wording of these questions can be altered depending on the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate (Robson 2011). According to Galletta, the questions in a semi-structured interview should 'progressively lead the participant into a full consideration of the researcher's variables of interest' (2013, p.72).

A pilot can be defined as a small-scale version or a 'dummy run' of the real thing (Robson 2011, p. 405). Taking Robson's perspectives on piloting as an integral part of the research process, the researcher piloted her interview questions with her critical friend and then with her pilot participants to ensure that the questions asked were 'understandable and unambiguous'. The researcher also wanted to ensure that she was on the 'right lines

conceptually' and had 'captured the phenomenon sufficiently well for meaningful data to be collected' (Robson 2011, p.82). Therefore, prior to commencing her own interview process, the researcher aligned herself with Stake (1995) and Creswell and Poth's (2018) assertion that a pilot should be embedded into the planning process, so that amendments can be made to the interview schedule if necessary. Subsequently, the researcher piloted her interview questions with stakeholders in her base school, who were subsequently willing to provide the researcher with constructive criticism (McNiff *et al.* 2009). The function of the pilot was to increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the study (Oppenheim 1992; Morrison 1993). It also gave the researcher exposure to the interview process and allowed her to develop familiarity with the interview questions themselves (Braun and Clarke 2013). Additionally, it gave the researcher a good indication of the potential length of the interview, which supported the researcher when organising appointments. Furthermore, it provided the researcher with the experience of organising and managing participants. It inevitably allowed the researcher to deal with her own presumptions before the interviewing process commenced (Flick 2009). Moreover, the pilot assisted the researcher in rearranging her questions to ensure there was a well-defined flow established (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). For example, initially the researcher planned to ask, "*How did the CPD provided by the PDST benefit you in the implementation of the PLC?*". A few pilot participants provided feedback that the question was quite leading, because it assumed that it did benefit. The pilot participants explained that the way the question was asked may lead a participant in a particular direction. Therefore, before commencing the interview process, the researcher amended the question to "*Do you feel you received adequate CPD in the PLC? Was it useful for identifying, addressing, and monitoring needs for students with SLCD? Explain*". The researcher felt this gave the participants an opportunity to expand the dialogue in a way that they were comfortable with. The findings that were obtained were crucial for the development of the research (Rose and Grosvenor 2012). It is important to highlight that throughout the entire interviewing process the researcher endeavoured to establish and maintain a neutral stance (Robson and McCartan 2016).

7.4.2.4 Recording the Interviews

In order to document the interviews for further reference and analysis, the interviews were recorded by the researcher using a digital recorder. The recordings were then imported directly into NVivo12. The interviews were then transcribed in full for analysis by the researcher. The transcription process marks the first step in the analysis of the data. Merriam (2009) advocates that the transcription process should be carried out by the researcher in order

to gain a holistic view of the underlying phenomenon. Although it is a slow and tedious process, given the time demands on transcription, Stake (1995) asserts that an in-depth analysis is warranted. Following the interviews, once the data had been transcribed from the recordings and coded, participants were invited for a follow up interview, to clarify any issues and to member check. Brenner (2006) asserts that member checking allows the participant to clarify the interviewer's interpretation of meaning. While a great amount of time and effort was invested into the recording and transcription process, it allowed the researcher to gain initial insights into the data which was of paramount importance to the overall study.

Patton (2002), Creswell (2014) and Cohen *et al.* (2018) advocate the use of recording interviews for qualitative research as one of the best methods of obtaining detailed information when you cannot observe participants. Similarly, Kvale (2009) believes that interviews are 'more powerful in eliciting narrative data that allows researchers to investigate people's views in greater depth'. In the same way, Robson emphasises that semi-structured interviews are 'most appropriate when the interviewer is closely involved with the research process' (2011, p.285). With this in mind, the researcher agrees with Stake in that 'it should not be thought that evidence-based research depends mainly on measurement; rather...it should enable people to attain a conviction of how the thing works and what to do about it' (2010, p.123). The researcher believes this reinforces the importance of the research process just as much as the product of the research.

7.4.2.5 Research Diary

In addition to, and in conjunction with the data collection instruments mentioned above, a research diary was maintained for the extent of the investigation. The purpose of the research diary was to document observations, thoughts, experiences and perceptions throughout the process (McNiff *et al.* 2009) (Appendix 2). The researcher believed that this form of documentation upheld the objectivity of the research. Maintaining a research diary is recommended in the literature to enhance reflective practices (Ortlipp 2008; Braun and Clarke 2022). Hart asserts that a detailed research diary 'can be an effective way to keep control of the information the research generates' (1998, p.216). This form of documentation was of paramount importance to the researcher as it was efficient, effective and practical (Altrichter and Holly 2004; Atkinson and Coffey 2004; Bryman 2016; Creswell and Poth 2018). The research diary also allowed the researcher to monitor and address her own biases throughout the study (Creswell and Miller 2000). This reflective process supported the researcher greatly

as it enabled her to frequently look back and observe her own thoughts over a period of time, which supported the overall data management throughout the study.

7.5 Data Management

Data management is a crucial ethical component when it comes to protecting the privacy of the researcher's participants (Creswell and Poth 2018). The Data Protection Acts of 1998 and 2003, outline the importance of adhering to legislation associated with storing personal data belonging to individuals. The researcher abided by the MIC Record Retention Schedule by storing all physical data under lock and key, while confirming that all electronic data was stored on an encrypted laptop for the duration of the project plus three years. Once the time expires, the information will be destroyed.

The anonymity of participants was assured, and all data collected was only accessible to the researcher and her supervisor. A pseudonym was assigned to each interview participant (see Table 8.1), and it was that pseudonym, rather than the participant's name, which was assigned to their data to maintain their anonymity (Creswell and Poth 2018). All information gathered remained confidential and was not released to any third party. The data from this research, combined with the data provided by the participants in this study, was used to form the results section of this thesis. Summary data only appears in this thesis and individual participant data is not shown.

7.6 Sample Selection

The selection of an appropriate sample is essential in doing any study (Robson 2011; Mertens 2015). A sample is defined as a subgroup of the target population that acts as a representative of the whole. According to Pathak, sampling is the 'process of inferring something about a large group or element by studying only a part of it' (2008, p.41). Cohen *et al.* assert that the sampling methodologies used can influence the quality of a piece of research, while also highlighting the factors to be accounted for, which includes: the size of the sample, representativeness of the sample and access to the sample and strategies used (2007, p.100). Similarly, Mertens and Wilson (2012) highlight the importance of using the appropriate sampling techniques in educational research, emphasising how the sampling strategies used enables the researcher to provide a systematic and transparent process for choosing participants. Therefore, taking the above into consideration, the sampling methods were carefully chosen by

the researcher prior to the data collection phase. The researcher did this as it was not feasible to collect data from the entire population (Mertens and Wilson 2012).

To carry out this study, a mixture of convenience sampling and purposive sampling was used to collect data from a specific group of participants i.e., principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs in a variety of schools. The researcher did this to ensure that the participants involved had knowledge and experience of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell and Poth 2018).

7.6.1 Convenience Sampling

Convenience sampling was utilised in this study within the researchers own school. The researcher selected participants who had knowledge and experience of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell and Poth 2018), and who were ‘easily accessible and willing to participate’ (Teddlie and Yu 2007, p.78). It must be noted however, that many researchers assert that ‘convenience sampling is the most widely used and least satisfactory method of sampling’ (Robson and McCartan 2016, p. 281). However, the researcher used this form of sampling as it acted as an initial pilot for the research and enabled her to get a deeper understanding of the issues involved (Robson and McCartan 2016). As discussed above, this group of informed individuals was also able to provide insightful comment into the design of the research questions which improved the quality of the later interviews.

7.6.2 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was also adopted in order to carry out this research. Purposive sampling involved the researcher selecting specific individuals as samples, according to the purpose of the research (Mertens 2015; Cohen *et al.* 2018; Creswell and Poth 2018). Individuals were selected as they were highly knowledgeable in the particular field, while being representative of their population (Calmorin and Calmorin 2007; Bryman 2016). According to Etikan *et al.* (2016), purposive sampling is often the most appropriate way of recruiting participants with specific characteristics. Utilising this type of sampling ensured that the researcher strongly considered who her participants were going to be, ensuring those selected best depicted the population and the topic in question (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Oliver 2010; Silverman 2015).

Maxwell defines purposive sampling as sampling in which, ‘particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide, that cannot

be gotten as well from other choices’ (1997, p. 87). Patton asserts that, the ‘logic and power of qualitative purposive sampling derives from the emphasis on an in-depth understanding of specific cases’ (1990, p.169). As discussed above, the researcher wanted to select candidates that would provide the richest and most detailed information to support her investigation (Lodico *et al.* 2006, p.134). Consequently, principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs were purposefully selected by the researcher to participate in the study. These stakeholders play a significant role in the implementation and dissemination of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (NCCA 2019), as well as supporting students with SLCD. Thus, purposive sampling was deemed the most suitable type of sampling for this research as extensive narrative data was required. It also enabled the researcher to compare data across the different school types and among relevant stakeholders, which facilitated opportunities to triangulate findings at a later stage (see Figure 7.4) and contributed to the validity of the study. Consequently, through implementing purposive sampling in her research, the researcher ensured that the data collected was of high quality and was capable of addressing the research question. The breakdown of interviewed participants is illustrated in table 7.1 below.

Roles	n=
Principal	4
Class Teacher	9
Special Education Teacher	10
Speech and Language Therapist	4
Total	27

Table 7.1 Breakdown of Qualitative Sample by Role

As mentioned previously, each group, or Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991), was composed of school staff, i.e., principal (walking/teaching), between three to five teachers or SETs, in addition to the corresponding SLT to allow for valid data triangulation (see Section 7.12.2). The researcher would assert that semi-structured interviews have the ability to ‘offer researchers a way to attend to lived experiences and pursue questions from extant theory’ (Galletta 2013, p.72). Therefore, in agreement with Denscombe (2014), the researcher signified that the selection of participants aimed to represent the opinions and experiences of those involved in collaborative practices to support students with SLCD.

The researchers sample size included 27 participants in total. Teacher participants (n=9), SET participants (n=10), SLT participants (n=4) and the principal participants (n=4). Apart

from the principals and SLTs, at least two of each group type were interviewed to ensure greater reliability (i.e., class teachers and SETs). The researcher agreed with Bryman's assertion that 'increasing the size of a sample increases the likely precision of a sample' (2016, p.183). It is important to also note that when selecting an appropriate sample, ethical considerations must be taken into account.

7.7 Ethical Considerations

Robson (2011) emphasises the importance of giving serious thought to the ethical aspect of one's study, by asserting that it should occur at the very early stages of one's preparations, in order to protect oneself. According to Robson and McCartan, 'ethics is a process and not an endpoint, meaning that it should be reviewed throughout the research process and should be done in tandem with others, not as a stand-alone, one time only pursuit' (2016, p. 208). Taking this view into account, the researcher acknowledged the importance of accounting for ethical considerations when conducting educational research from the onset (Brooks *et al.* 2014; Cohen *et al.* 2018). Thus, prior to the commencement of the study, the researcher sought ethical approval from Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) (Appendix 3). Ethical guidelines outlined by MIREC were followed rigidly so that all participants involved were protected. Walliman states that, 'the integrity of any research depends not only on its scientific rigour, but also on its ethical adequacy' (2005, p.355). Thus, in agreement with Mertens, the researcher firmly believes that adhering to an ethical approach is fundamental to guide the entire process of 'planning, conducting and using research' (2015, p.347). Subsequently, ethical implications were of utmost importance to procedures, with informed consent being the first protocol.

7.7.1 Informed Consent

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) express the importance of receiving informed consent, stating that it must be attained at the initial stage of the research (Bell 2014). Thus, the researcher sent a letter of information to the Board of Management (BOM) of the selected schools to seek approval to carry out the research at the earliest possible stage (Appendix 4). Upon approval, information sheets and consent forms outlining the protection of the participants rights (Creswell and Poth 2018) were forwarded to the principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs involved (Appendix 5 & 6). This was carried out to ensure that all participants understood what the study entailed, that their confidentiality, privacy, and

anonymity was upheld and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any particular time, without consequence (Cohen *et al.* 2018). Once official permission was attained, the researcher was able to focus on gathering high quality data by adhering to the steps recommended by MIREC. During the research process, both relational and procedural ethics were continuously reflected on. This allowed the researcher to remain aware of the ethical components relevant to her study in order to minimise risks and to protect those involved.

7.8 Fieldwork

This research project sought to investigate collaborative practice between class teachers, SETs and SLTs to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD, in Irish primary schools. The study was conducted in four different school settings: an all girls' mainstream school, an all boys' mainstream school, a mixed gender school and a mixed gender school that is designated DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) in the greater Dublin area. The researcher strived to include stakeholders that work with a diverse range of students, so that perspectives from all social and economic backgrounds were taken into account in this study. All schools involved were typical of those in mixed urban settings. As mentioned previously, prior to commencing the research, informed consent was requested from each school's Board of Management (BOM). Participant information sheets were distributed (Appendix 5), and informed consent obtained in writing from all participants involved (Appendix 6).

The pilot phase of this research involved the researcher interviewing the principal and class teachers who teach Junior Infants to Second Class, as well as the SETs in an all girls' mainstream school. The researcher also interviewed one SLT that works closely with this school. The initial pilot enabled the researcher to understand the quality of the responses to her interview questions and adapt these questions accordingly before later interviews commenced. Emerging from the initial analysis of this pilot and with recommendations from pilot participants implemented, the researcher then returned to the field for the next series of interviews. The researcher interviewed the principal, class teachers, SETs and a corresponding SLT in all of the different settings detailed in section 7.8.1 (Appendices 7, 8, 9 & 10 show the interview schedules of the participants mentioned respectively above). This approach allowed the researcher to gain a greater insight into collaborative practice in schools and assess what is actually happening on the ground. Moreover, some questions focused specifically on the how schools are implementing the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (DES 2019a) in their own

context of practice, to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD. Therefore, the researcher was able to understand how stakeholders adapt to new curricular objectives. This allowed her to identify if change impacted collaborative practice and whether the change enabled key stakeholders to meet the needs of all students. Consistently throughout her interview questions, the researcher ensured the central aim of each question was to uncover the nature of collaboration experienced by the participants and whether it enabled them to meet the needs of their students, specifically those with SLCD.

The four schools in question had students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. The student population represented a wide socio-economic spectrum which enhanced the overall study. A brief synopsis of the participating school's profile and settings are presented below

7.8.1 Profile of Schools and Participants

A profile of the participating schools is provided in the following subsections. Each table graphically outlines the school's population and the pseudonyms of staff members interviewed.

7.8.1.1 School A: Girls' School

School A: The all girls' school is located in the greater Dublin area and is a 19 teacher school. It has two streams of each class level and consists of 432 girls. There are 16 mainstream class teachers and 3 Special Education Teachers (SETs). There are also 3 full time and one part time Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). The researcher interviewed two class teachers, one SET and the Principal. Once these interviews were completed the researcher also interviewed one SLT that was currently working with a student in the school. Table 7.2 below outlines details of the Girls' school. The following names are fictitious but serve to introduce the individual participants.

School A: Girls' School	
School Population	432
Principal	Lynn
Junior Infant Teacher	Rebecca
Senior Infant Teacher	Ellen
1st Class Teacher	Linda
SET 1	Kathleen
SET 2	Elana
SLT	Ailbhe

Table 7.2 School A: Girls' School

7.8.1.2 School B: Boys' School

School B: The all boys' school is located in North Dublin and is a 19 teacher school. There are 393 boys enrolled in this school. There are 15 mainstream class teachers and 4 Special Education Teachers (SETs). There are 6 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). The researcher interviewed one class teacher, four SETs and the Principal. Once these interviews were completed the researcher also interviewed one SLT that was currently working with a student in the school. Table 7.3 below outlines details of the Boys' school. As per the above, the following names are fictitious but serve to introduce the individual participants.

School B: Boys' School	
School Population	393
Principal	Nora
Junior Infant Teacher	Alannah
SET 1	Angela
SET 2	Conor
SET 3	Anne
SET 4	James
SLT	Neasa

Table 7.3 School B: Boys' School

7.8.1.3 School C: Mixed School

School C: The mixed school is located in North-West Dublin and is a much bigger school compared to the others. It is a 50-teacher school with 12 Special Needs Assistants (SNA). It has four streams of each class level and consists of 424 boys and 423 girls. In total 847 students attend the school. The school has 3 ASD classes for children with Autism. Children from over 40 nationalities are represented in this school. The researcher interviewed three class teachers, two SETs and the Principal. Once these interviews were completed the researcher also interviewed one SLT that was currently working with a student in the school. Table 7.4 below outlines details of the mixed school.

School C: Mixed School	
School Population	847 (Boys 424) (Girls 423)
Principal	Keith
Junior Infant Teacher	Nicola
Senior Infant Teacher	Ava
1st Class Teacher	Olivia
SET 1	Cian
SET 2	Eileen
SLT	Rosie

Table 7.4 School C: Mixed School

7.8.1.4 School D: Mixed School (DEIS)

School D: The Mixed School (DEIS) is located in South Dublin and is a 22-teacher school with 4 full time Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). The school has currently 314 students enrolled, comprising over 45 different nationalities. As the school has such a high number of EAL students, the school has two specific EAL teachers and a Nurture Room Teacher to provide additional support to these students. The researcher interviewed two class teachers, two SETs and the Principal. She also interviewed one SLT that was working with a student in the school, see Table 7.5 below.

School D: Mixed School (DEIS)	
Mixed School Population	314 (Boys 173) (Girls 141)
Principal	Annie
2nd Class Teacher	Robyn
2nd Class Teacher	Donna
SET 1	Amelia
SET 2	Dave
SLT	Jessica

Table 7.5 School D: Mixed School (DEIS)

The category of teachers interviewed were similar in all settings. The demographic information was obtained while interviewing the principals of the four mainstream schools. The findings gathered from the fieldwork will be presented in Chapter Eight. However, it is important to note that the researcher enlisted the help of a critical friend in order to analyse and cross reference the data collected.

7.9 Critical Friend

Throughout this research a critical friend was utilised in order to reduce research bias and to support the researcher on her journey. Costa and Kallick describe a critical friend as a ‘trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work, as a friend’ (1993, p.50). A critical friend is also defined as an individual who is patient and willing. Someone who will take the time to ‘fully understand the content of the work presented and the outcomes that the person is working towards’ (Costa and Kallick 1993, p.50). Elaborating on this concept, Gurr and Huerta highlight how the use of a critical friend can have an impact on research quality. Moreover, they acknowledge how the use of a critical friend has the potential to challenge the researcher, playing a role that is informative and catalytic. This in turn improves the researchers own efficiency (2013, p.3085). Therefore, the researcher recognised that the use of a critical friend was crucial in this study.

Throughout this research, the researcher relied on a critical friend who understood the concept of the thesis, was familiar with the body of work that the researcher was developing and consistently provided feedback on this work. This came in the form of challenging the researchers' own opinions and offering guidance and support throughout the process. The

critical friend was also a source of guidance with regard to the ethical responsibilities of the researcher throughout.

7.10 Data Analysis

The researcher considers the process of data analysis as one which involves the compiling and organising of raw data, which is then explored with the intention of extracting useful information. This concurs with Cohen *et al.* (2018), who define the process of analysing data as one which enables patterns, themes, categories, and regularities to emerge from the participants' perspectives and understandings of a situation. The researcher was aware from the beginning of this study that data analysis was to be a recursive process throughout (Mertens 2015; Braun and Clarke 2022). Robson emphasises that data analysis is an integral part of any research, asserting that data in their raw form do not speak for themselves. The messages are hidden and need careful teasing out' (2011, p.408). While the researcher adopted a qualitative approach to her study, the process of thematic analysis guided by coding principles was utilised to interpret the qualitative data collected from the interviews. The researcher availed of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phased approach to thematic analysis¹¹. These encompassed:

1. Familiarising Yourself with Your Data
2. Generating Initial Codes
3. Searching for Themes
4. Reviewing Themes
5. Defining and Naming Themes
6. Producing the Report

Following the six steps mentioned above ensured that the data were analysed to saturation. Each phase is outlined chronologically below.

Phase One: Familiarising Yourself with Your Data

During Phase One of the data analysis cycle, the researcher familiarised herself with the data collected by replaying all the interview recordings. The interviews were manually transcribed verbatim by the researcher. This allowed the researcher to become fully immersed in the data (Robson 2011). When listening back to the interviews, the researcher repeatedly

¹¹ While the six phased approach to thematic analysis was adopted, it is important to note that the researcher explored Braun and Clarke's (2022) most recent publication which outlined their contemporary approach to reflective thematic analysis. Given that this publication was only issued towards the end of the research investigation the researcher applied their inaugural publication of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006).

read over her transcripts to ensure accuracy (Braun and Clarke 2006). In doing so, the researcher was confident that she was familiar with the data gathered. Throughout the process, the researcher found the use of annotations useful as it enabled her to document her thoughts, important fieldnotes and observations (Appendix 11). This supported her when interpreting meaning within coded context. Moreover, during this phase, the researcher ensured that all ethical considerations were adhered to. All interviews were recorded by the researcher and stored on the researcher's encrypted laptop. The files were then imported to NVivo 12 (Appendix 12).

Within NVivo 12, the researcher set up and detailed the sources. Each source contained contextual information such as the demographics of each school setting, the school's social status (for example: the student population and school designation (i.e., DEIS or non DEIS). Information about the participants was also inputted i.e., name, school, position in school (principal, class teacher, SET), class level and teaching experience. This contextual information was gathered from the 'school profile sheet' completed by the principals (Appendix 13), along with the opening narratives of the interview schedules. The data collected were highly valuable and supported the overall participant profile. Appendix 14 illustrates these case classifications outlining the demographic and attribute information linked to each participant interviewed.

Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes

During Phase Two of the data analysis cycle, the researcher started to organise her data in a meaningful and systematic way. She did this by engaging in line-by-line analysis (Bryman 2016). Throughout this process, the researcher used memos to document initial thoughts and concepts. In doing so, the researcher generated meaning from the original chronology and created initial codes. Boyatzis asserts that codes are the interesting concepts that derive from the data. They are considered 'the most basic segment or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (1998, p.63). Bazeley (2013) and Charmaz (2006) provided the researcher with detailed descriptions of coding strategies. These strategies enabled the researcher to 'segment and label text to form descriptions' (Bryman 2001 p.398). Once the researcher was pleased with her initial codes, she matched them to the data extracts that demonstrated that code using NVivo 12. Within NVivo 12, each code was labelled. A total of 78 initial codes were established (Appendix 15). During the coding process, it became apparent to the researcher that some statements provided by the participants had been coded more than once. As a result, the researcher had to regroup some of

her codes into different categories. She did this in line with Robson and McCartan's guidelines (2016).

Concurring with Boyatzis (1998), Braun *et al.* (2016) maintain that 'a code identifies and labels something of interest in the data – at a semantic and/or a latent level – that is of potential relevance to the research question' (2016, p. 9). Keeping this in mind, the researcher thoroughly worked through the data and coded any new relevant extracts that she encountered (Cohen *et al.* 2018). During this process, the researcher had to merge, tweak, and revise existing codes. This was due to the flexible nature of the process in addition to the researcher becoming more analytically engaged. The researcher adhered to recommendations of Braun *et al.* (2016) and scrutinised the dataset more than once when coding. The researcher did this to ensure that a 'systematic, coherent and robust' set of codes were established (Braun *et al.* 2016, p.10). The researcher understands that coding is a crucial element of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Gibbs 2007), as 'systematic and rigorous coding builds solid foundations for theme development' (Braun *et al.* 2016, p. 9).

Phase Three: Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)

During Phase Three of the data analysis cycle, the researcher began identifying categories after the data had been coded and collated. 78 codes were distilled and collapsed by the researcher into 16 potential themes (categories) (Appendix 16). The researcher did this by identifying shared patterned meaning across the data set, sorting the various codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). According to Maguire and Delahunt, 'a theme is a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (2017, p.3356). Braun and Clarke (2006) explain there are no hard and fast rules about what makes a theme or what can be considered a theme. Themes emerge from the researchers' own rigorous analysis of coding, categorising and thematising.

During this phase, the researcher understood that generating themes was more than a simple summarising exercise, and that a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of the data in front of them (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). Thus, the researcher continuously reflected on common ideas that emerged in Phase One and cross-referenced these with the initial codes she identified during Phase Two. This rigorous process allowed valid themes (categories of codes) to emerge. Bazeley asserts that themes are the 'starting point in a report

of findings from a study' (2009, p.7). Moreover, the researcher acknowledged the importance of writing memos during this phase. Concurring with Braun and Clarke, the researcher was conscious that some of the codes and categories identified 'may go on to form main themes, whereas others may form sub-themes, and others still may be discarded' (2006, p.90).

Phase Four: Reviewing Themes (Drilling Down)

During Phase Four of the data analysis cycle, the researcher reviewed, modified, and developed the initial themes that were identified in the previous phase as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher did this by going back to the full dataset, reviewing all coded extracts to see if they formed a coherent pattern. During this phase, it became apparent to the researcher that some themes were not actually themes i.e., there was not enough data to support them, while other themes had to be broken down into separate themes i.e., there were two or more themes combined in one theme. When reviewing the themes, the researcher asked herself the following questions, as were presented by Maguire and Delahunt:

- Do the themes make sense?
- Does the data support the themes?
- Am I trying to fit too much into a theme?
- If themes overlap, are they really separate themes?
- Are there themes within themes (subthemes)?
- Are there other themes within the data?

(2017, p. 3358)

By reflecting on the questions above, the researcher was able to review and refine her themes, while also ensuring that they were coherent and distinct from one another. At this point, the researcher had narrowed and refined the potential themes (categories) from 16 to 10 (Appendix 17), which informed the final themes developed in Phase Five.

Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes (Data Reduction)

During Phase Five of the data analysis cycle, the researcher finalised her themes with the intention to 'identify the essence of what each theme is about' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.92). This phase consolidated the data from the three previous phases and enabled the researcher to establish the final framework used to explore the research question. The researcher upheld that quality, rigour and validity of the data, by re-reading the interview

transcripts, reviewing memos, examining notes written in her research diary and reflecting upon the data gathered up to this point.

The researcher found this phase to be quite challenging as she tried to ensure that her established themes were of significance, and that her collated data extracts accompanied by narratives were rooted in a distinctive theme (Appendix 18). Bazeley (2009) asserts that defining and naming themes can be problematic even when codes are developed appropriately. Once the researcher had identified meaningful relationships between the remaining 10 potential themes (categories) from the previous phase, she was then able to consolidate these into 3 overarching, distinct themes supported by 9 sub-themes (Appendix 19). These themes included: The Value of Collaboration, The Challenges to Effective Collaboration and The Role of CPD in Enabling Stakeholders to Meet the Needs of all Students. These three themes reflect the headings and sub-heading in Chapter Eight.

Phase Six: Producing the Report

During Phase Six of the data analysis cycle, the researcher engaged in final analysis and began writing up the qualitative findings (see Chapter Eight). In order to do this successfully, the researcher had to provide a ‘concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell - within and across themes’ (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 23). Therefore, taking Braun and Clarke’s (2006) advice on data analysis, the researcher created analytical memos against themes to accurately provide a breakdown of the content in each theme, category, and code (Appendix 20). This ensured that the data analysed was valid and carried merit. While this phase was intense and time consuming, it enabled the researcher to break down the complicated story of her data in a more succinct manner, providing evidence of sound analysis.

7.10.1 Thematic Analysis

Given the detailed account above of how the researcher identified, analysed, and interpreted patterns across the qualitative dataset, it is important to understand that thematic analysis is much more than a process of summarising data (Braun and Clarke 2022). According to Clarke and Braun (2013), a good thematic analysis delves deeper, to interpret and make sense of the data. Roberts *et al.* assert that thematic analysis is ‘a form of pattern recognition used in content analysis whereby themes (or codes) that emerge from the data become the categories for analysis’ (2019, p.1). Thematic analysis was utilised due to its effectiveness and

flexible nature, as it is not tied to a specific epistemological or theoretical perspective (Maguire and Delahunt 2017; Braun and Clarke 2022). Boyatzis describes thematic analysis as ‘a way of seeing’ (1998, p.1). According to Robson, thematic analysis can be used as a ‘realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or as a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which, events, realities, meanings and experiences are the effect of a range of discourses operating within society’ (2011, p. 474). Robson (2011) explains, when analysing data, ideas for interpretation will often arise. Thus, the researcher completed the process of analysis directly after the data collection phase. This meant that the researcher could remain unbiased towards the data gathered, while also remaining focused on the research question. The researcher found the use of NVivo12 software fundamental to her study, as analysing qualitative data is often seen as a ‘demanding, repetitive and arduous task’ (Basit 2003, p.143). While the use of such qualitative software assisted the researcher, the researcher was mindful that it was only a methodological tool to support the process of data analysis, which made the process less invasive (Darmody and Byrne 2006). Therefore, for the purpose of this research, using qualitative data analysis software Nvivo12 was very beneficial.

7.10.2 Using Qualitative Data Analysis Software – NVivo 12

The use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDA) to facilitate data management and analysis has caused great debate amongst researchers in the field (Maclaran and Catterall 2002; Darmody and Byrne 2006; Bazeley and Jackson 2013). Researchers have contrasting opinions regarding the use of software to analyse research (Richard and Richards 1991; Dolan and Ayland 2001; Bassett 2004). This may be as a result of researchers viewing the use of software in qualitative research as a methodology, instead of a methodological tool (MacMillan and Koeing 2004). This misunderstanding has developed as a result of researchers having limited knowledge and experience of using the software (Darmody and Byrne 2006). Given that the function of the software is to support the data analysis process and not to perform the analysis, researchers outline its importance in analysing large amounts of qualitative data (Gibbs 2002; Darmody and Byrne 2006; Creswell 2013; Richard and Morse 2013).

While there are advantages and disadvantages associated with using any software, Jones (2007) asserts that there are many benefits for those who invest their time and use qualitative data analysis software to their complete advantage. Therefore, it is important to understand that when software is used correctly, it can benefit the researcher immensely, while also reducing stress levels, energy exerted, and the time spent on completing analysis (Richard

and Richards 1991; Fielding and Lee 1998). Bassett believes that such software offers ‘exciting and innovative opportunities’ (2004, p.33).

In more recent years, qualitative data analysis software has gained greater accreditation in the world of qualitative research. There has been an increase in the number of researchers using software, such as NVivo12, to support the data analysis phase of their research (DeNardo and Levers 2002; Basit 2003; Jones 2007). It must be stressed that the use of qualitative data analysis software is there to merely assist the researcher. It does this by shortening the analysis time frame, providing detailed coding and interpretations, and enhancing the organisation of data. According to Jones, it makes the ‘more repetitive and mechanical aspects of qualitative research easier and more efficient’ (2007, p. 76). It does not conduct analysis, nor does it build arguments, make inferences, or draw conclusions from the data (Darmody and Byrne 2006; Cohen *et al.* 2018). The researcher must do this themselves using the software as a support tool (Jones 2007). They must ‘collect the data, decide what to code and how to name the categories’ (Bourdon 2002, p.3). The researcher must still be able to ‘think, reason and theorise’ (Basit 2003, p.143). Richards describes this process as ‘decontextualizing and recontextualizing’ (2002, p.200). Bazeley and Jackson (2013) firmly believe that the software should follow the research, not lead it. Qualitative researchers ‘want tools which support analysis, but leave the analyst firmly in charge’ (Fielding and Lee 1998, p.167).

According to Welsh, there are two types of qualitative researchers, ‘those who feel that software is central to the analysis process and those who feel that it is unimportant and in fact can result in the ‘wrong’ kind of analysis taking place’ (2002, p. 4). Welsh (2002) further explains that in order to receive the best results from the data, it is important that the researcher does not rely primarily on manual or electronic methods. She believes that incorporating the best features of each can be highly effective to any research.

Welsh describes qualitative research using an analogy to ‘rich tapestry’. This analogy best depicts the overall picture of completing a research project using data analysis software. Welsh states that ‘the software is the loom that facilitates the knitting together of the tapestry, but the loom cannot determine the fine picture of the tapestry’ (2002 p.5). She further explains how ‘it can, through its advanced technology, speed up the process of producing the tapestry and it may also limit the weaver’s errors’ (Welsh 2002, p.5). The researcher concurs with Welsh on this topic, in that, once errors are kept to a minimum, data analysis software can greatly enhance the quality of analysis in her own research.

Overall, there is a growing consensus that the use of computer software for qualitative analysis can contribute to a more rigorous analysis (Richard and Richards, 1991; Altmann 2013, Bazeley and Jackson 2013). Using software ensures that the researcher is working more ‘methodically, thoroughly and attentively’ through their data (Bazely 2007). Geertz (1973) states that through this process, rich data does not degenerate as a result. Consequently, the researcher believes that the use of such software (NVivo12), inevitably promotes the reliability and validity of this research.

7.11 Credibility of Research

To ensure that this research is of a high standard, the researcher must ensure that the validity, reliability, and generalisability of the research is taken into account (Creswell and Poth 2018). Each aspect had a significant role to play in meriting the credibility of the research undertaken. According to Kvale (1996) and Marshall and Rossman (2011), credibility demands a true description of the phenomenon in question, as well as believable research claims. Many researchers maintain that establishing credibility is one of the most crucial indicators for strong qualitative inquiry (Maxwell 2005; Glensne 2011; Johnson and Christensen 2014). Concurring with Robson (2011), it is essential that both reliability and validity are accounted for in order to ensure the trustworthiness of research results.

7.11.1 Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of qualitative research has been widely questioned by researchers in the field (Long and Johnson 2000; Morse and Richards 2002). Some researchers argue that qualitative research does not hold the same merit with regards to rigor and validity as quantitative research. The researcher disagrees with this statement and would assert that qualitative research can be as rigorous as quantitative research. She believes that the rigour and validity of one’s study is contingent on the data collection instruments used, the analysis undertaken, along with the researcher’s own ability to remain unbiased and truthful throughout the study (Morse and Richards 2002).

Therefore, the researcher acknowledges the significant role validity and reliability has to play in any research (Robson 2011). She understands that validity and reliability operate simultaneously, ensuring that the information one uses is trustworthy, legitimate, and factual. According to the literature, ‘qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates

that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and projects' (Creswell 2009, p.190). To enhance the validity of this study, the researcher adopted the key criteria outlined by Lincoln and Gubas (1985). These criteria included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Moreover, as the researcher's study heavily relied on personal involvement, she agreed with Agar's (1993) claim that 'in qualitative data collection, the intensive personal involvement and in-depth responses of individuals secures a sufficient level of validity and reliability' (Cohen *et al.* 2011, p.181). To ensure that the validity of this study was maintained, the researcher considered the 'honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the research' (Cohen *et al.* 2007, p. 132). A brief overview of how the researcher achieved this is outlined hereunder.

The researcher addressed validity by following a number of procedures to enhance the accuracy of the findings. Firstly, the researcher ensured that she had chosen an appropriate time frame to carry out her research. She then carefully thought about selecting an appropriate methodology for answering the research question. After this, the researcher looked at all the data collection tools available to her and selected ones that best suited her study in order to 'catch accurate, representative, relevant and comprehensive data' (King *et al.* 1987). Consequently, the researcher selected semi-structured interviews as her primary source of gathering data. She also maintained a research diary for the duration of the study. The use of these data collection methods enabled the researcher to triangulate her data. Furthermore, the researcher upheld the validity of this study by piloting her interview questions in her base school. This ensured that the participants involved in the study could understand the questions being asked and answer them with ease. Additionally, she discussed her interview schedule with her critical friend and supervisor at length to make sure that the questions asked were suitable and phrased well in order to receive specific responses. The use of member checking also determined the accuracy of the findings and increased the validity of this study (Merriam 2009). Participants were given the opportunity to clarify and comment on the interviewer's interpretation of meaning. Moreover, the researcher also ensured that the sample selected was an appropriate one which was representative of the population. The researcher adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phased approach to thematic analysis (as outlined in section 7.10). This ensured the data collected were analysed to saturation in a rigorous fashion. Lastly, the appointment of a critical friend assisted the researcher in reducing research bias and in turn, adding to the validity of the findings. All of the above procedures were actively incorporated

into this study to enhance its validity. Therefore, in agreement with Long and Johnson, validity is the ‘quintessential element of qualitative research’ (2000, p. 35).

Similarly, the researcher addressed reliability in a variety of ways. Reliability refers to the consistency of one’s work in relation to that of their peers in the same domain who have carried out similar research (Parahoo 1997). It is also concerned with the ‘precision and accuracy’ of one’s findings. Therefore, to ensure that the reliability of this study was maintained the researcher remained consistent throughout her research and followed Gibbs (2007) suggested procedures to increase the reliability of her study. A brief overview of how the researcher achieved this is outlined hereunder.

Firstly, the researcher enhanced the reliability of the study by utilising the data collection instruments mentioned above. These instruments enabled the researcher to ‘arrive at a true estimate of the attributes that the instruments purport to measure’ (Mertens 2015, p.396). She then made sure that the participants selected were carefully chosen to ensure that the researcher would receive reliable data. After the participants had completed the interviews, the researcher transcribed them in full for analysis. In order to enhance the reliability of the interviews, the researcher checked the transcripts to ensure that there were no mistakes made in the transcription process. When the researcher began to code her findings, she wrote memos for herself to ensure that there were no alterations in the definition of the codes. The use of NVivo12 assisted the researcher with this process and ensured that she remained consistent throughout. She abided by the procedures outlined in the literature so that she would receive rich, valid and reliable data from her participants. The researcher firmly believes that it is ‘imperative for rigor to be pursued in qualitative research so that findings may carry conviction and strength’ (Long and Johnson 2000, p.35).

7.11.2 Triangulation

Literature states that researchers need to be mindful that no one data source can provide a comprehensive picture of the study (Bernstein and Tiegerman-Faber 2009; Merriam 2009). Triangulation is ‘a valuable and widely used strategy involving the use of multiple sources to enhance the rigour of the research’ (Robson and McCartan 2016, p.171). Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) assert that triangulation is an essential tool in identifying consistency across data sources. Furthermore, Robson defines triangulation as a ‘researchers approach employing more than one perspective, theory, participant, method, or analysis’ (2002, p.553). In order to ensure effective triangulation occurred, the researcher made use of ‘multiple and

varied sources...to provide corroborating evidence’ (Creswell 2007, p.208). The researcher ensured that a variety of data sources, across multiple settings were included in the qualitative sample i.e., principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs from four main cluster groups, an all girls’ mainstream school, an all boys’ mainstream school, a mixed gender school and a mixed gender school that is designated DEIS (see Figure 7.4), to explore the phenomenon of collaboration on the ground in Irish primary schools. This enabled the researcher to gain a cumulative view of the data retrieved, identifying commonalities and differences among participants (Silverman 2015). Furthermore, the researcher ensured that emergent data from interviewees within one cohort was cross referenced among the other members of their cohort, to ensure valid triangulation of the data, as shown in Figure 7.4.

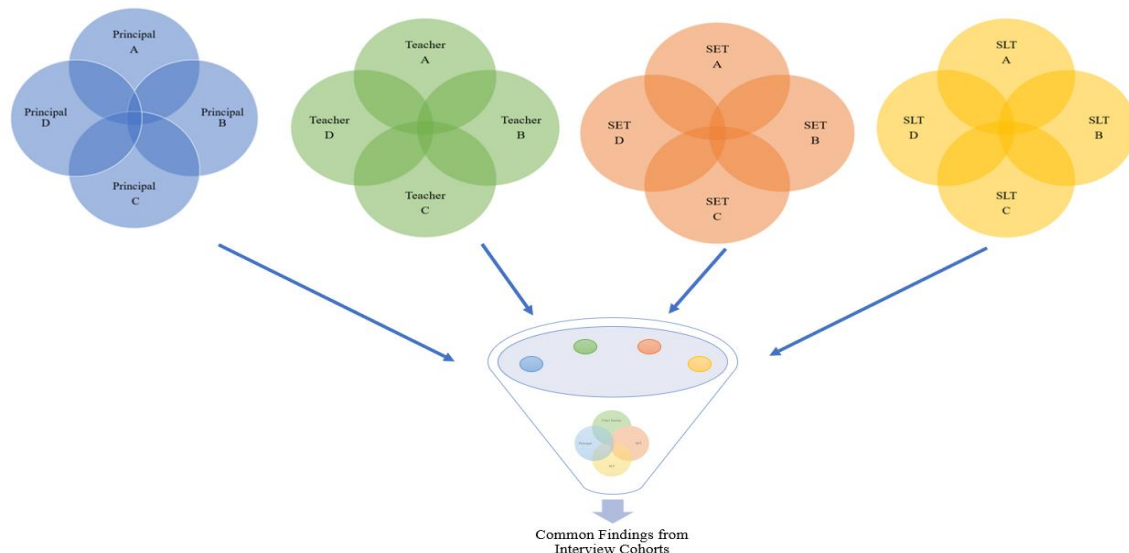


Figure 7.4 Data Triangulation between Interview Cohorts

The use of NVivo 12 for qualitative data management and analysis (see Section 7.10.2), supported the researcher in identifying common data from each of the four cohorts illustrated above (principals, teachers, SETs and SLTs). Similarities and differences established across the datasets enhanced the credibility and dependability of the findings, thus, adding rigour to the conclusions drawn from this inquiry which are outlined in the following chapter. Utilising computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo 12, further supported the researcher in creating an audit trail which illustrates the complexity of the work undertaken by the researcher (Woods *et al.* 2016). Feng and Behar-Horenstein (2019) maintain that the use of

such software has the ability to reduce bias within qualitative research. Furthermore, the use of a research diary supported data triangulation as it enabled the researcher to reflect on notes and observations recorded following the interviews carried out in the four main cluster groups.

7.12 Conclusion

This chapter provides a rationale for the chosen methodological tools used in light of the research question, which set out to examine collaborative practices between class teachers, SETs and SLTs to identify and meet the need of students with SLCD in Irish primary schools. It highlights the qualitative procedures employed, while describing the adopted social constructivist paradigm and its influence on the design. It also details the site, setting and sampling involved in the research. Moreover, this chapter illustrates the importance of validity and reliability, as well as, providing a detailed description of the ethical considerations pertaining to the study. Chapter Eight will present the main findings of the research.

Chapter Eight

Findings and Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter will present and analyse the findings of this research study which investigates collaborative practice between the class teacher, SET and SLT to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD, in Irish primary schools. This study fosters a pragmatic paradigm and analyses the meaning of collaborative practice within a Community of Practice (CoP), i.e., a school environment, by examining the lived experiences of principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs alike. As this study is rooted in the context of practice, it captures a realistic representation of key stakeholder's perspectives (n=27), examining what they define and classify as successful collaboration to support students with SLCD, as well as the various factors which impede such practice.

Additionally, this study attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice to support practitioner efficacy, support curriculum access and participation, especially for students with SLCD. Utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) rigorous approach to thematic analysis, three robust themes, along with a number of additional sub themes, were derived from the qualitative analysis undertaken. These include:

- The Value of Collaboration
- The Challenges to Effective Collaboration
- The Role of Continued Professional Development in Enabling Stakeholders to Meet the Needs of all Students

Section 7.10 provided a detailed account of the qualitative data analysis process, which led to the development of the three key themes presented in this chapter. Each theme and subtheme is analysed and discussed in conjunction with the research literature cited in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five. While the research focused on investigating collaborative practice among key stakeholders, the findings presented in this chapter seek to establish what is actually happening on the ground in schools, and how effective collaborative practice can be developed and sustained. The emerging data will be further evaluated through Lave and Wenger's CoP (1991) theoretical framework which underpinned the entire research study.

To begin, Table 8.1 presents an overview of the twenty-seven participants that took part in this study. In line with the ethical considerations outlined in Section 7.7, a pseudonym was assigned to each participating principal, class teacher, SET and SLT to ensure that their anonymity and confidentiality were upheld throughout the process. Providing the participants with pseudonyms enables the reader to examine the rich, in-depth data findings anonymously. Thus, the table below acts as a visual guide and aims to depict the range of participants and their varying roles within this field of research.

Pseudonyms	Participant Role	School Type	Practicing Name in Current Chapter
Rebecca	Class Teacher	All Girls	Rebecca, Teacher
Ellen	Class Teacher	All Girls	Ellen, Teacher
Linda	Class Teacher	All Girls	Linda, Teacher
Robyn	Class Teacher	DEIS	Robyn, Teacher
Donna	Class Teacher	DEIS	Donna, Teacher
Olivia	Class Teacher	Mixed	Olivia, Teacher
Nicola	Class Teacher	Mixed	Nicola, Teacher
Ava	Class Teacher	Mixed	Ava, Teacher
Alannah	Class Teacher	All Boys	Alannah, Teacher
Anne	Class Teacher	All Boys	Anne, Teacher
Kathleen	SET	All Girls	Kathleen, SET
Elana	SET	All Girls	Elana, SET
Amelia	SET	DEIS	Amelia, SET
Dave	SET	DEIS	Dave, SET
Eileen	SET	Mixed	Eileen, SET
Cian	SET	Mixed	Cian, SET
James	SET	All Boys	James, SET
Angela	SET	All Boys	Angela, SET
Conor	SET	All Boys	Conor, SET
Lynn	Principal	All Girls	Lynn, Principal
Ann	Principal	DEIS	Ann, Principal
Keith	Principal	Mixed	Keith, Principal
Nora	Principal	All Boys	Nora, Principal
Ailbhe	SLT	(Linked – All Girls)	Ailbhe, SLT
Jessica	SLT	(Linked – DEIS)	Jessica, SLT
Rosie	SLT	(Linked – Mixed)	Rosie, SLT
Neasa	SLT	(Linked – All Boys)	Neasa, SLT

Table 8.1 Participants’ Details

Furthermore, in order to quantify the qualitative responses gathered in this study, the researcher created participant descriptor tables which are illustrated below.

Qualitative Descriptor Table of Participant's Viewpoints

The tables below provide a qualitative description of the participants' viewpoints. Each phrase represents the scale of agreement witnessed among the participants. The reoccurring essence of these responses validate its truthfulness.

1-2 Participants	• 'It was mentioned...'
2-4 Participants	• 'A small number of participants...'
5 Participants	• 'Half of the teacher participants...'
6-7 Participants	• 'The majority of teacher participants...'
8-9 Participants	• 'Most of the teacher participants...'
10 Participants	• 'All of the teacher participants...'

Table 8.2 Class Teacher Participant Qualitative Descriptors

1-2 Participants	• 'It was mentioned...'
2-4 Participants	• 'A small number of participants...'
5-6 Participants	• 'The majority of SET participants...'
7-8 Participants	• 'Most of the SET participants...'
9 Participants	• 'All of the SET participants...'

Table 8.3 SET Participant Qualitative Descriptors

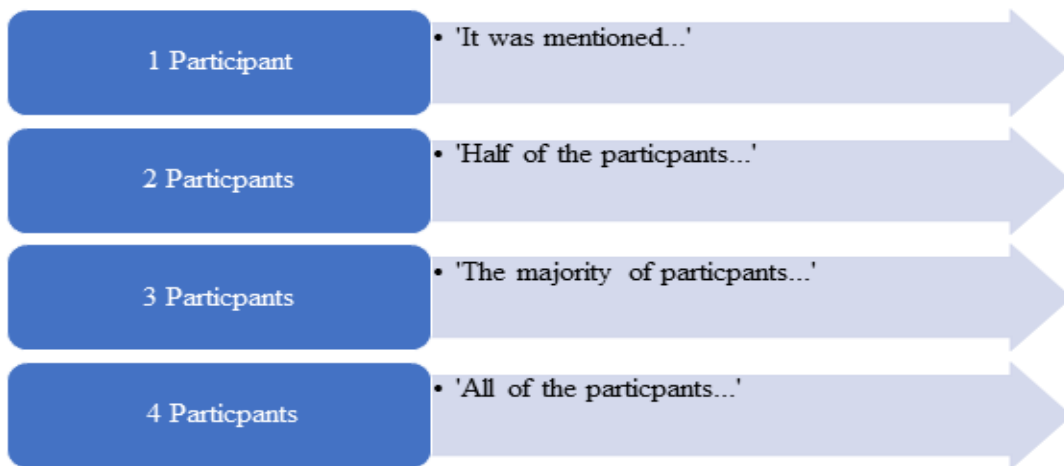


Table 8.4 SLT and Principal Participant Qualitative Descriptors

To begin the analysis of the research findings, it is imperative to start with Lave and Wenger’s theory of CoP (1991), which focuses on establishing partnerships to develop new ways of learning to support shared work (Colucci *et al.* 2002; Wegner-Trayner *et al.* 2015). Evidence from this research, along with the literature presented in Chapter Six, suggest that participating in a CoP is integral to the learning process and has a significant impact on both teaching and learning (Kosnik *et al.* 2015). Consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of this research (Lave and Wenger 1991), the first warranted finding will explore the value of collaboration from the participants' perspectives as outlined in Figure 8.1 below.

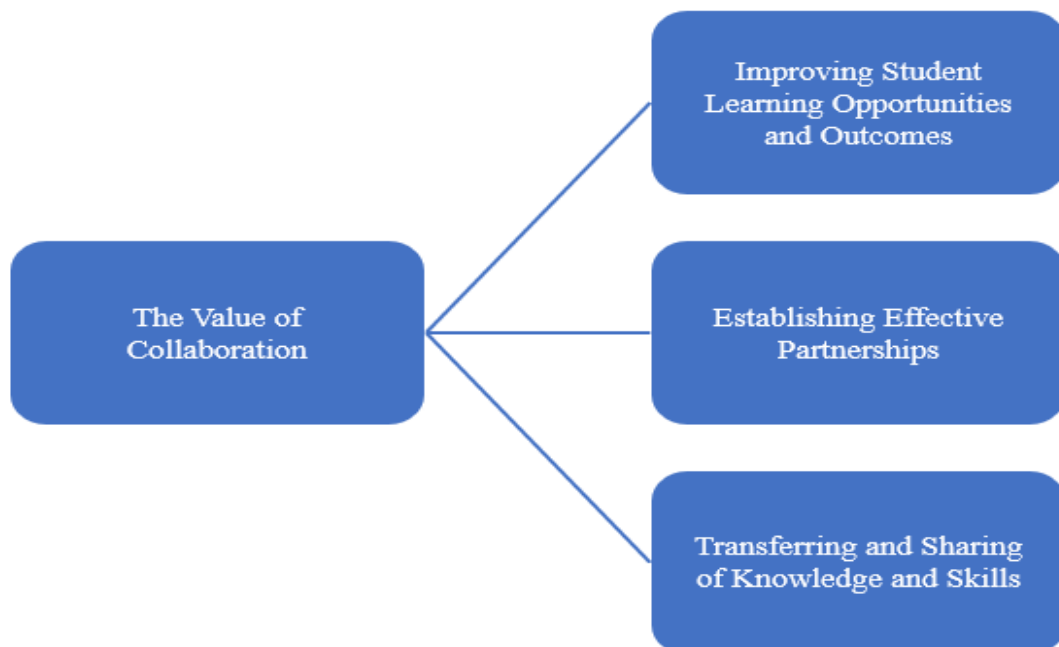


Figure 8.1 Theme One: The Value of Collaboration

8.2 Theme One: The Value of Collaboration

The value of collaboration is often underestimated (Lawson 2004; Mulholland and O' Connor 2016; Mora-Ruano *et al.* 2019). Concurring with Ainscow (2016), effective collaboration has the potential to foster inclusive practices, support student learning and respond to learner diversity. This sentiment was further reiterated by all participants in this study. They espoused the value of effective collaborative practice to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD. From analysing the interview transcripts, it became apparent that inter-professional practice between teachers and SLTs is warranted in order to meet the demands of both curriculum and therapy and to further promote optimum student learning (Tollerfield 2003; Wright and Kersner 2004; Glover *et al.* 2015; Mulholland and O' Connor 2016). Concurring with the literature outlined in Chapter Five, Jessica, a SLT, reported that due to the rising number of students needing specialised support in Irish primary schools (Law *et al.* 2001; Shevlin *et al.* 2013), engaging in collaborative practices "*is the only way to go*". In keeping with current literature, findings presented in a study carried out by Jago and Radford (2017) highlighted that, 'without collaborative practice the needs of the child cannot be fully met' (p.210). Jago and Radford (2017) posit that in order to meet the needs of students with SLCD joint target setting needs to be a priority. They believe that SLTs and teachers need to be given opportunities to collaborate, focusing on pedagogical approaches and assessment methods to support student language learning within the curriculum (DES 2019a). Similarly, Kathleen, a SET emphasised the importance of such practice, stating that "*sometimes the needs of the child are beyond our experience and specialist input is needed*". This coheres with Ava, a class teacher's assertion that in order to provide appropriate support to students with SLCD the class teacher, SET and SLT must work together, stating that "*it has to be a joint effort*". In essence, these findings echo longstanding sentiments expressed by researchers such as Anaby *et al.* (2019) and Borg and Drange (2019). Borg and Drange (2019) believe that due to the increasingly complex challenges that schools are facing, in relation to the student population, different professionals could utilise their expertise to support student outcomes. Such practices are rooted in Lave and Wenger's CoP framework (Lave and Wenger 1991). Despite the research of Pinkus (2005) and Weist *et al.* (2012) maintaining that inter-professional practice can be challenging and difficult to achieve, the participant data from this study along with the literature presented in Chapter Five, highlight the multiple benefits associated with engaging in collaborative practice. These include:

- Improving Student Learning Opportunities and Outcomes through Inter-Professional Practice
- Establishing Effective Partnerships through Collaboration (Relationship Building – Open Communication)
- Transfer and Sharing of Knowledge and Skills

8.2.1 Improving Student Learning Opportunities and Outcomes Through Inter-Professional Practice

Inter-professional practice is integral to the improvement of student learning and well-being (Hartas 2004; Lindsay *et al.* 2010; Mulholland and O’Connor 2016; Wilson *et al.* 2016). Concurring with current literature, most of the participants in this study (i.e., principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs) agreed that when teachers and SLTs engage in joint working practices, educational experiences for students are enhanced and greater student outcomes achieved (Law *et al.* 2002; Glover *et al.* 2015; McKean *et al.* 2017). Elana, a SET, emphasised the importance of inter-professional collaboration to support student language learning. She considers inter-professional collaboration with the SLTs as “*essential*”, which is outlined in her response below:

“I think it is essential...really really important. Otherwise, you’re really only guessing what’s for the best”

(Elana, SET)

Similarly, Neasa, a SLT, commented on the benefits of engaging in effective collaboration to improve student learning, asserting that when stakeholders work together in a systematic way:

“You see so much more functional and meaningful gains for a child”

(Neasa, SLT)

Aligning with the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (DCYA 2014), along with the participants perceptions of collaborative practice, the researcher would perceive ‘interagency collaboration’ (i.e., between class teachers and SLTs) as ‘transformational’ and essential in meeting the needs of all students (Jago and Radford 2017; Quigley, 2018). Concurring with research undertaken by Goddard and Goddard, there is a distinct correlation between teacher collaboration and student

advancement. Their findings revealed that ‘schools with greater levels of teacher collaboration did indeed have significantly higher levels of student advancement’ (2007, p.893). Therefore, the PLC signifies the importance of supporting ‘multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary’ practices to ensure that appropriate support is provided to students, especially those with SLCD (DES 2019a, p.4). Considering the above, all participants in this study emphasised the benefits of engaging in effective collaboration and communication with key stakeholders to foster Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1991) through the establishment of professional relationships, that enhance student learning (Korth *et al.* 2010; Mulholland and O’Connor 2016; Mora-Ruano *et al.* 2019; Hargreaves 2019). Ava, Olivia, Elana and Rosie highlighted the importance of teachers and SLTs working collaboratively, to support student learning opportunities and outcomes. From examining their responses, it is evident that although the participants had different roles to play (i.e., class teacher, SET and SLT), engaging in effective collaboration had an impact on their performance, thus leading to enhanced student learning (Jago and Radford 2017).

Ava, a class teacher, illustrated how effective communication and collaboration can improve student progress (Mora-Ruano *et al.* 2019). In her response below, she exemplified the power of online collaboration via email and the quick turnaround one can achieve when stakeholders work together. Ava’s response highlighted the importance of the class teacher working with the SLT to ensure that learning is reinforced in both settings (i.e., clinic and school):

“I was very concerned about this child’s progress and since speaking to the SLT I was able to tell the SLT about the child’s progress at school. The SLT told me about the child’s progress in her sessions and we have emailed ideas and work back and forth to each other and since doing that within about three or four weeks of doing that we both felt a huge improvement in the child’s development”

(Ava, Class Teacher)

This finding supports the view of Lacey, in that ‘the sharing or transferring of information across traditional disciplinary boundaries to enable one or two team members to be the primary workers, supported by others working as consultants’ is crucial to student success (2001, p. 9; Lawson *et al.* 2004; Quigley 2018; Travers 2021). Similarly, Olivia, a class teacher, highlighted the significance of engaging in inter-professional practice to support students with SLCD. In her response, she discussed her experience of collaborating with the SLT to improve practice, stating:

“It is absolutely crucial to collaborate with the SLT. If we were all trying to do different things nothing would be achieved, whereas because we have met and we have a common goal - the parents, SLT and the school, we are a lot more focused. We can all ensure that we are all supporting each other in supporting the child”

(Olivia, Class Teacher)

Considering Ava and Olivia’s responses, it is evident that collaborative practice is of paramount importance to both the student and the practitioner. Olivia emphasised the value of establishing “*common goals*”, while also ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the process (D’Amour *et al.* 2008). Such findings support those of Starling *et al.* (2012), and Archibald (2017). They imply that if the SLT and teacher can work collaboratively towards an agreed set of goals, inevitably students with SLCD will achieve greater outcomes. Olivia reiterates the significance of “*support*” and how stakeholders can achieve what they set out to do when collaboration is embedded in practice. Moreover, Elana, a SET, further explained the benefits of engaging with the SLT to support student learning. She described her own lived experience, highlighting how the SLT supported her teaching by providing her with strategies and practical advice:

“In the past I have met with the SLT for specific children, and I found that really helpful. For example, one child had difficulty with her speech, and it was all down to her breathing and once I knew that is what I needed to work on, that was really helpful”

(Elana, SET)

From examining the response above, it is reasonable to assume that if Elana had not received the support and guidance from the SLT she would have been unable to provide the appropriate support that her student required. Elana openly discussed how “*sometimes you misinterpret difficulties that children are having*” and therefore, elucidated the importance of collaborating with the SLT, stating that “*the more informed you are, the more prepared you are to support those children*”. Throughout interview discussion, Elana emphasised how SLTs are “*experts*” in the area and unlike teachers, have received specialised training to support students with SLCD. In this case, it was evident that the transfer of competencies and professional support played a crucial role in improving student outcomes (Quigley 2018). Equally, Rosie explained the benefits of collaboration from a SLTs perspective. She highlighted that when SLTs work closely with teachers and SETs there is some “*carryover*” in practice, which in turn reinforces student learning (Gallagher *et al.* 2019). Rosie emphasised

the importance of engaging in collaborative practice with schools, as she is often restricted by the amount of time she can spend with individual students (Hartas 2004). Rosie believes that such engagement with teachers and SETs innately supports those students with SLCD. This finding is exemplified in the following excerpt:

“A lot of the times when I am doing a block with a child in the clinic, I would reserve one of the sessions for in-school support so that I can show the staff working with the child the kind of activities we are working on and give them materials then, that they can carry over with”

(Rosie, SLT)

As illustrated above, Rosie claimed that in order for students to progress, teachers need to be made aware of the different activities and resources that they can incorporate into their teaching. According to Rosie, *“it definitely needs to be a collaborative process”*. SLTs and teachers need to be *“on the same page”* in order to support student development. Concurring with Mulholland and O’Connor (2016), Rosie believes that teachers and SETs have a greater insight into the abilities and needs of their students from working with them on a daily basis, asserting that:

“School staff often have such good insights into the child and how they are and how they react in school which can be totally different to how they act in a clinical setting. I don’t get to see them with their peers, which is often where issues with communication and social skills would arise”

(Rosie, SLT)

Reflecting on observations documented in the research diary, Rosie explained the vital role that the class teacher and SET play when trying to fully understand the student’s needs:

“Throughout our discussion Rosie kept emphasising how hard it is as an SLT to understand the students’ needs on a daily basis without the input of the class teacher. She mentioned how students often “act up” or “put on a show” when there is a visitor in the classroom, and that makes it difficult to see a true reflection of the student in one or two visits. Rosie would prefer to provide in-school support as she thinks that the environment is more natural for the child and interventions can be more successful”

(Research Diary 23rd October 2020)

Thus, Rosie firmly believes that interventions carried out by class teachers and SETs can be effective, once they are provided with the appropriate training and resources. This reflects a similar sentiment echoed by Jago and Radford, when they stated that interventions carried out by ‘non SLT professionals’ can be beneficial to the efforts of SLTs (2017 p.210). The data in

this study indicates that due to the increasing number of students presenting with SLCD in Irish primary schools (IASLT 2017; Rose *et al.* 2017), as well as SLT resources being heavily stretched, teachers and SETs do not have access to adequate professional support when working with students with SLCD. Conversely, the data in this study would suggest that when effective collaboration and communication is embedded in practice on the ground, greater student outcomes will be achieved (Chitiyo 2017; Jago and Radford 2017; Hansen *et al.* 2020). Donna, a class teacher, reiterates this point, stating the significance of stakeholders working closely together for the benefit of the student. She believes that:

“If you are able to plan and collaborate more and have a close relationship with outside agencies and have more knowledge, you are able to plan more for that child”

(Donna, Class Teacher)

The quotes above, taken from class teachers, SETs and SLTs, eloquently illustrate the perspectives of the majority of participants, highlighting the importance of establishing effective partnerships through inter-professional collaboration to support student learning and teacher efficacy (Doherty *et al.* 2011; Littlechild and Smith 2013; McGregor 2020). Concurring with Wenger (2011), successful collaboration is rooted in the concept of CoP, where collective learning is encouraged, valued and shared. In summary, data suggest that establishing effective partnerships is crucial in supporting overall student success (Colucci *et al.* 2002; Carpenter and Dickinson 2008; Sutton and Shouse 2016).

8.2.2 Establishing Effective Partnerships through Collaboration

The establishment of effective partnerships between class teachers, SETs and SLTs is perceived to be a fundamental prerequisite if students with SLCD are to receive the appropriate support that they require to access, participate in and benefit from the curriculum (Mulholland and O’Connor 2016). From analysing the data in this study, as well as the “Evaluation of In-School and Early Years Therapy Support Demonstration Project” (Lynch *et al.* 2020), it became apparent that relationship building, open communication and being immersed in the school environment were considered to be the most important factors in establishing effective partnerships. Concurring with Lave and Wenger (1991), these factors were also identified as key requirement for the establishment of CoPs. The three factors mentioned above will be discussed in greater detail hereunder.

8.2.2.1 Relationship Building

Throughout the interviews conducted as part of this study, all SLT participants stressed the importance of “*relationship building*”, in particular with class teachers and SETs to support student learning (Griffin and Shevlin 2011). Ailbhe, a SLT, began by explaining the importance of developing trusting relationships with professionals (i.e., class teachers and SETs). This is clearly elucidated in her response below:

“Building trusting relationships with the schools is pivotal. That is when we feel like we are collaborating. It is not that you’re ringing someone you don’t know. I know one school said to me that I am out there so much that I am practically one of the staff. That means that they don’t see me as an outside person. I am someone that they feel that they can collaborate with. I feel that I can collaborate with them. That relationship has made a massive difference to me being able to support the kids as well”

(Ailbhe, SLT)

Considering Ailbhe’s response, the data implies that by establishing consistent relationships with professionals over time, mutual trust and respect is fostered, thus, reducing professional isolation (Snell and Janney 2005; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Byrk 2016). Concurring with McKean *et al.* (2017), when effective partnerships are formed, like those referenced above, barriers between professionals begin to break down. Therefore, the “*us and them*” culture as illustrated by Neasa, another SLT, becomes less prevalent:

“It would break down this us and them culture. When you are working in the same space with someone, and doing something together, naturally those barriers start to break down”

(Neasa, SLT)

Such findings were further supported by Sunguya *et al.* (2014). They postulated that developing effective partnerships through inter-professional practice, has the potential to ‘break down the professional wall between disciplines, change individual attitudes and reduce stereotypes between professions’ (Sunguya *et al.* 2014, p.1). Likewise, in support of Ailbhe and Neasa’s perspective, Rosie, a SLT, reiterated the power of establishing effective partnerships with schools. She highlighted the advantages of the SLT working within the school environment to support individual and whole class instruction:

“I think having that relationship with specific schools is really powerful. As a student I worked in one school where the SLT was based in the school two days a week. This meant she had a really good relationship with the school staff, they all knew her, and it also allowed for whole class teaching by the SLT, which is really valuable because for

instance, if there is a child that uses Lámh, the whole class can be trained to understand Lámh signs”

(Rosie, SLT)

Rosie further stressed the importance of building working relationships in schools explaining that:

“In schools where I have a number of pupils rather than one or two, I would know the staff, and even the secretary when I come in the door, those relationships are so important”

(Rosie, SLT)

Considering Rosie’s points above, data indicate that consistency plays a crucial role in building effective working partnerships. The term “*consistency*” was referenced a total of twelve times by seven participants in varying roles, from all four schools. Jessica, a SLT, reiterates Rosie’s comment by asserting that, unless regular contact and communication is instigated “*it is very hard to make some sort of relationship or rapport with a professional in that way*”. Interestingly, a similar perspective was shared by Olivia, a class teacher. She explained that in order to support student learning, a team approach must be fostered:

“It has to be a team effort, from the parents and all the professionals involved, be it the SNA, the class teacher, the SET, the SLT and the OT. You know everyone needs to work together and do their best to provide support to the child”

(Olivia, Class Teacher)

Olivia further stated that, from her own experience “*liaising with the SLT and having regular contact and meetings with them has been beneficial*”. Therefore, interpreting Olivia’s quotes, the researcher would submit that establishing effective partnerships between all relevant stakeholders is crucial in meeting the needs of students with SLCD (McEwan 2009; Sutton and Shouse 2016; Lynch *et al.* 2020). In agreement with Carpenter and Dickinson (2016), most participants, in this study, implied that such practice unites professions, equipping them with a better understanding of each other’s strengths and values and what they can bring to the partnership. This sentiment is clearly articulated by Day, who regards ‘the building of joint, authentic purpose, trust and mutual understandings, and the provision of support and continuity of relationships through sustained interactivity’ as vital for success (1999 p.188).

Concurring with Day, Annie, a principal, expressed the value of building effective partnerships with outside agencies stating: “*I think it’s important that they [SLTs] get to know*

the school and the demographics of the school and what kind of support we need". While Annie acknowledges the benefits associated with developing effective partnerships, speaking from her own experience, Annie claims that *"the HSE are very fluid"*, and thus, asserts that it can be quite difficult to develop consistent relationships with SLTs when there is continuous changeover. Jessica, a SLT, voiced a similar concern. She highlighted the importance of building effective partnerships with schools, however, stated that it is often difficult to achieve when *"there is such constant changeover"*. As an SLT, Jessica believes *"consistency is key"*. In her interview, she emphasised how *"changeover can be quite difficult"* not only for students, but for parents and school staff also. Jessica stresses how the *"chopping and changing of therapists"* reduces the chances of building effective working relationships to support student learning. As reiterated by McCarthy (2011), the quality of the relationships developed among stakeholders is what determines the overall advancements students make. Thus, in light of Annie and Jessica's responses, data imply a need for a more cohesive approach to service delivery in order for teachers to feel supported in meeting the needs of their students (IASLT 2017; Lynch *et al.* 2020). Therefore, from analysing the data in this study, along with the literature presented in Chapter Five, it could be argued that establishing effective partnerships within a CoP relies on consistency, the clarification of roles and expectations (Griffin and Shevlin 2011), enabling equal power distribution among partners (Hargreaves and O' Connor 2018) and most importantly open communication (Battilana *et al.* 2010).

8.2.2.2 Open Communication

Open communication was consistently raised by all participants, in this study, as an important factor in establishing effective partnerships. This finding concurs with a study carried out by Liston (2004), which emphasised the importance of open communication in building trusting partnerships. It further complements the perspectives of Miller (2007) and Battilana *et al.* (2010), who assert that open communication is at the core of relationship building between school staff and external stakeholders. Jessica, a SLT, reiterated the importance of *"open communication"* when working with students presenting with SLCD. She maintains that when stakeholders engage in effective communication and collaboration the benefits are significant, stating that when such practices are implemented, *"we can actually meet those children's needs [SLCD]"*. Coinciding with Swick (2003), Jessica highlighted the importance of communication being a two-way process, which reflects equal power distribution among partners, asserting that:

“It is about finding the balance with me collaborating with schools and schools collaborating with me to make us better communication partners for the sake of the child”

(Jessica, SLT)

Therefore, in line with Swick (2003), findings obtained in this research would suggest that effective communication is not merely about the passing of information from one stakeholder to the next, it also occurs when individuals work together in shared decision making to enhance the process of achieving goals (Bush and Grotjohann 2020). Interestingly, a similar perspective was shared by Annie, the principal of a DEIS school. She emphasised the importance of management encouraging “*open communication*” among staff members to enhance teacher efficacy and to support student learning:

“In our school we would always encourage open communication. So, if a teacher feels that there is something not quite right that they can go to one of the resource teachers and say “listen I think this child might need a little additional support, have you any ideas?”. So, there is an awful lot of working together and amalgamation of ideas in the school”

(Annie, Principal)

Similar sentiments were echoed by all other principals who took part in this study. Lynn, Keith and Nora explained the importance of encouraging a working environment that reinforces effective communication and collaboration among colleagues (i.e., the sharing of resources, knowledge and skills) to enhance instruction as well as student learning. Upon in-depth analysis and triangulation of the data, it was evident that through effective communication, ideas can be shared, knowledge transferred, and interventions implemented (Sanders and Harvey 2002; Wenger 2011). Thus, it would seem warranted to suggest that establishing effective communication between parents, school staff and outside agencies is essential in order to support student learning (Swick 2003, Lacey 2013; Lynch *et al.* 2020). This coincides with Lave and Wenger’s CoP (1991), whereby collective learning is encouraged, valued and shared. This finding supports the assertion of James, a SET, that in order to support students with SLCD:

“Everyone has to play their part in the team...there has to be an open line of communication between parents, school, and outside agencies. It is all about collaboration and working off the same hymn sheet”

(James, SET)

All things considered, one could argue that engaging in effective communication is not always that simple. Most of the teacher participants, in this study, expressed varying opinions on this form of collaboration indicating that there can be a lack of effective communication between stakeholders (i.e., teachers and outside agencies, teachers and school management, teachers and teachers), which hinders the establishment of effective partnerships. Ailbhe, a SLT, highlights the different possible root causes for the failure to effectively communicate among stakeholders, stating that:

“Sometimes there might not be that open communication with the team and the school because maybe sometimes the parents don’t tell them that they are with the service or that they are receiving the support of a service. A child could be with a service but not be seen by intervention for months on end. Sometimes, as awful as it sounds parents give up on asking the team to communicate or vice versa if they have had a bad experience”

(Ailbhe, SLT)

Considering Ailbhe’s response above, Section 8.3 outlines, in greater detail, the many challenges principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs face around collaboration.

The interviews unequivocally highlighted the importance of liaising with parents, “*the primary caregivers*”, to support students with SLCD. This viewpoint was articulated by the majority, including Jessica, a SLT, and Linda, a class teacher. They both highlighted the benefits of open communication and parental involvement to enhance student progress. As a SLT, Jessica commented on the importance of being “*open*” with parents when discussing their child’s needs. She exemplified the significance of building effective partnerships and “*empowering*” parents by providing them with the necessary support:

“As humans, we want to fix things all the time, but sometimes things just need to be supported rather than fixed. I always tell the parents, “These are the goals, these are the strategies”. It is about empowering and educating parents on how they can help their child. It is about empowerment. I always say, information is the first step in therapy. Once a parent knows what to look out for and know what to do, they become therapists in their own right. They become therapists in a more natural environment for that child rather than coming into a very clinical setting with a stranger”

(Jessica, SLT)

Similarly, Linda stressed the importance of achieving a united approach between home and school, as advocated in the PLC (Ó Duibhir and Cummins 2012; DES 2019a), stating that

“communication between the school and home is so important when you are trying to teach language”. She further emphasised the value of working collaboratively with parents to support student development, asserting that:

“Parental involvement is crucial and from my experience I have seen where you arrange a meeting for parents to come in to discuss their child and they don’t turn up and then you have other parents who come in and they are doing so much at home and those are the kids who benefit and make huge progress. So really the parents have to meet you halfway because there is only so much as teachers and the learning support teachers can do. It has to be a joint effort”

(Linda, Teacher)

In interpreting Linda’s response above, it is evident that the more involved parents are in their child’s learning and development, the greater chance they have to succeed. (Síolta 2006; Travers *et al.* 2010). When parents and school staff engage (i.e., teachers and SETs) with one another and are committed in supporting the development and wellbeing of the student, improved academic outcomes are observed (Mulholland and O’Connor 2016; Gallagher 2019). Evidence provided at this point appears to correspond with Lopez *et al.* (2004). They argue that ‘parental attitudes, styles of interaction, behaviours, and relationships with schools are associated with children’s social development and academic performance’ (Lopez *et al.* 2004 p.2). Concurring with Travers *et al.* (2010) and Griffin and Shelvin (2011), data from this study claims that engaging in effective communication with parents and outside agencies, such as SLTs, is crucial in supporting instruction and ensuring that the appropriate support is provided to students with additional needs. Despite such positive findings, in relation to parental involvement in student success, Amelia, a SET, provides a more nuanced view into the realities of family structure and how it can affect the quality of intervention. In Amelia’s interview, she explained that all stakeholders need to remain mindful that parental involvement cannot always be relied on. Amelia states “*ideally if two parents are there at home and have the time available, they would probably be seen as a very important factor*”. However, Amelia further explained that given varied family circumstances, parental involvement is not always possible and thus, the home environment is not always “*an ideal situation for every child*”.

Therefore, considering the responses above, data indicate the benefits associated with having all stakeholders immersed in the school environment (Lynch *et al.* 2020), a specific CoP. In doing so, this enables the stakeholders to build relationships, foster open communication and crucially support students to access, participate in and benefit from the

curriculum (Government of Ireland 2004; McKean *et al.* 2017; DES 2017a). Furthermore, the school environment serves as the centre point where professional stakeholders, as well as parents, meet and interact during the course of the student's education. Considering Amelia's concerns, quoted above, immersion of all stakeholders in the school environment, as implemented in the Demonstration Project (DES 2018) (see Section 2.7.2) has the potential to cultivate effective CoPs (Lave and Wenger 1991) whereby, stakeholders can overcome the difficulties encountered when engaging in open communication and establishing effective partnerships (Lacey 2013; Lynch *et al.* 2020).

8.2.2.3 Being Immersed in the School Environment

Upon analysis of the interview transcripts, it became apparent that all SLT participants believed that being immersed in the school environment had a significant role to play in developing effective partnerships with teachers, as well as having the ability to provide tailored support to enhance overall instruction and student learning (Gallagher 2019). Such findings further support those of Jago and Radford (2017). In their study, positive interpersonal relationships between SLTs and school staff were seen as an enabler of effective collaboration. Participants in Jago and Radford's study (2017) highlighted the benefits of working within the school environment as means of supporting speech and language therapy services. Such findings were mirrored by both SLT and teacher participants who took part in this research. It was evident from the interview transcripts that there is a desire to move away from the traditional model of therapy provision and prioritise a more collaborative, evidence-based approach to school-based therapy (Glover *et al.* 2015; Lynch *et al.* 2020).

The preference for SLTs to be immersed in the school environment, as opposed to working with students in a clinical setting, was also a finding by Glover *et al.* (2015). Data suggest that where SLTs spent more time onsite in schools, greater opportunities for engagement and collaboration were reported, therefore leading to improved relationships (Law *et al.* 2001; Law *et al.* 2002; Lacey 2013; Lynch *et al.* 2020). Ailbhe, a SLT, provided a comprehensive explanation as to why she advocates in-school support as opposed to supporting students in a clinical setting. In her response, she highlighted the importance of ensuring that support is "*functional*" and that skills taught can be transferred and generalised in both the classroom and to other appropriate settings. Concurring with Anaby *et al.* (2019), Ailbhe emphasises the need to explore new ways of working that support the establishment of effective CoPs which promote strong 'therapist-education' partnerships (Lynch *et al.* 2020). Ailbhe

maintains that being immersed in the school environment is the only way that this can be successfully achieved:

“If you are in school, you can support the child more, it is a lot more functional. I don’t know how functional it is to bring a child into a clinic setting. They can learn to do what I expect them to do or I can teach them a skill. That doesn’t mean that they can generalise that skill. Is that functional or a good use of time? I don’t think so. If you can spend the time with those kids in their everyday environments and support them in the moment and support staff to continue to support them, it is so much more achievable, and you are setting that child up for success”

(Ailbhe, SLT)

From examining Ailbhe’s response, it is evident that supports for language learning are best undertaken in natural environments and through everyday activities in the student’s life (Lindsay *et al.* 2010; Law *et al.* 2012; Gallagher 2019), indicating the centrality of school in the language learning process. Thus, Ailbhe believes that working closely with key stakeholders (i.e., teachers and SETs) is of utmost importance when it comes to supporting students with SLCD (Dockrell *et al.* 2014). Ailbhe further maintains that engaging in collaborative practice within the school setting can enhance effective working partnerships, equipping stakeholders with the necessary skills and knowledge that they need:

“If you are working collaboratively, you can share some of your knowledge about how to make environments more communication friendly, you are hoping that this knowledge will be taken on and that teachers will go off with that knowledge going forward and use those strategies within the whole school setting”

(Ailbhe, SLT)

Such findings suggest that collaborative practice allows for different perspectives to contribute to the development of strategies to support student learning (Whitmire 2002; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Wilson *et al.* 2015). Similar sentiments were echoed by Neasa, a SLT. She maintains that when professionals from different backgrounds work together onsite, their unique skillsets “*can complement each other*”. According to most of the participants, when stakeholders are immersed in the school environment, it facilitates collective input, builds inter-professional partnerships, improves student outcomes and enhances teacher efficacy (McKean *et al.* 2017). This is evident in the response below:

“If you can work together and see what is working or adjust something if it is not working, then you are going to have much speedier outcomes than the current model. Your role is also to support teacher’s confidence, skills and knowledge so that they are set up to go off and do those things because they feel more equipped to help those kids.

Overtime, they won't need us [SLTs] so much and they are more confident in what they are doing"

(Ailbhe, SLT)

Concurring with Borg and Drange (2019), 'better utilisation and coordination of existing resources, including providing schools with more and varied expertise through collaborative inter-professional teams, can help strengthen preventive work and the efforts related to early intervention and rapid assistance for students who need additional support from other services' (p.252). According to Rebecca, a class teacher, having specialist support such as SLTs embedded in the school environment to "*bounce queries off*", "*point you in the right direction*" and to provide teachers with "*more knowledge*" is hugely beneficial. Rebecca believes that such practice is necessary to support students with SLCD, while also focusing on early identification and intervention (Dockrell *et al.* 2014). Ellen, a class teacher further explained the importance of inter-professional collaboration and the benefits associated with having the SLT onsite within the school, stating how:

"They [SLTs] might see something different to what you're seeing, when you're seeing a child every day"

(Ellen, Class Teacher)

Ellen argues that such support enables teachers to identify students with SLCD at an earlier stage, reducing the chances of students being left undiagnosed (McGregor 2020) and inappropriately supported. Ellen believes that "*being able to get advice*" from the "*experts*", is invaluable and can have a significant impact on student's success. The notion of the SLT being the expert/ having the expertise was referenced a total of nineteen times by thirteen participants in varying roles, from all four schools. Ellen maintains that when SLTs are immersed within the school environment they can "*collaborate with your support plan...see if the goals set are appropriate and if the child is meeting those goals*". Engaging in joint working practices, as mentioned by the participants above, inevitably leads to 'more creative solutions of shared problems, a more holistic approach to addressing student's needs and an increased sense of personal and professional support' (Quigley 2018, p.71). In interpreting the participants' responses, it is reasonable to assume that when teachers and SLTs engage in effective collaborative practice, the therapist-educator relationship is enhanced. From analysing the data in this study, it was evident that all class teachers and SETs valued the opportunity to work closely with therapists to support participation and inclusion. Therefore,

in agreement with Rafferty (2014), the data would suggest that a multi-disciplinary approach, with the integration of services across health and education, is needed to support early intervention, the transfer and sharing knowledge and skills, and to reduce the wait time to access speech and language therapy services (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020).

8.2.3 Transfer and Sharing of Knowledge and Skills between Professionals

The transfer and sharing of knowledge and skills between teachers and SLTs is a crucial component and was deemed to be one of the major benefits of effective collaboration by all participants in this study. Considering the participants' responses, as well as current literature (Tollerfield 2003; Hartas 2004; Hall 2005; Archibald 2017), it became apparent that teachers and SLTs have different but complementary skills in developing students' speech, language and communication proficiencies (Glover *et al.* 2015). SLTs are trained to 'take a linguistically analytical approach to language' specifically focusing on students' speech, language and communication difficulties (Wright and Kersner 1999, p.201), while teacher's knowledge and skills related specifically to the curriculum and instruction. Therefore, it is unsurprising that all participants acknowledged the unique skillset and contribution that each stakeholder has to offer and consequently explained the need for a more holistic approach to support student intervention, an approach which combines the skills of class teachers, SETs, SLTs and parents alike (Roy *et al.* 2014; Lynch *et al.* 2020). Similar findings were mirrored by McKean *et al.* (2017). Their research indicated that there are greater benefits achieved from co-practice (McKean *et al.* 2017), where stakeholders are involved in observations, demonstrations and are provided with constructive feedback (Lynch *et al.* 2020). Coinciding with Hall (2005) and Mulholland and O' Connor (2016), all participants, in this study, emphasised the value of sharing knowledge between professionals and thus, voiced their desire for more practical advice along with "*tips and tricks*" to support teaching and learning. Most of the class teachers and SETs, reported wanting increased knowledge in how to support students with SLCD in the classroom. Such findings were clearly depicted in both Donna, a class teacher and Angela, a SET's, responses below.

"I would love to gain further knowledge to help the children and their parents with different tips. The theory [around collaboration] is very interesting...but it is lovely to have practical tips that you can then transfer to the classroom, even little things like the visual timetables... It would be lovely to have further tips. Even how the child is sitting or positioned in the classroom, sometimes you feel a little at sea, thinking am I doing this right?"

(Donna, Class Teacher)

Donna expressed the need for SLTs to provide teachers with more practical tips that can be implemented in the classroom setting and further adapted and used by parents at home to support student learning. Donna believed that the transfer and sharing of knowledge and skills across practitioners has immense benefits for both parties involved (Tollerfield 2003; Hartas 2004; Gallagher *et al.* 2019) and ultimately the student. Angela also echoed a desire to work more closely with the SLT. Her response focused on the need for SLT support to enhance practice and subsequently student progress:

“I was looking forward to meeting the SLT as to how and what I can do to help the child...that is their field of work. They are the experts. They are the teachers in that sense. They can tell us, show us and guide us what to do and we can deliver that in the best way that we can using the resources that we have. It is so important”

(Angela, SET)

Evidently, Angela perceives collaboration with the SLT as essential. She highlighted that the SLT is the “*expert*” in the field and therefore, has the ability to educate teachers in the areas of speech and language to support student learning (Mitchell 2008; Hansen *et al.* 2020). Such findings build on the advice of Glover *et al.* (2015) and McGee (2004) who advocate the importance of sharing specialist knowledge and skills to support student learning. Likewise, Alannah, a class teacher stressed the importance of working with the SLT to gain specific knowledge to support students with language difficulties. Despite Alannah not getting the opportunity to meet the SLT in person, she explained that she engaged in various phone conversations and was sent resources which were extremely beneficial. This is representative of a small number of teachers who took part in this study:

“She [SLT] was giving me loads of advice and loads of different things I could try. I was like “Oh my God, why aren’t we put in contact with each other at the start of the year so I could have all this information...Again, his SLT sent me this huge folder of things that I could do. I was like “Oh my God, this is amazing”. I was trying to Google stuff on my own. I think it is really important to see what they have. They have this huge bank of knowledge that could help you”

(Alannah, Class Teacher)

In keeping with Donna, Angela and Alannah’s points above, Robyn too exemplified the importance of collaborating with the SLT to ensure that the needs of all students are met, by

gaining additional knowledge and skills (Gallagher *et al.* 2019). This is emphasised in her response below:

“I think it’s very important because the SLT is the one who has the expertise you know; they have the resources, and you know they can share that with you. But ultimately, they are the ones who have the most knowledge in that area”

(Robyn, Class Teacher)

Such findings further support those of Blask who maintain that ‘one of the ways teachers gain knowledge about their students is through collaboration with specialists’ (2011 p.4). Moreover, similar findings were rooted in Nora’s statement. From the perspective of a principal, Nora emphasised the importance of transferring and sharing knowledge and resources between professionals to support student learning. Concurring with Mitchell (2015), such collaborative practice enable expertise to share resources and ideas while also discussing solutions to problems that may be encumbering the students’ progress. Nora, like Alannah, highlighted how collaboration does not necessarily need to be carried out face-to-face in order for it to be successful. Nora explained how online collaboration with the SLT through “Zoom” worked in her school setting to further support instruction. Her quote below eloquently depicts the shift in the use of technology in the contemporary classroom:

“We have one case in particular, where the therapist is doing it via Zoom. She has done a session or two in school so that the class teacher could attend which was actually very good and useful”

(Nora, Principal)

Such findings are further supported by Samuel (2015). Samuel (2015) believes that online collaboration has its own benefits attached and can therefore be just as valuable. In the following excerpt, Nora further emphasised the importance of the SLT effectively working with the class teacher and SET to plan and deliver support (Starling *et al.* 2012; Archibald 2017). She maintained that gathering information from the SLT is crucial to support not only the individual student that the SLT is working with, but other students who may be presenting with similar difficulties. Nora explained how she compiled an archive of information from her collaboration and coordination with various SLTs over the years:

“There are reports that would have additional information attached that psychologist or OTs or SLTs have given that would provide generic information in relation to a specific difficulty. We have summarised that information into an independent folder so it can be used. We have a file let’s say with additional information about dyspraxia,

additional information about speech and language and resources that will help those pupils... It is brilliant actually because sometimes we do get these nuggets that can be helpful. We have built up quite a bank of resources that have helped other children”

(Nora, Principal)

Nora’s response shows how stakeholders in her school rely on a compilation of what Nora deems “nuggets”, taken from many different students’ external agency reports (i.e., SLT, OT and psychologists), without identifying a particular student or exposing their sensitive information. Nora explains how this vital information is then adapted to specific student support cases. However, the fact that Nora has to compile a bank of generic information based on a particular diagnosis to support student learning in her school, suggests that there is a lack of available resources to support school staff (Conroy and Noone, 2014). This highlights the harsh reality of accessing specialist services in the Irish context (Travers 2021). Similar findings were further reported by Keith, a principal. He eloquently described his experience of engaging with outside agencies (i.e., the SLT) to support intervention and enhance instruction by sharing knowledge:

“I would have a lot of contact with the SLT again by phone, by email and what we actually did was we had a number of support teachers go observe a session with the identified SLT...The SLT would provide them with strategies and content to bring back to the school. And then in the school we would do targeted interventions session. What you would learn from this observation visit on one pupil can be completely transferable to another pupil, so we would set up mini meetings then within the SET team to spread the knowledge. So I found that great because it supported the child which is what I wanted”

(Keith, Principal)

In Keith’s response above, he discusses the positive impact of sharing knowledge and skills among professionals. Keith further highlights the benefits of the SET observing the SLT in action and how the transferability of knowledge and skills has the ability to support many students presenting with similar difficulties. He signifies the importance of developing effective CoPs where meaningful interactions are fostered to support student learning (Lave and Wenger 1991; Laluevein 2010). In this case, Keith particularly stresses the importance of inter-professional practice and the value of engaging in effective collaboration. He emphasises the significance of the SET getting to “sit in on a session” and the SLT providing the SET with “strategies and content to bring back to the school”. The data, in this study, would suggest that

such practice equips stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills that they require to support student learning. This form of professional development, whereby the learner shares and distributes information among their colleagues was perceived to be more beneficial and effective in the long term (Lawlor 2014). Cian, a SET, reiterated this point, asserting that upskilling school staff so that they can provide CPD to fellow colleagues as mentioned in Keith's quote above, "*stops this idea that we have to bring these two experts from outside in who don't really know the school and who don't really know the setting.*". Cian indicates the importance of stakeholders supporting one another through collaborative practice to support student learning and to enhance teacher competency by modifying existing practices. In agreement with Coolahan, it is evident that, effective, meaningful and well-designed CPD has the capacity to 'unleash new energies, foster fresh enthusiasm, cultivate deeper understanding and fine-hone pedagogical skills' (cited in Hogan *et al.* 2007, p.i). Therefore, data suggest that through continued strengthening of class teachers and SETs capacity to identify and support SLCD, through information sharing, CPD (see Section 8.4), and support, greater outcomes are achieved (Mulholland and O'Connor 2016).

From analysing the participant transcripts, it was evident that the transfer and sharing of knowledge and skills was postulated as a priority in supporting intervention. Data, presented in this section, appear to concur with findings presented by Glover *et al.* (2015), which illustrate that shared knowledge is powerful. Teachers and SLTs who work collaboratively were found to mutually share knowledge and skills. This aligns with Lave and Wenger's theory of CoP, which encourages stakeholders to collaboratively 'look at practice in new ways, ask questions and develop new criteria for competence' (Wenger 1998, p.218). Most teacher participants and all principal participants in this study, expressed the benefits of such practice asserting that it allowed them to "*bounce ideas off each other*" and "*mirror strategies*" which were happening in the SLT sessions. Linda, a class teacher, emphasised the benefits of collaborating with the SLT, asserting that they have "*good ways and fun ways*" of supporting language development in the classroom. Linda articulately described her experience of working with the SLT and how collaborative practices between key stakeholders can significantly support student progress:

"When I met with the SLT it was simple little games that she was doing with the kids and you know you could see how that really helped them, so just to meet a SLT would just give us little tips and tricks maybe to try, that could help and then obviously if the child is doing that work with a SLT and then we did a little bit in school even through the learning support team and then they were doing bits at home all of that collaboration would really help to bring a child on"

(Linda, Class Teacher)

It is widely acknowledged in the literature that these types of interactions enhance working relationships, building on individuals' strengths and knowledge (Snell and Janney 2005; Mitchell, 2008), ensuring that appropriate support is provided to students with SLCD (Law *et al.* 2012; Lindsay and Dockrell 2012; Ebbels 2014; Bishop *et al.* 2016; Dockrell *et al.* 2019). While the above participants focused on collaborating with the SLT to gain knowledge, Kathleen, a SET, stressed the importance of collaborating with colleagues, stating that "*informal support of fellow SETs and teachers in the form of sharing resources, ideas and methodologies that have been successful*" can significantly enhance practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015), and from her own lived experience has supported her in addressing and monitoring students with SLCD. Her response implied that as professionals, teachers can learn an immense amount of knowledge from one another. Such findings align with Mulholland and O'Connor, who suggest that 'for teachers, collaboration with colleagues intrinsically strengthens their capacity for inclusion, both encouraging and facilitating an organic process of professional development through sustained access to, and sharing of, knowledge and expertise' (2016, p. 1072). The researcher would assert that if such collaboration continues, over time there is a greater chance of establishing effective CoPs within the school environment (Lave and Wenger 1991).

From in-depth analysis of the data, it became apparent that all stakeholders signified the importance of learning as a process of social participation, where stakeholders gain knowledge and skills from engaging in meaningful interactions with more experienced individuals (Wenger 1998). Coinciding with Lave and Wenger's theory of CoP (1991), the data in this study highlighted how individual stakeholders have the ability to bring specific knowledge, skills and expertise to the organisation. In a school setting, as noted by Kathleen, a SET, each stakeholder is a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) in their own domain (Vygotsky 1978). She explained how class teachers and SETs can support one another by sharing "*resources, ideas and methodologies*". Conversely, data suggest that the same applies for teachers and SLTs (Lawson 2004). Teachers can rely on SLTs for information pertaining to specific SLCD and strategies to support student learning. While the SLT can rely on teachers to gain a more comprehensive view of the student within the classroom environment during the school day (Glover *et al.* 2015; Wilson *et al.* 2015; Archibald 2017). Therefore, the data along with the literature presented in Chapter Five, suggest that sharing this type of information

through inter-professional collaboration, can have a significant impact on student learning (Gallagher *et al.* 2019). Consequently, Neasa, a SLT, highlights the benefits of collaborating with teachers and SETs by sharing knowledge and expertise. In her response, Neasa acknowledges the complementary skill set that both professionals have and the importance of it being bidirectional for both counterparts:

“We understand the children better [Students with SLCD]. For example, language disorder is often referred to as a hidden disability. You don’t look at a child and know. Often teachers have been quite surprised when we talk about a behaviour in the classroom. I can come at it from the angle of a speech therapist and say, well maybe the reason that your note is saying that halfway through the oral language lesson their attention is completely gone, well actually think about how much the language load is increased there. They are probably lost at that point. They are really struggling. Compare that to when there is a lower language load for a lesson of the same length, they actually do a lot better. It is actually like a light bulb goes on, sometimes they [teachers]are like “Oh my God”

(Neasa, SLT)

Neasa further explained how the class teacher can also support the SLT by providing practical ideas that can be utilised in the clinical setting to prevent the student from disengaging:

“Oh, do you know when that happens in class what really works well is when we pair it with this sort of activity, or we pair it with this movement”

(Neasa, SLT)

This type of knowledge sharing is perceived to be vital in supporting the SLT who does not always have first-hand experience of the student’s in-class behaviour. In the example that Neasa provided above, the class teacher can offer unique insights into what aids the students' learning. In this case, a specific ‘*activity*’ or ‘*movement*’. Concurring with Wilson *et al.* (2015), this form of knowledge sharing in an inter-professional context, is a testament to the true value of collaboration. It emphasises the significance of developing effective CoP to promote professional growth by creating an environment wherein educators learn from one another (Hadar and Brody 2010; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

In summary, evidence provided at this point argues that, due to the rapid change of our educational landscape and the greater diversity of students integrated into mainstream classes, it has never been more appropriate for teachers, SETs and SLTs to engage in reflective and

collaborative practice to support inclusion (Mulholland and O' Connor 2016; Hansen *et al.* 2020; Kenny *et al.* 2020). From analysing the interview transcripts, all participants (n=27) agreed that effective inter-professional collaboration enhances student learning and engagement, supports positive behaviour, increases teacher efficacy (Donohoo *et al.* 2018), while also creating a more positive working environment by developing effective partnerships (Burke and Hodapp 2014; Francis *et al.* 2016). Therefore, the data in this study would suggest that the integration of stakeholders such as SLTs within the school environment witnessed in the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020), has the ability to enhance practice, establish effective working partnerships, as well as meet the needs of students presenting with SLCD in a way that traditional clinic-based services cannot. Based on these findings, the researcher maintains that, if teachers and SLTs work collaboratively towards an agreed set of goals, by sharing knowledge and resources, students with SLCD will inevitably achieve greater outcomes (Starling *et al.* 2012; Archibald 2017; Gallagher *et al.* 2019). In essence, such findings support Lave and Wenger's concept of CoP theory, which encourages stakeholders to 'look at practice in new ways, ask questions and develop new criteria for competence' (Wenger 1998, p.218). Concurring with O'Kelly, the use of CoP within education has become an increasingly valuable framework for 'sharing practice, resources and ideas' (2016, p.5). Stemming from such findings, the data in this section, along with the extant literature presented in Chapter Five, indicates that collaboration across professionals like those mentioned above is necessary in supporting the increasingly complex needs of students in school settings (Borg and Drange 2019).

Although Jago and Radford (2017), acknowledge the benefits of collaborative practice in improving the delivery of intervention and supporting student advancements, they also recognised the challenges of enacting collaborative practice within an educational setting (Archibald 2017; Bishop 2014; Dockrell *et al.* 2017). This theme was consistently raised by all participants in this study. Therefore, the researcher will explore the challenges to effective collaboration voiced by the participants in the subsequent section (see Figure 8.2).

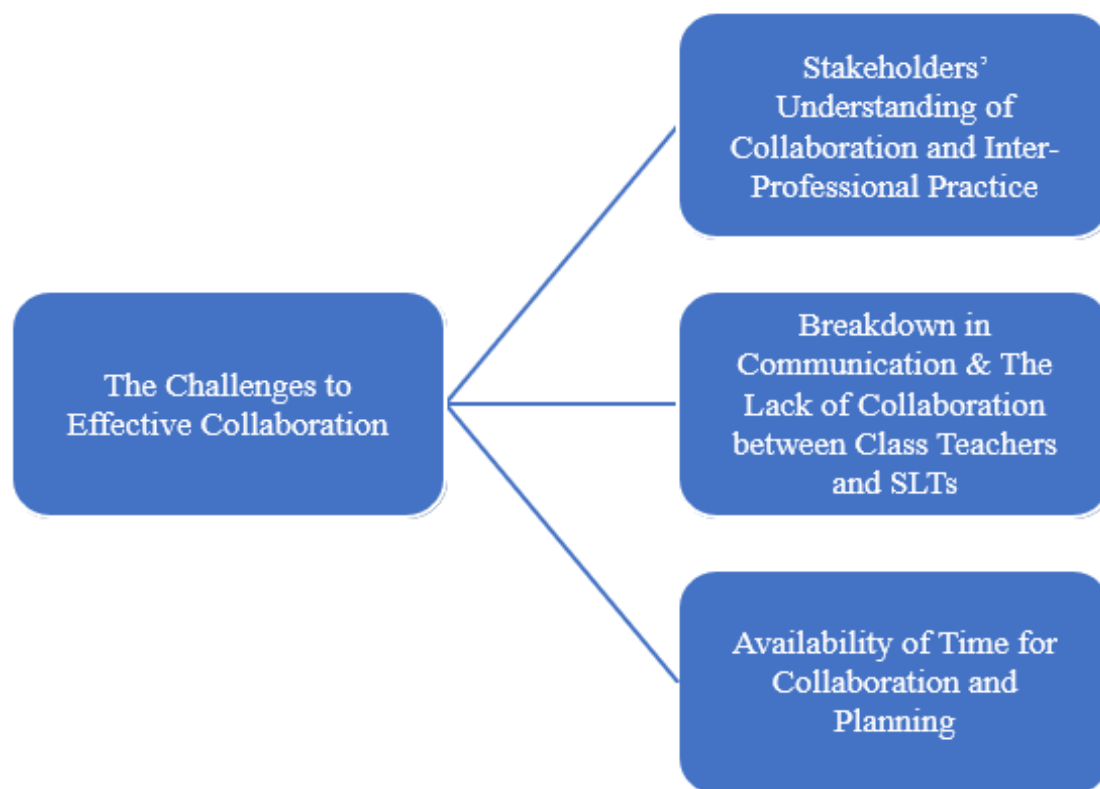


Figure 8.2 Theme Two: The Challenges to Effective Collaboration

8.3. Theme Two: The Challenges to Effective Collaboration

The challenges to effective collaboration were strongly voiced by all participants in this study. It was evident from the interview transcripts that, ‘what appears in theory to be a simple knowledge swap, within inter-professional practice, leading to a plethora of benefits, in practice can be difficult to achieve and fraught with epistemological challenges’ (Quigley 2018, p.71). According to the data presented in this chapter, along with the literature explored in Chapter Five, three distinct sub themes were identified. These include:

- Stakeholders Understanding of Collaboration and Inter-Professional Practice
- The Breakdown in Communication and The Lack of Coordination between Services
- Availability of Time to Collaborate

Guided by the theoretical framework of this study, each sub theme will be discussed in greater detail hereunder.

8.3.1 Stakeholders Understanding of Collaboration and Inter-Professional Practice

Given the title of this research, it was not surprising that ‘collaboration’ was the predominant theme, which emerged from the data. Over the past decade the term ‘teacher collaboration’ has received increasing attention and has been used in many DES policy recommendations (DES 2015; DES 2017a; DES 2017b; DES 2018; DES 2019a; Lynch *et al.* 2020). While collaborative practices are seen to be a crucial component to effective instruction, inclusion and overall school improvements (DuFour 2007; Harris and Jones 2010; Levine and Marcus 2010; Doherty *et al.* 2011; Glover *et al.* 2015), it can be discerned from the qualitative data collected in this study, that the word ‘collaboration’ is very broad and can be interpreted in many ways (Friend *et al.* 2010; Laluevein 2010; Vangrieken *et al.* 2015). Therefore, according to the data presented in this study, the researcher discovered that the inconsistency and ambiguity around the term ‘collaboration’ amongst stakeholders has caused great confusion (Reeves *et al.* 2011; Lacey 2013; Quigley 2018). The researcher would submit that the primary reason for this is that there is no concrete definition of collaboration at policy level in Ireland (Fullan 2008; McCarthy 2011).

Concurring with Little, the constructs of collaboration found in the literature tend to be ‘conceptually amorphous’ (1990, p.509). Thus, it could be argued that the lack of conceptual clarity has hindered effective collaboration among stakeholders (Slater 2004). Indeed, Lacey lends credence to this assertion when she states that there has been ‘a terminological quagmire’ regarding the terms used to signify different forms of interprofessional collaboration (2013, p.9) (see Section 5.2). Based on the qualitative data collected in this study, it became apparent that all class teachers, SETs and SLTs had varying interpretations of collaboration and what it involved (Hartas 2004; Wilson *et al.* 2015; Weddle *et al.* 2019). Similar to Robinson and Buly (2007), when the participants in this study were asked to describe their experiences of collaboration, and how they engage in collaborative practice, a diverse range of opinions and subtle differences in terminology were obtained (see Figure 8.3).

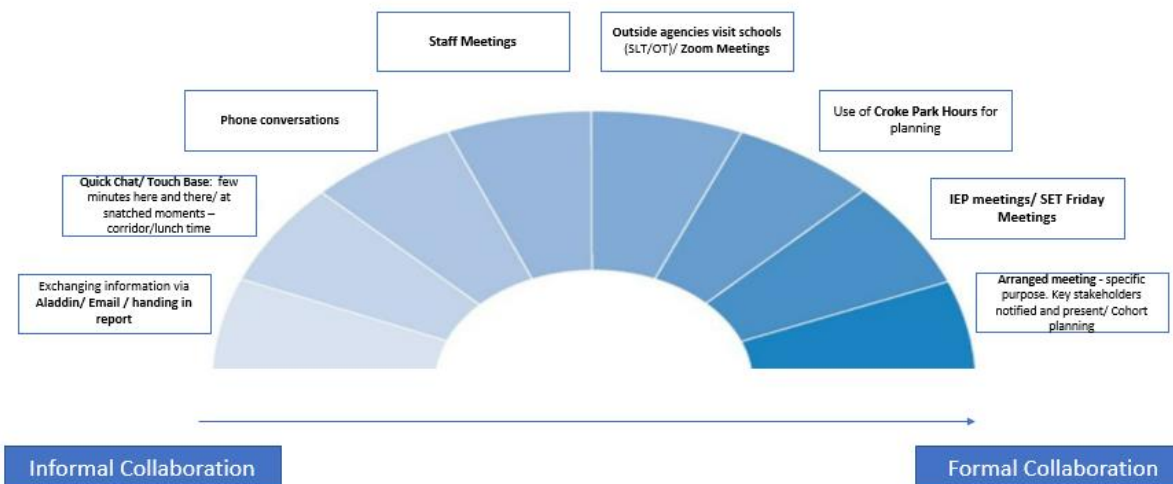


Figure 8.3 Spectrum of Collaboration Derived from the Participant Interviews

On one end of the spectrum, class teachers and SETs engaged in what could be termed ‘formal collaboration’, where they would organise a time to sit down and meet with their teaching partner(s) i.e., ‘cohort’ planning. These meetings had a specific purpose and agenda. During this time, class teachers and SETs would discuss plans, what is working well, what is not working so well and what they can do going forward (Ebbels 2014; Travers *et al.* 2010; Mitchell 2008; 2015). According to interview data, these teachers exchanged resources and ensured that they were “*singing from the same hymn sheet*”. Such findings support those of DuFour (2007) and Travers (2021), who maintain, that across international contexts, formal collaboration can improve instructional practice as well as promote student learning. This type of formal collaboration was reflected in the responses of Ellen and Nicola, both class teachers, shown below:

“At the end of each term we sit down, and we discuss the target pupils. We look back on their support plans to see if they are meeting the goals that we set and if there’s any new goals that we can set together. Also, we keep up communication throughout the term, daily and weekly to see how the target pupils are getting on and just discuss the children. Yeah, it’s definitely helpful to be on the same page especially if the children are being withdrawn”

(Ellen, Class Teacher)

“We would plan together...so at the start of the month we would meet up, we would discuss what we are going to do that month and then at the start of every week we would look at what we are covering, gather resources and gather activities. The language support teacher like I said takes the lead from me and moves the children along on what we are doing. Myself and the SET teacher we would plan together definitely at the start of every term because we would be looking at the student support plan and make a plan

from there. Then on a weekly basis she'd update me on what she's doing with him, and I'd update her on how he's getting on in the classroom. We would also have a lot of informal chats during the day like when she brings him back for lunch or when she's taking him for big break"

(Nicola, Class Teacher)

On the other end of the spectrum, the participants reported that the nature of the collaborative work was 'informal'. Class teachers and SETs classified a "quick chat", a "check in" and a "touch base" as collaboration of this type (NCSE 2011; The Teaching Council 2016). Linda and Olivia, both class teachers, stressed the importance of such informal collaboration stating that:

"I try my best to grab a couple of minutes here and there with the learning support teacher. You know every week or so or every fortnight, you definitely need that time to plan and to review what's working, what's not working and maybe how to adjust things a little bit, that kind of thing"

(Linda, Class Teacher)

"Every Monday morning my SET comes into me just to see what I have planned for the week, and we would talk about different activities that we would be doing in literacy"

(Olivia, Class Teacher)

While the nature of Linda and Olivia's collaboration was informal, both teachers expressed the need for regular communication and collaboration in order to reflect on and analyse their own existing practice. Concurring with Clarke (2001), these informal conversations have the ability to become authentic learning experiences for these teachers. Subsequently, similar responses were voiced by Angela and Elana, both SETs, when they were asked how they engage in collaborative practice. They commented on how they "regularly check in" with the class teacher to discuss what they plan to do when withdrawing students for support:

"I regularly check in, be it when I am collecting a child before removal for one to two minutes, literally to say what I have planned or normally when I am dropping them back, give literally two minutes on what we covered, how it went, or if a message needs to be given to mum or whoever is at home"

(Angela, SET)

“I check in with what’s happening within the classroom”

(Elana, SET)

According to the interview data, a small number of class teacher and SET participants, including Linda, Olivia, Angela and Elana, perceived this form of informal collaboration as sufficient. The quotes of these interviewees provide evidence of a focus on the frequency and speed of their interactions. They appear to desire to collaborate at a fast pace by taking a couple of minutes when available, or “before removal for one to two minutes”. Despite such subjects reporting that this form of informal collaboration is effective, current literature (McCarthy 2011; Ware *et al.* 2011; Lacey 2013; Bush and Grotjohann 2020) argue that consulting with one another ‘briefly’ does not suffice as ‘effective collaboration’. Participants are doing what they perceive as good collaboration, but in reality, the frequency or speed of ‘teacher collaboration’ alone does not make it ‘good’ collaborative practice. Based on the findings of Ware *et al.* (2011) and Bush and Grotjohann (2020), it would appear in these cases that collaboration has become simply about ticking a box, and for the participants, they believe their consistency in doing so will lead to better outcomes. Furthermore, it is important to document at this point, the difficulty in assessing the quality of these interactions. Engaging in effective collaborative practices, involves stakeholders working together, who are committed to one another, to plan and implement interventions thoroughly to support student learning (Ervin 2011; Westwood 2021). This finding is further supported by Barson (2004) and Laluevein (2010). They maintain that collaboration between stakeholders may be informal, where a phone call is made or email sent, and formal, where meetings are organised in particular settings. However, the focus should be on the ‘quality’ of stakeholder’s interactions, not the ‘quantity’. This point is reinforced by Cian, a SET. He believes that collaboration is flexible in nature and that it does not necessarily need to take the form of a formal meeting in order for it to be effective (The Teaching Council 2016). Cian believes that in an informal collaborative environment, the effectiveness of collaboration depends on the relationship one has with their fellow colleagues:

“Often times it is just a short conversation, it’s often not even written down. It’s not a case of we meet every Friday or every Monday or anything like that. It can be very again ad hoc... it might be just a case of sometimes even sending a message on Aladdin. I might just get a message saying, ‘we are doing X Y or Z will you just keep an eye on’. So, it’s that kind of thing and I think to be honest it’s far more powerful than just saying we will meet every Monday because maybe we just don’t have enough to talk about on that Monday, so maybe I suppose it depends on the relationship you build with the

teachers. I am lucky to have wonderful teachers to work alongside so that's what it looks like for us."

(Cian, SET)

This extract depicts the informal nature of collaboration in Cian's work setting. Specifically, Cian engages in an informal form of collaboration compared to Ellen and Nicola, both class teachers mentioned above. Given Cian's response, and concurring with Barson (2004), once there is evidence of mutual engagement and shared repertoires between stakeholders, collaboration can be effective in both informal and formal settings. According to Lave and Wenger (1991) such interactions are crucial in the establishment of effective CoP. However, it should be noted again that, although the stakeholders mentioned above report that their form of collaboration works for them, in reality, there is no mechanism that can be utilised by these stakeholders to measure the impact of collaboration, be it informal or formal. Keith, a principal, asserts that *"it is mostly left to the professionalism of the class teacher and the support teacher.* This reiterates the problem raised by Hartas (2004) and Wilson *et al.* (2015), when they stated that stakeholders are relying on varying interpretations of what makes collaboration effective. In order to truly gauge if collaboration is having a positive impact on student outcomes, the researcher would argue that stakeholders need an evidenced based measure, to validate if outcomes are improving (Owens *et al.* 2007; Law *et al.* 2012; Dockrell *et al.* 2017; Thomas *et al.* 2019).

Due to the multiple meanings of collaboration, it is evident from the above quotes that Ellen, Nicola, Linda, Olivia, Angela, Elana and Cian had different perspectives on what constitutes collaboration. In practice, and concurring with findings of previous literature, collaboration looked very different to all participants (Thousand *et al.* 2006). Considering their responses, it could be argued that there is a lack of a shared understanding of collaboration among stakeholders (Lacey 2013; Glover *et al.* 2015; Archibald 2017; Dockrell *et al.* 2017; McKean *et al.* 2017). Moreover, data presented in this section appears to concur with findings presented by Robinson and Buly (2007) and Lacey (2013), which illustrate that the lack of commonality in definitions used by teachers and SETs hinders effective collaboration (see Figure 8.3). Robinson and Buly assert that the lack of shared understanding can leave stakeholders 'impoverished and unable to work collaboratively to best instruct students' (2007, p.84). From analysing the qualitative data in this study, it is evident that teachers do not have uniform experiences of collaboration. Some participants perceived collaboration to be merely

the exchange of notes or plans, infrequent meetings or infrequent dialogues (Quigley 2018), which presents risk of information being missed. While others perceived collaboration to be more structured, with the collaboration occurring at dedicated times so that stakeholders can exchange ideas and resources with the intention of improving instructional practice (DuFour 2007). This finding interlinks with literature presented by Weddle *et al.* (2019), which highlight that, teachers have widely different perceptions of the value and quality of collaborative practice. Therefore, engaging in effective collaborative practice on the ground i.e., in a school environment, is difficult to achieve.

In agreement with the work of Wren *et al.* (2001) and Law *et al.* (2002), the findings of this research further support the need for measures to be implemented on a national level that will enable teachers and SLTs to identify expectations and desired outcomes that support collaborative practice (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020) (see Section 2.7.2). With the plethora of terminology and definitions of collaboration evident in the literature, stakeholders find it challenging to establish mutual expectations (Baxter *et al.* 2009; Lacey 2013; Dockrell *et al.* 2017; Ebbels *et al.* 2017). Data revealed discrepancies in practice, notably in the form of collaboration, such as the frequency of meetings, be it informal or formal. Similar findings were noted in Mulholland and O'Connor's study (2016).

In summary, based on definitions and explanations of collaboration and inter-professional practice in Chapter Five (e.g., Lacey 2013; Littlechild and Smith 2013; Borg and Drange 2019), along with the theoretical underpinnings of this study, CoP (Lave and Wenger, 1991), it seems apparent, according to the participants' perspectives, that there is a lack of shared understanding among stakeholders around the essence of collaboration and what it involves. Data presented in this section concur with findings presented by Hartas (2004) and Lacey (2013), which highlight the need for a more accurate and specified definition of collaboration, to ensure stakeholders fully understand their role and responsibilities and what is expected of them. Based on such findings, the researcher would submit that the stakeholders' varied understandings of collaboration have limited their capacity to engage in effective collaborative practice. This finding may reinforce the need for additional CPD so that stakeholders understand what true collaboration entails.

8.3.2 Breakdown in Communication and The Lack of Collaboration between Class Teachers and SLTs

SLTs play a crucial role in supporting students with SLCD (RCSLT 2011; IASLT 2017). From analysing the data in this study, findings obtained support the argument posed by Wilson *et al.* (2015) that ‘the lack of effective classroom-based collaboration among SLTs and teachers may be partly attributed to the adoption of service delivery methods that provide limited opportunities to blend their respective areas of expertise’ (p. 2). All SLTs in this study confirmed that, despite having the desire to collaborate with class teachers to support student outcomes in speech and language, it is often difficult to achieve (Glover *et al.* 2015). This is evident in following quote:

“I don’t think it is a lack of willingness or interest, but that everyone is stretched so thin”

(Neasa, SLT)

Many participants in this study stated that due to their “*heavy caseloads*”, “*lack of time*” and “*lack of a common workspace*”, effective collaboration was nearly impossible to achieve. Similar findings were presented by Travers *et al.* (2010), Kinsella *et al.* (2014) and Glover *et al.* (2015) as obstacles to working collaboratively in schools. Therefore, coinciding with research undertaken by Law *et al.* (2002), Pring *et al.* (2012) and Ekins (2015), developing collaborative networks and professional working partnerships among key stakeholders to address students’ speech, language and communication needs is crucial. Thus, the data in this study would suggest the need for a more cohesive and structured service delivery (Dockrell *et al.* 2017) as seen with the rollout of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018) (See Section 2.7.2).

8.3.2.1 Disconnect between Class Teachers, SETs and SLTs

Upon analysing the data in this study, it became apparent that all teachers and SLTs perceived there to be a general failing within the current system and procedures in place to support students with SLCD (Travers *et al.* 2010; Wilson *et al.* 2016; Dockrell *et al.* 2017). To tease out the root cause of this issue, it is worth noting that international literature recognises a broad range of impediments to collaboration among class teachers, SETs and SLTs. These encompass ‘logistical difficulties...factors related to the institutional structures of school and clinic, differences in professional cultures, deficits in training, and differences in understandings of collaborative processes and professional roles’ (Travers 2021, p. 63).

Moreover, Travers highlights how these issues are ‘exacerbated’ in the Irish context due to the structure of in-school SLCD supports and their dependence on external SLT services. In this context, SLCD supports are hindered from the outset due to ‘the fact that access to support services is limited, uneven and poorly coordinated’ (2020, p.63). Given the above points, it is not surprising that most participants in this study reflect these issues in their responses. According to Conor, a SET, the system needs to be revamped in order for inter-professional collaboration to be fostered and to improve outcomes for students with SLCD:

“I think the system definitely needs a complete makeover. Communication is key. There is a severe lack of communication in both schools I have worked in as far as I can see”

(Conor, SET)

This concern was also voiced by parents and SLTs in the IASLT position paper (2017). The IASLT (2017) stressed the need for effective working partnerships to overcome ‘patchy services, excessive SLT caseloads and poor awareness of the needs of children with DLD’ (IASLT 2017, p. 8). Participants in this study emphasised the impact that heavy caseloads and long waiting lists have on students not receiving adequate or effective services (Duncan 2014; O’ Brien 2014; Rose *et al.* 2015). Keith, a principal, highlights the harsh reality of accessing services for students with SLCD. While he acknowledges that SLTs are “*very stretched*”, Keith asserts that the process is not efficient, stating:

“When a child goes through an assessment of need, they could be two years waiting to access an SLT, so it’s no surprise that we could be waiting another 12 – 18 months after that before our phone rings you know”

(Keith, Principal)

Concurring with Keith, Annie, a principal, also commented on the demands for SLTs and how teachers are often left to try and fill the gap while waiting for such services:

“I know that there are huge waiting lists for SLTs. So, all we can do is support the child as best we can. But we’re not qualified so all we can do is cobble together something that we would have been told about a different child, but for all we know we could be going in the wrong direction, but we are not qualified to do anything else other than that”

(Annie, Principal)

Considering both Keith and Annie’s responses, the time it takes for effective liaison to occur between the professionals i.e., teachers and SLTs, is alarming and has had a negative impact in fostering positive attitudes and relationships to promote collaborative practice (Hanko 2004; Travers *et al.* 2010; Travers 2021). The data in this study suggest that SLTs are simply overstretched with the increasing numbers of students requiring SLT services (Duncan 2014; O’Brien 2014; IASLT 2017). Concurring with Daly *et al.* (2016), the lack of external support services i.e., SLTs available to support students with additional needs is perceived to be a major barrier to effective instruction and inclusion prevalent in Irish primary schools. Moreover, the lack of clear structures for sharing information between professionals, outlined by Daly *et al.* (2016), is also impeding student progress. Considering all of this in the context of Lave and Wenger’s CoP (1991), one can understand that a CoP cannot be fostered when individuals are siloed and do not communicate for lengthy periods of time. Thus, the type of service provision facilitated by the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020), is significant in establishing a ‘strong educator-therapist partnership’ (Anaby *et al.* 2019, p.16) to enhance instruction and improve student outcomes which according to the interviewed participants, is needed now more than ever.

The data from this study indicate that due to the lack of SLT services available, schools are forced to triage a broken system (Glover *et al.* 2015). For instance, participants in this study reported that teachers are attempting to take on the role of the SLT and support students with additional learning needs despite not having the qualifications to do so as mentioned by Annie, a principal above. Similar findings were highlighted in a study carried out by Glover *et al.* (2015). Their study revealed that there is a lack of services available to meet the escalating demand of students presenting with SLCD. As a result of excessive SLT caseloads, SLTs find it difficult to engage in effective collaboration with schools (IASLT 2017). This is evident in Jessica, a SLT, response below:

“A lot of the time because our lists are so long, we give the support to parents, and I always say to give a copy of that to the school and tell the school to contact me. I don’t know should I contact the school a little bit more. But if I feel like if it is warranted or I have a specific question to ask the teacher, I will make more of a direct contact with the school especially with children who are being assessed for maybe Autism or an intellectual disability”

(Jessica, SLT)

While Jessica envisages that more contact and communication is needed between SLTs and schools, heavy caseloads like Jessica's impede the ability to do so (Glover *et al.* 2015). Jessica and Ailbhe, both SLTs, further highlight more common constraints, stating that:

"It is us finding a time that suits us and suits the teacher on a day that the child is in and they are not going off on an activity. Then, the child could be sick at the end of it. Sometimes it could be a disaster. Sometimes it is just constraints like that. Then you play phone tag, and it could be a week when you make contact with someone"

(Jessica, SLT)

"Sometimes the class teacher mightn't be aware. The principal may not have told the teacher we are coming in. Poor teacher sees me arriving in. The teacher doesn't know why I am there, hasn't been told. Panic stations. Because they obviously don't have cover organised, then you might get two minutes to talk to each-other. Sometimes in those incidents we might try and arrange a phone-call to follow up but that doesn't always happen"

(Ailbhe, SLT)

Considering the responses of both Jessica and Ailbhe, it is evident that there is a lack of communication between the class teacher and SLT in those cases. The fact that the class teacher in Ailbhe's case is sometimes not aware of the SLT visiting is a stark depiction of contemporary stakeholder communication. Not only does this demonstrate the breakdown in communication among the class teacher and principal on one level, but it also shows the complete lack of coordination with stakeholders outside of the Department of Education, such as with SLTs who work in the Department of Health (Drudy and Kinsella 2009). According to Neasa, a SLT, a possible explanation for this breakdown in communication and collaboration is the fact that teachers and SLTs have non-parallel professional schedules i.e., working calendars (Travers 2021). Neasa describes how frustrating it can be, stating:

"Just if we look at the way we work, our year doesn't necessarily align with the school year. The breaks are different. I know it is really frustrating for me when I get information on a child in July, and I need to wait two months to speak to a teacher. Equally I am sure it is frustrating for teachers when they try to contact me in September when I am on leave or training. It doesn't always match up. It can be tricky"

(Neasa, SLT)

Jessica, a SLT, further stresses that the lack of stability and frequent changes in SLT staffing is another issue which hinders effective collaboration and communication among stakeholders (Baxter *et al.* 2009). Jessica openly discusses her experience working as an SLT on short term contracts and the challenges she faces when trying to get to know the students she works with on an individual level. Jessica believes that consistency is key however, as a result of the “*chopping and changing of therapists*”, collaborative practice is not always feasible.

“I find it is kind of difficult that there is such constant changeover. It is very hard to make some sort of relationship or rapport with a professional. To have that consistency is key. Especially in primary care where you might be assessed by one therapist, and you might come into another therapist for intervention. It can even be difficult for parents to get used to a new adult. But I think it can be so hard for schools as well. The parents are coming to that block of therapy. They will get to know that SLT, but it is very daunting for the teacher to ring up a completely new person every-time and be like “Hi, I am this person’s teacher. Can you tell me what their goals are?” They are like “I’m a new SLT, let me check their file”. You don’t know the validity of that information they are giving you because that child might have been seen six months ago by another therapist. The chopping and changing of therapists is also an issue”

(Jessica, SLT)

Evidence provided at this point appears to correspond with a study carried out by Drudy and Kinsella (2009), which highlighted the ‘logistical difficulties of achieving coordination and cohesion within and between the different sectors of the education system; between the education system and other relevant systems, especially the Health and Welfare systems’ (Drudy and Kinsella 2009, p.656). The fact that both sectors are seen as separate entities, within the Irish system, causes great difficulties.

Given that both teachers and SLTs are employed by different governing bodies i.e., teachers employed by the Department of Education and SLTs employed by the Department of Health, it is no wonder that the disconnect between teachers and SLTs is so prevalent (Law *et al.* 2002; Gallagher *et al.* 2019). Concurring with Quigley, both entities have ‘distinguishable frameworks of operation, practices, priorities and expectations’ (2018, p.72). This lends credence to the idea that ‘the fields of health and education need to converge’ in order for stakeholders to achieve true inter-professional collaboration (Lindsay and Dockrell 2004).

From analysing the data in this study, it could be argued that the disconnect between both Departments has inhibited collaboration among stakeholders and thus, caused the quality of care given and the outcomes for students with SLCD to decline (Drudy and Kinsella 2009).

In their current state, the Department of Education as well as the Department of Health are simply failing these students by not referring students with additional needs to appropriate services in a timely manner (IASLT 2017). These findings were echoed by the participants in this study. Cian, a SET, reiterates this concern regarding the lack of coordination among stakeholders, stating that:

“The issue as I see it is that everyone is working in isolation. There doesn’t seem to be any sense of us being a multidisciplinary team to support the welfare of the child and that’s where it all falls apart. I have had three separate speech and language therapists working with three separate children here and interestingly they were all offering similar suggestions even though the children were very different, and I just thought if you had one SLT that you were working with who knew all those three children it would be a much more effective use of time and money”

(Cian, SET)

Similarly, Neasa, a SLT, highlighted the challenges SLTs face when trying to engage in collaborative practice. In her response below, Neasa discusses how difficult it is for SLTs to develop meaningful relationships with class teachers and SETs when they do not share a common workspace:

“I think part of the issue is because we are not based together... we are employed separately, and work so separately, it is very hard to build up those meaningful relationships. A class teacher in the school maybe with thirty kids in the class, or a resource teacher seeing six kids, you could feasibly have six different speech therapists ringing you in a given week. You can’t build those relationships...There is a huge difficulty there”

(Neasa, SLT)

Furthermore, the lack of shared terminology was highlighted as another contributing factor to the challenges surrounding effective collaborative practice (Wilson *et al*, 2015). Class teachers and SETs in this study stressed the need for “*uniformity*” in terms of the language used among different stakeholders¹². Conor, a SET, reported that the mixture of terminology used was “*massively confusing*” and therefore emphasised the need for it to be “*standardised*” asserting that “*everyone needs to be on the same page in relation to the one child*. In a similar vein, Olivia, a class teacher openly discussed how she too found the terminology “*very*

¹² The terminology used by stakeholders vary within the Irish context. SLTs refer to goals, class teachers refer to outcomes and SETs refer to targets.

confusing” and felt that “it would be a lot more beneficial for everyone if the same term was used, given at the end of the day the end goal is the same for all, the SLT, class teacher and the SET”. Throughout interview discussion, Olivia further elaborated on this, stating:

“If there was one common term used, I think it would wipe out the confusion and uncertainty I had as a young teacher. I was getting confused between them all thinking they were all different things when really, there was just one goal in mind. We all wanted the same for the child”

(Olivia, Class Teacher)

In agreement with Conor and Olivia above, Niamh, Ava and Donna, all class teachers, expressed the need for uniformity in terms of language when planning and delivering support to students with additional needs. This is evident in the excerpts below:

“I think there needs to be some uniformity with the terms used. It is impossible to keep on track of everything and the child will struggle to reach any targets, goals or outcomes if we are all working on different areas...I think the terminology is one of the biggest obstacles”

(Niamh, Class Teacher)

“We are all working towards the same thing, yet we are all using different terminology, so often our wires can get crossed...It gets confusing with everyone using different phrases”

(Ava, Class Teacher)

“Depending on what area you are working in there is different terminology. This creates confusion. It would be lovely if we were working off the same template and the same language. Everyone has their own lingo. It would be lovely to have more clarity and if we all used the same terms. It would be great. There would be no confusion...people wouldn't be afraid to ask questions then”

(Donna, Class Teacher)

From analysing the participant responses, it became apparent that while stakeholders utilise different terminology, ultimately, they desire to achieve the same optimal outcomes for the student. Based on this premise and contrary to the above, Rebecca, a class teacher, eloquently reported that irrespective of the terminology used, once class teachers, SETs and SLTs work

collaboratively towards an agreed set of goals, students with SLCD will achieve improved outcomes:

“I think people get bogged down with the different terms they use but at the end of the day we are all working towards the same thing...we all want the child to be able to do their best and reach their full potential, so I feel like it doesn't really matter what you call them once you are all on the same page and working towards the same goal. It could be called whatever you wanted once you are all on the same page”

(Rebecca, Class Teacher)

In line with Gallagher (2019), the data from this study suggest that the differences in perspectives across professions i.e., teachers being concerned with the functions of language and SLTs being concerned with the form of language (McCartney 1999; Quigley 2018; McLean *et al.* 2021), as well as the discrepancy in terminology used, holds implications for effective collaboration and inter-professional practice. From analysing the interview transcripts, the researcher would assert that these issues relate back to teachers and SLTs having minimal to no contact at an undergraduate level (Wilson *et al.* 2015).

Interpreting the responses of the participants above, it is evident that there are many logistical difficulties that hinder effective collaboration within our school system (Dockrell *et al.* 2017; Travers 2021). According to the literature presented in Chapter Five, SLT services in the UK, parts of Australia and the USA appear to be far more efficient in meeting the needs of students with SCLD. The literature presented in Chapter Five suggests that this may be as a result of SLTs working within the school environment to support students with additional needs (McCartney 2018) (Section 5.5.3.1). In doing so, teachers and SLTs have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities (Baxter *et al.* 2009; Anaby *et al.* 2019). Similar findings were noted in the rollout of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020). The benefits of having access to a SLT on the ground, in schools, proved to be crucial in meeting the needs of students with SLCD (Dockrell *et al.* 2014; Lynch *et al.* 2020) (see Section 5.6). Furthermore, when these stakeholders are given the opportunity to work in proximity with one another, there is the potential for a CoP to form, which could compound and catalyse the improvements noted in the literature (Lave and Wenger 1991). While data indicate the need for a more cohesive and multidisciplinary approach to support students' learning, it is important to also note the need for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and SLT training programmes to overlap, so that teachers and SLTs, in these programmes, are encouraged to collaborate from the onset of their careers.

8.3.2.2 Initial Teacher Education and SLT Training Programmes - Not Synchronized

Research argues that the lack of shared understanding, values and responsibilities among class teachers, SETs and SLTs hinders the implementation of effective collaboration and inter-professional practice (Glover *et al.* 2015; Dockrell *et al.* 2017; Borg and Drange 2019; Gallagher 2019; McLean *et al.* 2021). Data in this study indicate that the lack of shared understanding may be as a result of these key stakeholders not engaging in some common form of training at an undergraduate level. Neasa, a SLT, stresses that the training teachers and SLTs receive during ITE and SLT training programmes is very different and thus, a more integrated approach is needed in order to improve practice:

“I think, even the training of health care professionals and teachers, it is very different. I don’t think we need to change it, but maybe we need to build in more opportunities for even getting to know each other better, maybe as students, so there is some way from the word go that we are learning about each other”

(Neasa, SLT)

Consistent with previous research, participants from this study voiced their concerns around not having the necessary skills or knowledge to support students experiencing SLCD (Dockrell and Lindsay 2001; Hall 2005; Mulholland and O’Connor 2016; Florian and Camedda 2020). Conor, a SET, explained that during his time in college he received no training in speech and language and as a result, is unable to provide the appropriate support that students with SLCD require (Sadler 2005; Dockrell *et al.* 2017). Concurring with Richards (2010), Conor believes that the lack of ITE and practical experience working with students with SEN has inhibited his ability to do so. Therefore, Conor emphasised the need for change at undergraduate level in order for educators to be competent in supporting students with additional needs:

“During my time in college I never had any specific training on any speech and language...It is very hard to solve a problem, fix a problem, if you are not trained up on how to do it”

(Conor, SET)

Throughout interview discussion, Conor highlighted that *“a lot of people in schools are thrown into SET positions with no specific training on it”*. Conor stressed the need for inclusive education to be embedded in ITE programmes so that NQTs are equipped with the appropriate

knowledge and skills to support students with SEN. Although Conor had twelve years teaching experience, five of those years in SET, he openly discussed how he does not have the necessary resources and expertise to meet the needs of students with SLCD (Dockrell *et al.* 2017):

“If truth be told, I am learning as I go along. I do not have degrees in speech and language”

(Conor, SET)

Conor reiterated that teachers are not experts in the field of speech and language, they do not have the specialist skillset of a SLT and therefore, encounter difficulties when trying to provide appropriate support to students:

“Speech and language is such a wide area. Nine times out of ten, they [students] have different needs. A lot of the time you are googling, looking at different journals, looking at what best helps the child”

(Conor, SET)

From analysing the participant responses, it could be argued that the lack of consistency across ITE programmes in relation to inclusive education is a key factor in teachers feeling unprepared and ill-equipped to teach students with SEN (Richards 2010; Shevlin *et al.* 2013; Hick *et al.* 2019). Given that the literature highlights how ITE ‘programmes vary in terms of both the modules that address issues of inclusive teaching and the extent to which inclusive teaching is stressed as an overall approach’ (Hick *et al.* 2019, p.xiii), it is unsurprising, that student teachers and NQTs ‘often perceive discrepancies between the emphasis on inclusive teaching advocated within ITE programmes, and the practices and contexts they experience in schools’ (Hick *et al.* 2019, p.145). The fact that it is not compulsory for student teachers to complete part of their school placement in a SET role, or in a special class setting, reflect dilemmas in practice (DES 2017a; Curtin and Egan 2021). Therefore, the participants in this study would agree that low levels of teacher confidence attribute to lack of ITE (Florian and Camedda 2020).

Moreover, the issue regarding interdisciplinary education at an undergraduate level that Neasa and Conor raise, is a factor in the breakdown of collaboration between the Department of Health and Department of Education. Considering the data presented in this study, it could be argued that teachers and SLTs having minimal to no contact during their training

programmes is a shortfall within the system itself (Wilson *et al.* 2015; McLean *et al.* 2021). Gallagher maintains that teachers and SLTs are at a greater disadvantage when collaborating as they do not have a ‘shared frame of reference’ and have few opportunities to develop shared goals and manage their differences’ (2019, p.33). Data would suggest that the root of this failure is that placement within an education setting for SLTs is not mandatory when training (CORU – Speech and Language Therapists Registration Board). As a result, SLTs, such as Ailbhe, are not exposed to such learning environments and therefore, believe that their understanding of the everyday running of a classroom is limited:

“I would say I have as much as any outsider can have. I think there is huge demands on teachers particularly as you see more children with additional and different needs. I understand the demands on teachers to an extent, but I think I don’t know what it would be like if it was me and if someone was asking me to do these things, while I also have a class to teach and other children with additional needs”

(Ailbhe, SLT)

Ailbhe’s point suggests that ongoing collaborative interactions are not occurring and thus, collaborative practice among the teacher and SLT is difficult to achieve. The fact that Ailbhe reported that she has as much knowledge as any other outsider would emphasise that practice on the ground i.e., in schools, is limited. Jessica, another SLT, gave a very realistic perspective from her own experience stating:

“I don’t think I’ll ever know the ins and outs of what happens in a primary school day. I would have a fair idea, but I think sometimes, my recommendations can fall short on what a school might need. I do have to sit back and think “Is this actually practical to give to a school?” when there are 30 other kids, and a lot of those kids might have other needs as well or there might be a couple of classes in one room, and you are trying to cover two curriculums. I am trying to think “Will this fit into the child’s life?” “Could this goal be used for another child?”. Again, sometimes as therapists we forget that. We are very much “this is my goal; this is what the child needs. This is my discipline”. Teachers looking at us “Are you joking”. It can be very difficult”

(Jessica, SLT)

Following Jessica’s interviews, the researcher reflected on the importance of cultivating effective teacher/ SLT partnerships to support students with SLCD. This is evident in the excerpt below:

“I felt that Jessica was very honest in her interview. Having a sister as a class teacher helped her to gain a better understanding of what goes on in a classroom of thirty

children. Jessica openly discussed how the recommendations she provides can “fall short” of what a school needs and stressed the importance of working with the class teacher to see what is actually feasible, what can the teacher actually do? Jessica informally mentioned that as a SLT she does not have expertise in the curriculum and therefore, does not know how her recommendations can match particular learning outcomes. She explained that teachers are the MKOs in this area and stressed the need for a more partnership approach to be cultivated between teachers and SLTs in order for students with SLCD to reap the benefits”

(Research Diary 12th November 2020)

Data yielded from the semi-structured interviews is consistent with the findings presented by McLean *et al.* (2021). Results from their study highlighted how SLT training ‘could not and did not prepare them to work in school systems or to practice within the frame of school curricular’ (McLean *et al.* 2021 p.256). McLean *et al.* (2021) emphasised the need for greater classroom exposure and more collaborative interactions to enhance instruction and overall practice. Therefore, considering both Ailbhe and Jessica’s responses above, more needs to be done at an undergraduate level to close the knowledge gap between teachers and SLTs so that effective collaboration and coordination can take place (Wilson *et al.* 2015; McLean *et al.* 2021). While the above extracts focus mainly on SLTs, equally, the same can be said about teachers. During ITE teachers are not provided with the opportunity to engage with SLTs (Hartas 2004; Glover *et al.* 2015). Agreeing with Wilson *et al.* participant data suggest that there is a ‘continuing mismatch between university preparation and what is expected of teachers and SLTs working in primary education’ (2015, p.356). Therefore, teachers are not fully aware of the role that the SLT provides in student support (Baxter *et al.* 2009). This inhibits the ability of an effective CoP to develop (Lave and Wenger 1991). Neasa, a SLT, reiterates the point, asserting that:

“Sometimes for teachers, the issue is that they maybe don’t understand enough about what I am trying to work on”

(Neasa, SLT)

While the majority of SLTs in this study acknowledge the demands teachers face and the wide range of abilities in the classroom, the data suggest that sometimes the recommendations SLTs provide are impractical and difficult to implement as mentioned by Jessica above (Baxter *et al.* 2009). Concurring with Dockrell and Lindsay (2001) and Glover *et al.* (2015), teachers in this study reported that they had ‘insufficient support’ with the information received from the SLT.

Teacher participants explained that rising class sizes (INTO 2020a) and busy teacher schedules prevented them from implementing the recommendations provided by the SLT. Such findings were evident in Linda and Conor's responses below:

"You know you can't do it [implement individual recommendations] in the class when you have 23 others sitting there. It's not feasible. You can't"

(Linda, Class Teacher)

"When they are in a class with thirty other boys or girls, they can get left behind...it is hard to get one to one time to implement the different recommendations"

(Conor, SET)

Moreover, from the researcher's own lived experience as a class teacher, the recommendations provided by the SLT often get passed onto the SET, as the teacher is too busy to implement the recommendations effectively or there is little time for appropriate, collaborative planning between them i.e., teacher and SLT. This notion was mirrored in Neasa, a SLTs, response. She explained that due to the "busy" nature of the classroom, teachers are often unable to implement the recommendations they provide, and are therefore handed over to the SET to try implement:

"The most consistent for us is the resource teachers. The resource teachers have the capacity to follow up on recommendations that we are making"

(Neasa, SLT)

While the SLT is the expert in his or her field and wants the best for the students, sometimes the SLT forgets that the teacher is not specifically trained in the area of speech and language and therefore, does not have the necessary skills or resources to support students in the same way (Dockrell and Lindsay 2001; Rix *et al.* 2009; Dockrell *et al.* 2017; Florian and Camedda 2020). Concurring with Hartas (2004), Bishop (2014) and McLean (2021) differences in notions of language development within a curriculum context inevitably creates tension in the collaborative workings of both professionals. The feeling that teachers are expected to take on the role of the SLT emerged as a recurring point of contention for many participants in this study. This is evident in the following responses:

“I suppose we do a lot as teachers, but we are not professionals in the area whereas they have a lot more expertise”

(Olivia, Class Teacher)

“It is very hard for the class teacher or support teacher to try and implement the practice of a SLT and I think it is unfair to expect them to do that. At the end of the day, we are trained to do one thing and they are trained to do another. We will obviously support their work as much as possible as it is beneficial for the child, but we have to ultimately realise that we are not the SLT in school”

(Lynn, Principal)

“Teachers haven’t been taught how to deal with kids with language difficulties. You are taught how to teach a class. You are not taught the difficulties a child can face with ADHD. It is very different for you guys to try and manage children with needs when you haven’t been specifically taught those needs like I have. It is definitely very difficult”

(Jessica, SLT)

The above quotes, extracted from the participant interviews, encapsulate the breakdown between the Department of Health and the Department of Education. This separation of concerns between the two Departments could be perceived as a fundamental flaw in our approach to supporting students who present with SLCD (Lindsay and Dockrell 2004; Dockrell *et al.* 2007; Dockrell *et al.* 2017). The breakdown in communication between key stakeholders is a significant impediment to effective collaboration, but the complete lack of coordination between the Departments is the root cause of this breakdown (Drudy and Kinsella 2009). Data in this study illustrate that the Departments have created a situation in which teachers and SLTs are siloed from one another due to a lack of coordination and collaboration from the onset of their careers (Wilson *et al.* 2015).

Furthermore, the fact that SLTs are often viewed as ‘visitors’ within a school environment inevitably creates a social barrier between the professions (Hartas 2004, p.37). Reflecting on notes recoded in the research diary, it became apparent that issues of professional confidence, respect and trust as mentioned by Higgins (2021) (see Section 8.7.1.5) emerged when SLTs visited the school environment. This is evident in the extract below:

“Throughout interview discussion Olivia acknowledge the value of working alongside the SLT to support students with SLCD - working towards a common goal. However, as a relatively newly qualified teacher she sometimes felt less knowledgeable and lacked confidence when the SLT was in the classroom. The sporadic nature of their

visits made it difficult for her to develop mutual trust and a strong working relationship with the SLT. While she valued the input of the SLT, she mentioned how she would feel “on edge” and nervous prior to their visit. She believes that if visits were more frequent greater working partnerships would be established. From her perspective a more collaborative approach is needed to eliminate the feeling of superiority”

(Research Diary 9th May 2019)

Given that SLTs do not engage in regular school visits and are considered members of a ‘noneducational profession’ (Hartas 2004, p. 38), they are often referred to as ‘*strangers*’ by the students. This was evident in the data, with half of the overall SLT participants echoing this sentiment, an example of which is depicted in Jessica’s quote below. This again illustrates the divide between the Departments and the need for a more collaborative approach to be taken. Due to the lack of interactions between both parties, it is very difficult for trusting relationships and mutual respect to be developed. As mentioned previously, given that SLTs engage in minimal school visits hinders the ability of stakeholders to form a CoP (Lave and Wenger 1991). Consequently, SLTs are perceived as ‘*strangers*’ as they don’t work in the same environment for long enough. This is further supported by Gallagher *et al.* who highlights the harsh reality of collaboration among SLTs and teachers asserting that, ‘many collaborative encounters between SLTs and teachers are ‘one off’, time-limited events, involving practitioners who are unfamiliar with one another. As practitioners don’t work together in a sustained way, it is difficult for them to develop an awareness of difference, and/or to develop the necessary trust and/or a sense of belonging’ (Gallagher *et al.* 2019, p. 179). Ailbhe, a SLT, reiterates this point, stating that:

“We don’t share the same space and I guess we are coming from different perspectives. I am coming from a health and development perspective and you [teachers] are coming from a learning and teaching perspective. Sometimes we can be really on the same page and sometimes we are just coming from two different spaces. It doesn’t mean we will always be able to necessarily find the common ground we need to effectively implement the recommendations”

(Ailbhe, SLT)

Jessica, a SLT, portrays the logistics of a visit from a teacher’s perspective. She asserts that finding the right time that suits everyone can be quite challenging, which mirrors a point raised by Gallagher *et al.* (2019). Jessica stresses that due to the varying activities happening in schools, it is merely impossible to not feel that you are interrupting or intruding on the class teacher:

“It is quite disruptive having people come into your room. From the teacher’s perspective, their day is so busy. Trying to find a time that will actually suit. Having an SLT coming in, they are thinking “Is there any point doing PE if the SLT is coming in?” They are trying to cater their day for these strangers coming in. The class are like “Who is that?” The kids are off form. There is me waving at them in the corner. That can be obtrusive”

(Jessica, SLT)

In interpreting Jessica’s response, it is reasonable to assume that when a SLT feels like an outsider in the classroom, this feeling can also be perceived by the students and teachers alike. The students lose focus, the class teacher is uncomfortable and the SLT is unable to effectively carry out their duties. The researcher would claim that attempting to achieve results in such an environment is not feasible and represents a barrier to collaborative practice. The fact that both teachers and SLTs are not used to working together in the same environment for long periods of time lends itself to misunderstandings and a lack of shared knowledge (Marshall *et al.* 2002; Dockrell and Howell 2015; Glover *et al.* 2015). Wenger *et al.* (2002), reiterates that in order for a CoP to be effective, stakeholders must deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis. Therefore, such collaboration needs to filter down from ITE and SLT training programmes, where students, both training teachers and SLTs are embedded in a culture of collaboration from the onset. In agreement with Anaby *et al.* (2019), the necessity of having a clear organisational framework for service delivery is crucial. Stakeholders need to be made aware of the cultural expectations within their chosen profession (D’Amour *et al.* 2008; Lynch *et al.* 2020). Inevitably, there needs to be some crossover at this level, i.e., training, in order for effective collaboration to be encouraged and to subsequently promote the development of a CoP (Holsey 2009). Findings obtained in this research support the argument posed by O’Neill and Logan (2012), in that a group of people achieve more when they work as a team rather than in isolation. O’Neill and Logan further suggest that when key stakeholders engage in collaborative practice, ‘less fragmented instruction’ is provided to students with SEN (2012, p.423). The following section will explore the lack of time available for such practice.

8.3.3 Availability of Time for Collaboration and Planning

According to all participants in this study, time constraints and the need for additional time to collaborate with colleagues were perceived as a major barrier to effective collaboration, which coincides with previous research discussed in Chapter Five (Hartas 2004; Hall 2005;

Blecker and Boakes 2010; Travers *et al.* 2010; Ware *et al.* 2011; Glover *et al.* 2015; Mulholland and O' Connor 2016; Pratt *et al.* 2017) (see Section 5.6.1.3). Concurring with Bishop *et al.* (2016), teachers and SLTs in this study agreed that more collaboration is needed for them to fully identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD, but that time constraints made this difficult (Law *et al.* 2000; Dockrell and Lindsay 2001; Blecker and Boakes 2010). From analysing the interview transcripts, it was evident that both teachers and SETs had limited time to meet, plan, discuss and collaborate with their colleagues (Friend *et al.* 2010, Glover *et al.* 2015; Mulholland and O' Connor 2016). This is exemplified in the following quotes:

"We don't actually get time"

(Rebecca, Class Teacher)

"I do wish we had more time"

(Ava, Class Teacher)

"Time is always a factor. You would obviously love more time"

(Conor, SET)

These quotes lend credence to Hargreave *et al.*'s statement that, 'if there is a single thing that teachers always need more of, it is time' (1997, p. 79). While stakeholders repeatedly alluded to the 'availability of time' as an issue while being interviewed, it became apparent that issues around time were multifaceted (Bush and Grotjohann 2020). One such factor was the availability of time for teachers and SLTs to engage in effective collaboration and planning within the school environment. Another factor was the availability of time that teachers and SLTs have with their students (Hartas 2004; Talmor *et al.* 2005; Travers *et al.* 2010). These factors will be discussed in greater detail hereunder.

Concurring with Shevlin *et al.* (2008; 2013), collaboration between the class teacher and SET is a core factor in successful inclusive practice (Long 2017). While the literature emphasises its importance, Westwood (2021) acknowledges that collaboration between these stakeholders is not always possible. According to the participant data collected in this study, this is due to there being reduced opportunities for interaction as a result of the growing demands placed on teachers (Chitiyo 2017; Hargreaves 2019). Moreover, the overcrowded curriculum that they are required to complete further complicates collaborative efforts

(McCarthy 2011; Morgan and NicCraith 2015). From analysing the interview transcripts, the majority of teachers commented on how *“it was up to them”* to find the time to meet with their teaching partner or SET to collaborate, and that very little time was allocated to planning. Dave, Linda, Ava and Robyn openly explained how the onus is on the teacher to organise time for collaboration:

“We would never be given time by management to meet the class teachers. You would just take it upon yourself to organise a meeting with the class teacher”

(Dave, SET)

“No, there is very little allocated time to do so [collaborative planning]. So, it is up to us I suppose to try and find those few minutes here and there”

(Linda, Class Teacher)

“No, we are not given allocated time to do so, and it’s done very informally. The junior infant teachers meet once a week when our children go home, because our children go home an hour earlier, and we plan and from that plan there I try to catch up with my SET and fill them in, but it’s done very informally and often very rushed. I do find it helpful that I do get to speak to the teachers, but I do wish we had more time and more of a chance because I think if we could sit down for a little bit longer each week and discuss it further it would be a lot more beneficial”

(Ava, Class Teacher)

“We’re actually not given any allocated time to collaborate with the SET team so it’s more up to the teacher to kind of go and organise that time and it could be during your lunch break, it could be during break time, in the morning, after school but it’s on your own time”

(Robyn, Class Teacher)

The sporadic nature of collaboration reported by the participants above, emphasises the need for improved structures and supports to be implemented in order to facilitate successful collaboration (Mofield 2020). Considering the participants’ perspectives, it could be argued that the impression emanating from the data suggests that stakeholders are grappling to find a *“few minutes here and there”*, *“in the morning”*, *“during break time”*, or *“after school”* to collaborate and plan effectively with their colleagues. Concurring with research undertaken by Ware *et al.* (2011), a considerable amount of collaborative planning in schools is informal, ‘having to occur in snatched moments, as there may be no time set aside for collaboration’

(p.129). Therefore, teachers in this study reported feeling guilty and torn in their efforts to give sufficient time and support to their students, with and without SLCD (Talmor *et al.* 2005; Travers *et al.* 2010; Law *et al.* 2012; Dockrell *et al.* 2014). This is exemplified in Niamh and Cian's quotes below:

"I'm under too much pressure and time is always ticking so I just can't give them the same support"

(Niamh, Class Teacher)

"I am often caught for time. There is simply not enough time in the day to give adequate support to these students with SLCD. In order for them to progress they need opportunities to communicate and as you know yourself the school day is just so busy that it is merely impossible"

(Cian, SET)

While it is evident from the statements above that all class teachers and SETs desire to have "more time" and greater opportunities to sit down and discuss plans and issues pertaining to student learning, the school day does not suffice for such practice to happen (McCarthy 2011; Glover *et al.* 2015; Hargreaves 2019). There is simply a lack of sufficient collaborative planning time embedded within the school day (Blecker and Boakes 2010; Pratt *et al.* 2017), which holds implications for the implementation of effective inclusive practice (Mulholland and O'Connor 2016). Therefore, the data from this study suggest that the nature and extent of collaboration varies from participant to participant based on their own availability (Mulholland and O'Connor 2016). According to Eileen, a SET, a lot of her collaboration would be carried out informally, thus, due to its ad hoc nature it is not very productive:

"We are not given time to do it [plan] So it would just be informally in the morning, after school or you know when you would pop in to take him or whenever, which isn't very productive. It's all informal. Now we would sit down and plan some evenings but it's on your own time"

(Eileen, SET)

Similar sentiments were also expressed by Anne, a SET. Anne reported that a lot of her planning was carried out infrequently and in an informal manner:

"I suppose we don't really get allocated time to do so.... a lot of the time it might be very informal, like an hour in the morning or in the evening after school when you both just happen to be there, and you might sit down and think through what we will do"

tomorrow...I guess we just do it as we go. It is just the nature of it sometimes. Especially when you are in a number of different classes. It is impossible to get around and talk to everybody”

(Anne, SET)

Interpreting Anne’s response, it can be deduced that, collaborative interactions in her case, were often left to chance. The practices of Anne, on the ground, are in stark contrast to the recommendations of Mulholland and O’ Connor (2016). Mulholland and O’ Connor argue that mutual planning time is a ‘core requisite of cohesive capacity-building, where shared awareness of philosophies, skills and practice in relation to SEN and inclusion becomes a necessary preamble to successful collaborative practice’ (2016, p.1073). Therefore, Mulholland and O’ Connor (2016) maintain that collaboration cannot be left to ‘chance’, when stakeholders “*just happen to be there*” (Anne, SET).

Negotiating collaborative planning time in an already busy school day (Blecker and Boakes 2010; Travers *et al.* 2010; Ware *et al.* 2011) was a particular challenge identified by most participants in this study. Alannah, an infant teacher, reported that she was not allocated time for collaboration or planning, but that she was “*lucky*” to be teaching infants due to the additional time provided at the end of the day:

“In the infant end we have an extra hour at the end of the day... I am finding it much better this year, because I have that hour to be able to plan. I know, up the other end of the school, it is completely different”

(Alannah, Class Teacher)

While Eileen and Anne’s quotes above exemplify the lack of structure and time for planning within the school day, Alannah clearly elucidates the benefits that one additional hour can have for teachers to plan and coordinate with others. The fact that Alannah considered herself ‘*lucky*’ and stressed how she is “*finding it much better this year*” suggests that time is precious and often restricted. Therefore, the data would suggest that stakeholders i.e., class teachers and SETs, need to be allocated more time to liaise with one another in order to promote good collaborative practice (Law *et al.* 2000; Hartas 2004; Ware *et al.* 2011). Not only could this improve teachers' ability to collaborate, organise lessons and deliver joint instruction, but it could also encourage the establishment of effective CoPs (Lave and Wenger 1991), whereby collective learning is encouraged, valued and shared (Wenger 2011). In doing so, Glazier *et al.* (2017) maintain that meaningful and transformative learning can therefore take place,

particularly in cases such as Alannah's where there are cohorts of infant teachers who have an additional hour at the end of the day.

While the majority of class teacher participants reported that they were not given allocated time to engage in effective collaboration or planning, throughout interview discussion it became apparent that most of SET participants were provided with additional planning time. This assigned planning time was generally carried out on a Friday afternoon during school hours. However, a consensus emerged that due to the structure of the school day, SET planning was often completed in isolation without the class teacher. Although the SETs interviewed appreciated the allocated time, they still encountered challenges when trying to collaborate with their colleagues. This is exemplified in Kathleen, Conor and Amelia's responses below:

"Special Education Teachers have forty minutes a week that can sometimes be used for planning, but this is not timetabled with class teachers. After that it is more informal"

(Kathleen, SET)

Kathleen, a SET, reported that she was given allocated planning time once a week. However, she explicitly stated that it did not necessarily mean that she got the opportunity to collaboratively plan with the corresponding class teachers. Therefore, her planning was often carried out in isolation due to the class teachers not being able to remove themselves from classroom duties. Conor, a SET, also stated that he was given planning time once a week. However, consistent with Kathleen's response, Conor explained that there is very little time to collaborate with the class teacher to discuss a particular student's needs. Moreover, Conor stressed that, due to the lack of formal collaboration, he is often left guessing what actions to take to best support the students he teaches:

"We are given 45 minutes on a Friday to plan and prepare the week ahead. To be honest, once every term, with a particular child, I will try and sit down with the teacher. There is no real time to do this. You might get five or ten minutes in the morning or evening. It would be great if there was some sort of allocated time there to properly discuss the child's needs. It would be a massive help to have this time. Just sitting down and having a chat with someone over a particular child, you can learn so much. The time is just not there. It is guess work a lot of the time and a lot of informal chat"

(Conor, SET)

In a similar vein, Amelia, a SET, commented on the benefits of being allocated "meeting time on a Friday from half past one to half past two", but contended that collaboration with the

class teacher is not happening formally here in Ireland, in comparison to her experience teaching in Vietnam. Throughout interview discussion, Amelia acknowledged that the fault does not necessarily lie with the teachers but can be broadly encapsulated as a timing issue. In her response, she highlighted the difficulties negotiating collaborative planning time due to the dynamic and often disruptive nature of the classroom:

“Time is a big factor...we would have a lot of informal chats throughout the day a few minutes here and there and that works really well and then we also [the SETs] have an allocated meeting time on a Friday from half past one to half past two so that’s quite helpful, but in terms of sitting down with the class teacher it’s not happening a lot formally. Again, it’s quite difficult because nowadays there are quite a few adults going into each classroom, so to meet with teachers yes it would be ideal to have that meeting time but it’s a bit unrealistic at the moment with all the other expectations. It’s nothing against the teachers at all, It’s just time”

(Amelia, SET)

Amelia openly discussed how she found the transfer home to Ireland “difficult”, given the lack of time provided to communicate and collaborate with her colleagues. In her response she eloquently described how she engaged in collaborative planning in Vietnam, highlighting what she believes to be the ideal situation in order to combat the issue around collaboration:

“Ideally to sit down for half an hour and talk things through on a Thursday or a Friday for the following week would be ideal. That certainly was the case when I was in Vietnam, we were actually allocated time for this [collaboration]. So, the school day is from half past seven until three o’ clock, it’s a lot longer but you are given time off to have these meetings so that’s the ideal situation but in Ireland time restraints is a problem”

(Amelia, SET)

In agreement with Hargreaves, the participants in this study alluded that the ‘scarcity of time makes it difficult to plan more thoroughly, to commit oneself to the effort of innovation, to get together with colleagues, or to sit back and reflect on one’s purposes and progress’ (1994, p.15). As previously emphasised by Conor, “*the time is just not there*”. In Ireland, the way schools are organised leaves few opportunities for teachers to plan collaboratively (Drudy and Kinsella 2009; Blecker and Boakes 2010; McCarthy 2011; Pratt *et al.* 2017). As witnessed in the participant responses above, traditionally the work of a teacher is carried out in their classroom on their own (Conway 2002). There is very little time for planning alone or with colleagues and thus, teachers have become accustomed to planning their work at home after school hours

(McCarthy 2011). From analysing the interview transcripts, it became apparent that scheduled planning time within the school day does not extend to class teachers. When asked ‘How often does the class teacher and SET engage in collaborative planning? And are they given allocated time to do so?’ The majority of participants stated that scheduled planning time with the class teacher and SET was only allocated during specific Croke Park Hours¹³. This is evident in both Donna and Lynn’s responses below:

“There isn’t really any official slot [for collaborative planning] apart from Croke Park hours maybe that you might be assigned a little bit of time, it is always after school hours”

(Donna, Class Teacher)

“Time is the issue here. Informally, they might do it through corridor conversation at the end of the day or in the morning time. At the end of the month, there is one Croke Park Hour designated to planning for teachers. This can be used for either class teacher to use individually or for obviously the support teacher to collaborate with the class teacher during this time. I know that planning time is always going to be an issue. There is obviously not enough of it. I don’t really know how often it happens where the two of them would sit down together. They would certainly be encouraged to do so when we meet for staff meetings”

(Lynn, Principal)

It can be deduced from Lynn’s response, that while there is one Croke Park hour dedicated to planning, the onus remains on the individual teacher to engage in such practice. Similar sentiments were expressed by Keith, a principal. Throughout interview discussion he emphasised the importance of collaborative planning, however, stressed that due to the busy nature of the school environment time constraints make it difficult for it to be facilitated:

“It is organised between the teachers by in large themselves...informally during the day checking in with each other. Now and again, they would formally meet before and after school and some time is allocated to Croke park hours. I would love if we had more hours to formally allocate to this... however when you start taking away the formal staff meetings and other CPDs that we do during the year we don’t have a lot of capacity left to say ok everybody is meeting the SET team today at this time, so it is timetabled infrequently, and it’s mostly left to the professionalism of the class teacher and the support teacher. They organise those meeting themselves...I would love to have more capacity to do it formally with Croke park hours, but the time just isn’t there”

¹³ Under the Croke Park Agreement primary school teachers are required to work an additional 36 hours a year. These are often referred to as Croke Park Hours. These hours are used for parent teacher meetings, staff planning, staff meetings, CPD training and other workshops. These hours take place outside tuition time (DES 2016)

(Keith, Principal)

Although Lynn and Keith align with the views of Glazer and Hannafin (2006) that planning time should be factored into the school day to allow for reciprocal interactions among class teachers and SETs, it can be discerned from their responses that there is simply not enough time to do so. This holds significant implications for the development of effective CoPs (Lave and Wenger 1991). Looking at it from a different perspective, Lynn reflected on her time as a SET, prior to becoming principal. Throughout interview discussion she highlighted the challenges associated with not having adequate time to engage in effective collaboration with the class teacher. In the extract below she provided an honest account from her own experience, highlighting the lack of communication and collaboration between class teachers and SETs when devising Individualised Educational Plans (IEPs):

“Even looking back when I was a support teacher, and I was doing IEPs, you mightn’t get the time to fully communicate targets with the class teacher and you might carry out your own little assessments in the resource room and draw up your own little plan. I probably made the mistake sometimes that the class teacher was not getting enough of a buy-in on that or not being in tune with that. The class teacher, I suppose, maybe had the view that this child is going to the support teacher, that teacher is responsible for that child. But ultimately, the class teacher is obviously responsible for the learning of every child in the class. So, it is very important the class teacher and support teacher collaborate and communicate and know the contents of the IEP and know what targets are being worked on”

(Lynn, Principal)

Data yielded from this study indicate that due to the limited collaboration and planning time available, class teachers and SETs are under significant pressure to meet the needs of students with additional needs, especially those with SLCD. Lynn’s response above illustrates how SETs often devise IEPs on their own, with little support from the class teacher. This again highlights the lack of time for collegial support and effective collaboration on the ground, to support inclusive practices (Hartas 2004; Fullan 2007; Daly *et al.* 2016; Bush and Grotjohann 2020). Therefore, the researcher would assert that allocated time for collaborative planning and effective communication is a necessity in order to enhance instruction and encourage stakeholders to look at practices in new ways (Wenger 1998). Concurring with Ware *et al.* (2011), time for collaborative planning needs to be embedded in practice i.e., built within the school week to ensure that both, class teachers and SETs are “*in tune with*” one another and know exactly what “*targets are being worked on*”.

While the above section examined the difficulties class teachers and SETs face in relation to effective collaboration within the school environment, it is important to also consider the challenges experienced by these stakeholders when trying to engage with outside agencies such as SLTs and vice versa. This will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

8.3.3.1 Time for Collaboration with Outside Agencies – SLTs “The Experts”

As outlined above, availability of time for collaboration is a major barrier when it comes to engaging in effective collaboration (Glover *et al.* 2015; Bush and Grotjohann 2020; Quigley and Smith 2021). While it is evident from the interview data that class teachers and SETs are grappling to find the time to collaborate within the school day, time to collaborate with SLTs was emphasised as one of the major concerns when supporting students with SLCD (Archibald 2017). Throughout interview discussions, teachers’ frustration with the level of responsibility placed on them as a result of the lack of SLT engagement was stressed. The majority of class teachers and most of the SETs interviewed, reported that they did not get the chance to meet or speak with a SLT. The lack of communication and collaboration is evidenced in the participants responses below:

“I have not had the chance to talk to anyone [SLT] this year”

(Alannah, Class Teacher)

“I don’t know the name of the SLT, I never met the person”

(Conor, SET)

“No I have not got the chance to meet with the speech and language therapist but I think it would be really worthwhile because she has the expertise in that area. Her knowledge is way more than what I have, so to hear her ideas and what things work would be brilliant, so we could implement them in our own classroom”

(Rebecca, Class Teacher)

With respect to this study’s theoretical framework, CoP, it is evident from these responses that teachers and SLTs do not possess the requisite relationships that underpin effective collaborative practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). The lack of engagement observed by the participants has led to teachers feeling unsupported and ‘left guessing’ what to do, as previously mentioned by Conor, a SET. From analysing the participant data, the need for

greater SLT collaboration was signified. Such findings were illustrated in Rebecca's response above. Throughout interview discussion, Rebecca emphasised that teachers are not experts in the field of speech and language, they do not have the specialised skillset of an SLT and therefore need professional support to identify and meet the 'increasingly diverse learning needs' of their students (Chitiyo 2017, p.57). While Rebecca reported having the desire to collaborate with the SLT to implement different strategies and techniques in her own classroom, unfortunately the opportunity did not arise. This finding was also reflected in the response of Ellen, a teacher, below:

"I never got the chance to meet with the SLT...I think it is really important...it is their area of expertise, the teacher can't be an expert in all areas, so being able to get advice... even to kind of collaborate with your support plan to see if the goals are appropriate and if the child is meeting them goals. So, I think it is really important to have someone there"

(Ellen, Class Teacher)

It is evident from the quotes above, that teachers value the knowledge and skills that SLTs have and therefore, long to develop effective collaborative practice with these stakeholders to enhance teaching and learning. Keith, a principal of a mixed school, claimed that developing inter-professional collaboration is vital and that schools need to be provided with adequate SLT services in order to support students with SLCD (Lynch *et al.* 2020). Therefore, to enhance SLT provision, Keith welcomes the rollout of the Demonstration Project (Section 2.7.2), whereby support is provided on the ground in school, asserting *"I would be all for it"*. During interview discussion, Keith reiterated the sentiment expressed by Rebecca and Ellen, wherein he perceives the SLT as being the 'expert' and therefore stresses the need for increased collaboration with the SLT:

"It is their primary expertise, it's not our primary expertise, so the SLT is in the best position to offer support. I don't think that's open to interpretation, that's who they are, that's their area but the access is not at an ideal level"

(Keith, Principal)

Therefore, considering Keith's response it could be argued that, for collaborative practice to be successful, common planning and review time among teachers and SLTs is essential (Blecker and Boakes 2010; Pratt *et al.* 2016). While Keith fully supports the implementation of the Demonstration Project to enhance SLT collaboration and to develop multidisciplinary

teams, he is uncertain that it will achieve what it sets out to accomplish due to a lack of human resources (see Section 5.6.1.4) and funding. Keith's uncertainty is strongly illustrated in the quote below:

“The theory behind all these things sounds great Ciara, and I think it would be absolutely incredible...but do I believe the resources are there?... I do not at all. Because again like everything, there will be difficulties with it. Like even something as simple as someone going on professional maternity leave and that professional not being replaced. That seems to be the environment that they are working in... the pool of professional talent in this area doesn't seem to be too deep and nor are the pockets of the HSE so there seems to be a difficulty there. If they access leave and they aren't replaced. Here is where the whole system grinds to a halt”

(Keith, Principal)

Given that both teachers and SLTs are employed by different Departments and work in different environments, as discussed above in Section 8.3.2.1, data from this study indicate that this divide is an impediment to collaboration. The lack of consistency, as mentioned by Keith, along with the persistent rollover of staff as evidenced in Cian's response below, inevitably leads to greater difficulties when trying to establish effective collaborative practices (Lave and Wenger 1991):

“I have worked with three individual SLTs last year, all of whom have been redeployed and or are on leave”

(Cian, SET)

From analysing the interview transcripts, it became apparent that the lack of time and SLTs available has forced a significant amount of collaboration and sharing of knowledge to be carried out over the phone. While this form of collaboration may be one way to combat the shortage of SLTs, the data from this study portrays significant challenges associated with such practice. One major issue with this type of collaboration as experienced by Jessica, a SLT, is the time spent making calls and trying to get through to the class teacher or SET and vice versa. According to Jessica, this leads to them playing constant “*phone tag*”. From first-hand experience, Jessica claims that after making the initial call “*it could be a week when you make contact with someone*”. Thus, Jessica asserts that the time wasted here is unacceptable and firmly believes that communication between both stakeholders needs to improve. In the quote below, Jessica highlights the possible reasons as to why collaboration over the phone does not always work:

“It is not a blame game. It is nobody’s fault. Sometimes it can get left to the wayside. Teachers finish up school. Sometimes the teacher might not get the phone-call from the SLT or might not get the email or might not be able to get around to replying to the SLT. Sometimes there is a delay in getting back to each-other. If I ring a school and ask to speak to Miss Murphy, and they are like well actually she is in class and there is no one to cover. It definitely does need to be improved”

(Jessica, SLT)

In order to overcome this issue, Jessica always provides her contact details to the schools and tries to respond to any queries teachers have:

“Once schools know that they can contact us, again we find it hard as a team to try and contact every school and check up on all our kids. Sometimes we end up playing phone tag. I just say to the schools, “here is my email, here is my phone number, leave me a message and I’ll email you back”

(Jessica, SLT)

While the situation isn’t ideal, it is evident from Jessica’s interview discussion, that heavy caseloads and a lack of time is hindering her ability to work effectively with the various schools and students she provides therapy to:

“We have so many appointments. We are under massive pressure with waiting lists and assessments for kids with complex needs. It is very hard to find that time to go out to the school”

(Jessica, SLT)

Although Jessica desires to engage with schools, time constraints make it impossible. Similar sentiments were echoed by Noreen, a SLT, when asked if she feels she engages in effective collaborative practice with class teachers or SET or both:

“I try to. It is definitely constrained by the amount of time and capacity that I have for it. I certainly try to keep people at a minimum informed. When I meet with teachers my approach is to try and start at “This is where we are at in terms of this child’s speech and language profile. These are the things that I am suggesting. What is feasible in your setting?” I try not to say that “you must do this, or you have to do that”, it is more about what is realistic. Acknowledging that within my own service, I can’t often do the ideal. I have to sometimes think “What can I do right now, what is feasible and realistic? That is what I would try to do, to make myself as available on the phone, via email, even if I can’t physically visit the school, I would try promote the culture of contact me. I am more than happy to revise plans or goals”

(Neasa, SLT)

Neasa's response eloquently depicts that it is not a case of her not wanting to collaborate, or not willing to support students and teachers to the best of her ability, but rather a case of there simply not being enough time in the working day to do so. Neasa acknowledges that recommendations made by SLTs need to be realistic in order for them to work. She openly admits that she often doesn't have the capacity in her own setting to complete what she wants and thus, understands the pressure teachers are under with the increasing number of students with SEN being educated in mainstream schools (McCoy *et al.* 2016; Rose *et al.* 2017). While Jessica and Neasa both made reference to the importance of promoting effective communication and a culture of openness, Anne, a class teacher, maintains that, although efforts are made by a number of SLTs, the lack of time SLTs have to collaborate with school staff is minimal and more often than not futile:

"From my experience, when you do need to get in contact with someone, say a SLT or occupational therapist, quite often, their workloads and caseloads are so big, they don't necessarily have the time to give to you."

(Anne, Class Teacher)

It can be deduced from Jessica, Neasa and Anne's responses, that the lack of time available is a fundamental issue hindering effective collaboration (see Section 5.6.1.3). Returning to Jessica's comment *"it's not a blame game. It's nobody's fault"*, suggests that greater intervention is required from the Department of Education (DoE) as well as the Department of Health (DoH) in order to tackle the issue (Glover *et al.* 2015). Neasa's response below further signifies this:

"I do think it has to come from a higher level than just the teachers and therapists on the ground. Good will and people being really flexible only gets you so far. There is only so much people can do. It needs a structure and that needs to come from the people who control the budgets, HR and employment"

(Neasa, SLT)

According to Ailbhe, a SLT, the only alternative for ensuring that sufficient SLT support is established, is by hiring *"more therapists"* and by providing *"long term funding"*. Ailbhe believes that if such amendments were made, SLTs would have more time to engage in effective collaboration and communication with school staff. This would result in teachers feeling more supported and equipped to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD

(Lynch *et al.* 2020). Observations reflected on by the researcher, highlight the need for change at a systems level in order for effective intervention to be carried out.

“Feelings of outrage were expressed by Ailbhe and Neasa, both SLTs, when talking about the lack of therapeutic support available to students with SLCD. Throughout interview discussion they both became very passionate and expressed the need for structural change, in order to keep newly qualified therapists in Ireland. Having more SLTs they believe would reduce caseloads and enable SLTs to visit schools on a more frequent basis”

(Research Diary 4th December 2020)

Data yielded from this study, support the need for an integrated system of therapeutic, health and education services, as provided by the Demonstration Project, to be rolled out nationwide. The potential positives of this project were witnessed by all participants in this study. Kathleen, a SET, acknowledged the importance of fostering a more collaborative approach in schools, stating *“it is exactly what we need”*, while also highlighting how *“it provides SETs with a point of reference which they never had before and a resource they could use on a regular basis”*. Moreover, Eileen, a SET, referred to fostering and encouraging collaborative efforts as *“a God send”*. Eileen states that greater collaboration with the SLT would support her in identifying and meeting the needs of her students:

“At least you would have some guidance, or you would have ideas of what to do or you could at least have regular conversations and interactions with them [SLT] so you could bounce things off them or they could see the child in action regularly”

(Eileen, SET)

Annie, a principal, believes that the Demonstration Project is *“essential in this day and age”* to foster a culture of inter-professional collaboration within our education system, stating:

“I think it would help hugely because we are all kind of swimming against the tide trying to come up with ideas, it would mean that instead of having to organise telephone calls and literally everybody is kind of missing each other constantly on the phone because either I am in a meeting, the teacher is in a class or the SLT is in an appointment there would be a set time that we could all get together so I think it would be time saving as well in the long run and an awful lot more efficient”

(Annie, Principal)

It was evident from the interview discussions that all principals, class teachers and SETs alike welcomed the rollout of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018). Concurring with the literature

presented in Chapter Two, participants believe that this would meet the demands of both curriculum and therapy (Glover *et al.* 2015; Mulholland and O'Connor 2016). Lynn and Nora, both principals, argued that such intervention is needed:

“As I said earlier, teachers are not trained speech therapists and a 45-minute meeting really doesn’t suffice to hand over adequate amount of stuff. It would be really great... I think it would work very well. I know even in our own school here, there would be some children who would really benefit from it”

(Lynn, Principal)

Nora signified the importance of receiving support from the “experts” asserting that:

“With the new model, many children will not have a diagnosis anymore. Reports are no longer going to be necessary. There will be children out there who may not have the piece of paper but certainly have the need”

(Nora, Principal)

Considering Nora’s response above, the rollout of the Demonstration Project is needed now more than ever. Throughout her interview, Nora stressed how it would greatly support the staff in her school stating, *“it would help us help the children, that is what we are there for”*. Nora stressed the value of working alongside the professionals to gain information and develop strategies that can easily be put into practice:

“I would love it. One hundred percent. Absolutely... because we are not experts ... they have the expertise, so to get their opinion of how best to help would be incredible”

(Nora, Principal)

Similar findings were also highlighted by Ailbhe, a SLT:

“I think it makes so much sense [The Demonstration Project] ...children needing more specialist or targeted interventions are accessing that in real time. To me, I would hope that it is something that gets rolled out nationwide. Going back to that idea of the importance of collaboration and building relationships. I think if you are embedded in a school system, then overtime you become part of that school system and you can facilitate those close workings, obviously so much more effectively. I think it is brilliant and the outcomes that have been shown are really positive in terms of speech and language”

(Ailbhe, SLT)

Alike Ailbhe, Jessica a SLT, emphasised the importance of having the SLT working within the school environment to support everyday practice, language instruction and overall student outcomes. In her quote below, she outlined the many benefits of the Demonstration Project and how she perceived the need for such change, stating:

“There is always an SLT on hand. If that SLT is in the school, she is going to know all the kids with speech and language needs. Again, it is not me reaching into a file because I haven’t seen that child in six months – wondering what goals did I work on with them? The information is going to be there. It is going to be quick. The SLT will know the running of the school and the school day. They can pop in any time, suggesting goals that you can bring in for these kids...visuals that you can use. The information is more on hand, up to date, functional and realistic. There is definitely benefits...the teacher gets support, and the SLT gets to see the kids. It would be easier to track how therapy is improving and how the SLT service is improving teacher’s connection with the kids regarding their speech and language goals”

(Jessica, SLT)

It can be deduced from the responses above that the lack of collaboration and time available for SLTs to collaborate with teachers is causing much concern (Drudy and Kinsella 2009; Travers *et al.* 2010). Concurring with Gallagher *et al.* (2019), there is insignificant time for SLTs to share their knowledge and skills with class teachers and SETs alike. Thus, school staff are left feeling unprepared and unsupported in their efforts to provide adequate instruction to students with SLCD (Glover *et al.* 2015). Participant data suggests that the implementation of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018) is one solution that would foster effective collaborative practice, whereby SLTs can provide training and CPD to school staff within their own learning environments (Lynch *et al.* 2020). While time constraints are a recurring issue, Amelia, a SET, suggested that SLTs should be assigned to a ‘*small cluster of schools*’ so that sufficient support can be offered to both the students and teachers. Rosie, a SLT, agrees with Amelia, asserting that having one therapist assigned to a school, as a whole, is much more effective:

“it’s a lot more beneficial than having ten therapists from different agencies going into the same class, because often that is really confusing for everyone and it’s not time efficient. If you had one therapist going in for everyone you would be able to see a lot more children more efficiently”

(Rosie, SLT)

As encouraged within the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020), SLTs are given the opportunity to provide ongoing support to their fellow stakeholders (class teachers and SETs). However, all of these stakeholders still need time working together in a shared environment in order for effective collaboration to be achieved. Findings from this study reveal the importance of cultivating a CoP, whereby stakeholders build positive working relationships and learn from one another in a mutually beneficial way (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger *et al.* 2002; Parker *et al.* 2016). However, as explained in this section, stakeholders' understanding of what is meant by 'collaboration', breakdown in communication and coordination between services and the availability of time continue to obstruct effective collaboration and hinder the development of CoPs (see Figure 8.4). Despite this, data from this research would assert that effective CPD may be able to bridge the gaps in knowledge and enhance collaborative practice between key stakeholders in order to meet the needs of all students. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

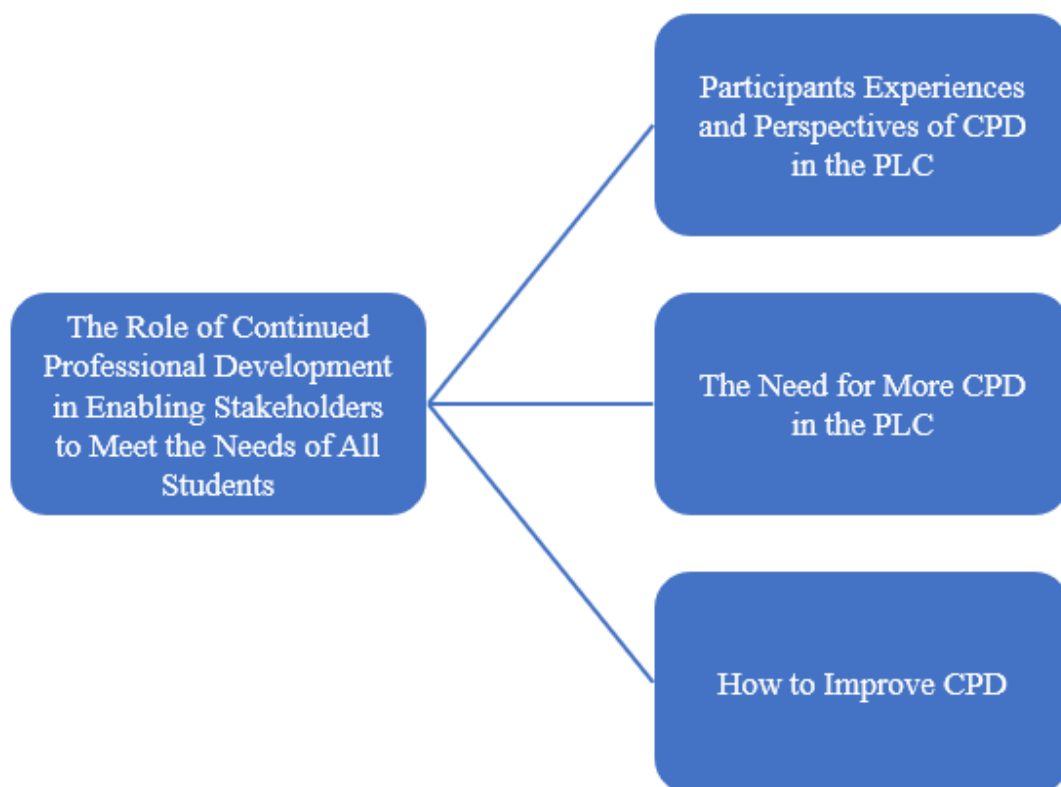


Figure 8.4 Theme Three: The Role of CPD in Enabling Stakeholders to Meet the Needs of all Students

8.4 Theme Three: The Role of Continued Professional Development in Enabling Stakeholders to Meet the Needs of All Students

As explored in Chapter Four, Continued Professional Development (CPD) has the potential to enhance ‘instructional practices, pedagogy and student outcomes’ (Day *et al.* 2007) and has become a major policy priority both nationally and internationally (OECD 2005; Banks and Smyth 2011; The Teaching Council 2016). In Ireland, current education policies have placed a significant emphasis on the need for teachers to engage in CPD in order to improve teaching instruction, enhance teacher confidence and maximise the potential of resources (Armitage *et al.* 2012; The Teaching Council 2016). Since the introduction and implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (DES 2019a), CPD has been facilitated by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in collaboration with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). This CPD aimed to support principals and teachers in effectively implementing the PLC over a three-year framework (Circular 61/2015). The following points derived from the research of McGarry (2017, p.198), outline, in detail, the support and training that schools received by the PDST regarding the rollout of the PLC.

- During year one, the primary focus was oral language. The PDST provided a half-day seminar for school principals, followed by a half-day school closure for whole-staff CPD through the use of online support. In addition to this, a full day seminar was provided to principals and one other staff member. Following this, another half-day school closure for whole-staff CPD was allocated through the use of online support. During this time staff were to familiarise themselves with the curriculum while also exploring the learning outcomes and progression continua for planning and teaching.
- During year two, schools were allocated one full-day school closure for whole staff CPD facilitated by a member of the PDST. During this phase schools were also offered ongoing elective support by the PDST if needed.
- During year three, the primary focus was reading and writing. The PDST provided one full-day school closure for in-school CPD, while also offering a number of ongoing elective supports depending on the individual needs of the school

(McGarry 2017)

While the three-year framework, outlined in Circular 61/2015, aimed to provide schools with the necessary support for implementing the PLC, data from this study assert that the majority of stakeholders perceived the delivery of CPD, provided by the PDST, to be inadequate (Smith 2015; Welch *et al.* 2016; McGarry 2017). The following section will outline the participants' experiences and perceptions of CPD regarding the PLC.

8.4.1 Participants Experiences and Perspectives of CPD in the PLC

The majority of the participants in this study reported that they did not receive adequate CPD in the PLC, whereas a small number of participants reported that CPD was satisfactory. Moreover, a few reported feeling unsure or indifferent about the amount of CPD provided. Given the high number of responses that responded negatively to the question, "Do you feel you received adequate training in the PLC?", showed, that despite the efforts of the PDST to supports school with the implementation of the PLC, the majority of stakeholders still perceive that they lack the requisite knowledge to implement the PLC successfully (Fraser *et al.* 2007; Murchan *et al.* 2009).

Nicola, a class teacher, explained how she felt the CPD provided was "very wishy washy" and that she was unsure whether she was implementing the PLC correctly:

"I have to say that I don't feel that I received adequate training. I found it very wishy washy...I would definitely like more training. I think most of my colleagues would agree with me on that. We are still a bit confused. We have tried to sit down in our cohorts and plan, but we are really just doing it as we go along. It's all trial and error. I will be honest in saying that I don't know if I am implementing it correctly in the classroom. I am trying to, but it is just very difficult to get your head around it"

(Nicola, Class Teacher)

Nicola further stated that the training she received was aimed "more towards the mainstream classroom" and that "it didn't really touch on how to support those with additional needs". This concern raised by Nicola, goes against the recommendations of Ware *et al.* who state that if 'inclusive education is to be progressed it is essential that all teachers receive appropriate training in teaching students with special education needs' (2011, p.150; Pugach *et al.* 2014; Holmqvist and Lelinge 2021). Similar sentiments were expressed by Robyn, a class teacher, of a different school. In her response, Robyn stressed that the CPD provided was "inadequate" and that it "wasn't really relevant" to her school setting (DEIS). This is evident in the extract below:

“The CPD that we received wasn’t really relevant to our school setting...even though we have a huge EAL population it didn’t really focus on providing support for them.... honestly it was not thought through properly. I think if they took more into consideration and adapted it to suit the schools they were going to, it might be more adequate”

(Robyn, Class Teacher)

Robyn’s response highlights the need for CPD to be tailored to suit the individual needs of the school, in order for it to be effective. This coincides with Brennan, who claims that ‘the content and manner in which professional development is executed is important’ (2017, p.51). From analysing Robyn’s response, it is evident that she believes ‘CPD for teachers is best situated in close proximity to the work itself, the teacher’s own classroom’ (NCCA 2018, p.216). In agreement with Robyn, Nora, a principal, stressed that CPD in the PLC is “pointless” unless it is “specific” to your own school. This aligns with the recommendations of Guiden and Brennan (2017). They argue that CPD should reflect both the personal needs, and the needs of the school. Therefore, the researcher would posit that a ‘one size fits all’ (Smith 2012, p.2) approach to CPD is inadequate, as no two schools are the same. While Nora acknowledged the need for curriculum reform and welcomed the PLC, stating “we have asked for this”, she described the challenges herself and her colleagues faced when trying to implement it:

“We found it difficult that there was no content. Where is the content of what you are actually teaching? There were objectives etc...but where do you get the substance to deliver it? I like to have content; I like to know what I am supposed to be teaching”

(Nora, Principal)

Alannah, a class teacher, echoed Nora’s concern regarding the lack of content provided in the PLC. In her response Alannah emphasised the stress she endured when trying to plan and implement the curriculum, stating:

“I had endless days where I cried over the PLC. I was fine planning for any other subject. It is saying a lot, but it is not giving you what to teach. There is no content. For example, in Maths - by the end of teaching the concept of time, they need to know how to tell the o’clock. Boom... there it is, in black and white in the curriculum. I feel like the PLC is very airy fairy, and it is all under weird and abstract titles”

(Alannah, Class Teacher)

From engaging in interview discussion with Alannah, it became apparent that she felt she lacked the necessary knowledge to effectively implement the PLC. Alannah informed the

researcher that she often asked herself “*Am I being stupid, am I not understanding this?*”. Alannah maintained that the first few CPD sessions were “*pointless*” stating how herself and her colleagues “*didn’t really learn anything from it*”. Alannah reiterated that the lack of adequate training has impeded her ability to use the curriculum effectively to enhance the quality of teaching and learning within her classroom. Reflecting on the CPD provided, Nora also claimed that she felt “*none the wiser*” after participating in the CPD:

“Did I find it useful?...not particularly, personally speaking. Most of the staff would feel that way about it”

(Nora, Principal)

During interview discussion, Nora reiterated the uncertainty experienced on a whole school level regarding the implementation of the PLC, stating, “*I don’t know how much we have got our heads around it.*” Concurring with the participants above, Cian, a SET, expressed his concerns with the CPD provided by the PDST in the rollout of the PLC describing it as “*really really poor*”. In his response he highlighted how he perceived the CPD to be inadequate in supporting teachers with its implementation¹⁴, and that too much was expected of them from the onset:

“I couldn’t take it all in in the two days and it was kind of like there’s two days of help now paddle your own canoe from now on...I mean we wouldn’t do that to the children and yet we think that we can do it to teachers... I’m not trying to be negative, I found it very demoralising to be honest. They were very helpful, and they clearly knew their stuff. One in particular was very well versed on it and you would know he was very passionate about it. But all the passion in the world isn’t going to work if it’s just fired at you in one day and you are expected to just know what to do. You know, we don’t expect you to learn to drive a car in a day. You get it over a long period and your muscle memory builds up and I think that the Department doesn’t seem to recognise that you need that with everything but particularly with the core key subjects English, Irish and Maths”

(Cian, SET)

While Cian stressed that the PDST facilitators were “*very helpful*” and “*very well versed*”, it was evident that he perceived the CPD to be insufficient in providing teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills in implementing the curriculum. Cian stated that it was

¹⁴ It is important to note the challenging situation the PDST found themselves in during the Covid-19 pandemic in delivering sustained support to schools. While Circular 0045/2019 (DES 2019a) outlined a new three-year cycle of support from 2019/20 to 2021/22 for the PLC, it was unavoidably disrupted as a result.

unreasonable to expect teachers to be equipped and competent in implementing the PLC with such little guidance and support (McGarry 2017). Cian stressed the need for ongoing support using the analogy of learning to drive. He stated that it takes time to build “*muscle memory*” and that when it comes to the dissemination and implementation of a new curriculum, especially the three core subjects, effective CPD is crucial (Strieker *et al.* 2012; Miller and Stewart 2013; Grimmett 2014). In agreement with McGarry (2017), data from this study would suggest that the time allocated to the CPD for the rollout and implementation of the PLC was inadequate to fully meet the needs of all stakeholders. Such findings may have ramifications for the meaningful reform of future CPD.

From analysing the participant data, the majority of principals, class teachers and SETs reported being somewhat overwhelmed with the introduction of a new curriculum (McGarry 2017). Therefore, data suggest that a more balanced approach to CPD is warranted, wherein knowledge is transferred on a recurring and frequent basis (Strieker *et al.* 2012). This ensures that the participants have the chance to continuously learn and implement new knowledge that they receive through CPD. Like Cian above, Conor, a SET, expressed how he was dissatisfied with the CPD he received and highlighted the unrealistic expectations placed on teachers to implement the PLC. Throughout interview discussion, Conor reported that there seemed to be a complete disconnect between the policy makers and those on the ground who are grappling to implement the PLC. This is depicted in his quote below:

“You are setting up people to fail, setting up schools to fail. To be honest, have you seen the size of the handbook? Who do they think is actually going to sit down and read that? You get one day to go and do this [CPD]. You are expected to implement a whole new language curriculum after one day where they don’t even have an example to show you. There is a massive disconnect between the Department and the people on the ground”

(Conor, SET)

Similar findings were mirrored in a study carried out by McGarry (2017). High levels of dissatisfaction and frustration were also reported by the participants in her study. One such participant, observed the following:

“It’s a joke - the manner in which this has been introduced is half-baked and has had no thought put into it”

(McGarry 2017, p. 203)

“A dreadful awareness that the people who do not understand how schools and teachers work are gaining more and more control over the education system”

(McGarry 2017, p. 203)

These statements reflect the concerns raised by Conor above. Conor highlighted the contrast between the significant financial investment in the PLC and the perceived lack of results, stating:

“The amount of money that has gone into the first part of it and the amount gone into the second part. A lot of schools are struggling to implement it. New things like this need to be user friendly. No one wants to study it to see how to implement it. They have put all the effort into creating it so it should come with a user-friendly guide to give us step by step on what to do. It should be uniform across the board. Obviously making allowance for different types of schools”

(Conor, SET)

Again, this perception is reflected in McGarry’s study (2017), when another participant of her study stated:

“So much money and time invested, I thought, and it is now ‘all up in the air’ - Are they making it up as they go along”?

(McGarry 2017, p. 203)

Given that McGarry’s study took place in 2017, the researcher would argue that there has not been much change despite the large investment by the DoE and its agencies in the PLC. This explains the frustration raised by stakeholders in this study, when they state that the Department has not addressed their concerns. Therefore, stakeholders in this study emphasise the need for enhanced delivery of CPD that is, ongoing, sustainable, collaborative and embedded in the context of one’s own practice (see Figure 9.3), to improve instructional practices, pedagogies and ultimately student outcomes (Shevlin *et al.* 2008; Armitage *et al.* 2012; de Vries *et al.* 2014). This will be discussed in greater detail in Section 8.4.3 below.

8.4.1.1 “Overwhelming” and “Information Overload”

Most of the participants in this study stressed that the CPD, provided by the PDST, was “*overwhelming*” and “*impractical*”. Linda, Donna and Ellen, all class teachers, highlighted how they felt overwhelmed and confused after engaging in CPD. Linda and Donna both stressed how CPD for the PLC was very “*spaced out*”, and therefore, were unable to fully understand how the PLC should be implemented given that the CPD sessions were too far apart from one another. This is evident in their quotes below:

“The CPD that we had so far has been a bit overwhelming and it has also been quiet spaced out, like you know you have one bit of training and then ages later there is another bit of training, so you are forgetting what was said before and then also things keep changing in these CPDs. Like they are telling you one thing and then you go with that and then the next thing it's like “no no no we're not doing that, we are changing it”. Like it's a bit confusing”

(Linda, Class Teacher)

“They were a little bit spaced out and everyone felt a little overwhelmed... I definitely found it overwhelming. You can see where everyone is trying to do their best. They are trying to bring in a new plan to help everyone but sometimes it tends to be the same system but just changed around. Everyone I have spoken to seems to be still a little bit confused about it. The facilitators were lovely but a lot of us felt there was information overload. I think some of us felt a little intimidated when we saw the first book as well. We all felt that we were only getting the hang of the other one and now we have to change everything around”

(Donna, Class Teacher)

Furthermore, Ellen reiterated how the CPD she was provided was impractical and that too much information was distributed at one time. In her response she offered suggestions on how to improve CPD. From a teacher's perspective Ellen stressed the need for CPD to be practical and relevant to one's own classroom in order for it to be effective (Brennan 2017):

“We were given a lot of information, but it wasn't very practical, and it nearly came across to us as information overload... I think, maybe a practical approach would be better because it can be hard to take all that information in, in one day. Like if you were able to model a lesson based on the PLC and get feedback or get someone else to come into your classroom and model it that would be a more practical approach and it might make it easier for teachers to implement the new curriculum in their classrooms”

(Ellen, Class Teacher)

Similar sentiments were expressed by Annie and Keith, both school principals. Annie stated that *“the sheer volume”* of information provided during CPD caused great insecurity among staff members. She personally felt that the CPD *“took everyone by surprise because it was quite wordy and quiet paperwork orientated”*. Throughout interview discussion, Annie highlighted the benefits of having Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) employed, asserting how it helped them with the implementation of the PLC as the NQTs had received more training during their time in college:

“I think it was a huge amount of information to be landed in one go, what helped us a lot was we had a couple of newly qualified teachers who had an introduction to it in college”

(Annie, Principal)

Moreover, Annie commented on the benefits of utilising post holders¹⁵ to help with the dissemination of the PLC. In her response, she highlights the importance of having a member of staff to provide additional support to others:

“We have a teacher on staff that would have a post of responsibility for English, and she took it upon herself to make sure there were groups set up in class levels and she was there to give any additional support that was needed. So, I think it’s important that you have someone who can actually take on that role”

(Annie, Principal)

Similar findings were also evident in Keith’s response. Keith reported the benefits of having a “*team of people*” who can offer “*support*” to other staff members and to “*drive*” curriculum implementation:

“I feel that teachers still are unsure of the whole thing...we are lucky here that we have a team of people made up of API’s and APII’s who try to support and drive it [PLC] but it is very difficult. I think it will just take time”

(Keith, Principal)

Throughout interview discussion, Keith stressed the importance of curriculum implementation being a collaborative endeavour, whereby stakeholders learn from one another in a supportive environment. Such practice promotes the development of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) CoPs, where teachers can be provided with a safe space to openly discuss challenges and share concerns (Lave and Wenger 1991; Parker *et al.* 2016). Data in this study concur with Nieto (2003), that teachers often learn more from their colleagues, in comparison to outside professionals. The fact that Keith claims that the teachers in his school are still “*unsure of the whole thing*”, suggests that the CPD provided did not meet the needs of the class teachers and SETs on the ground, emphasising the policy-practice divide. Therefore, the researcher recommends a Community of Practice as Professional Development Model (see Figure 8.5) to enhance CPD during periods of policy and curricular change.

¹⁵ Post holders are part of a school’s leadership and management formation. They are usually referred to as Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal I (API) and Assistant Principal II (APII) (Circular 0044/2019).

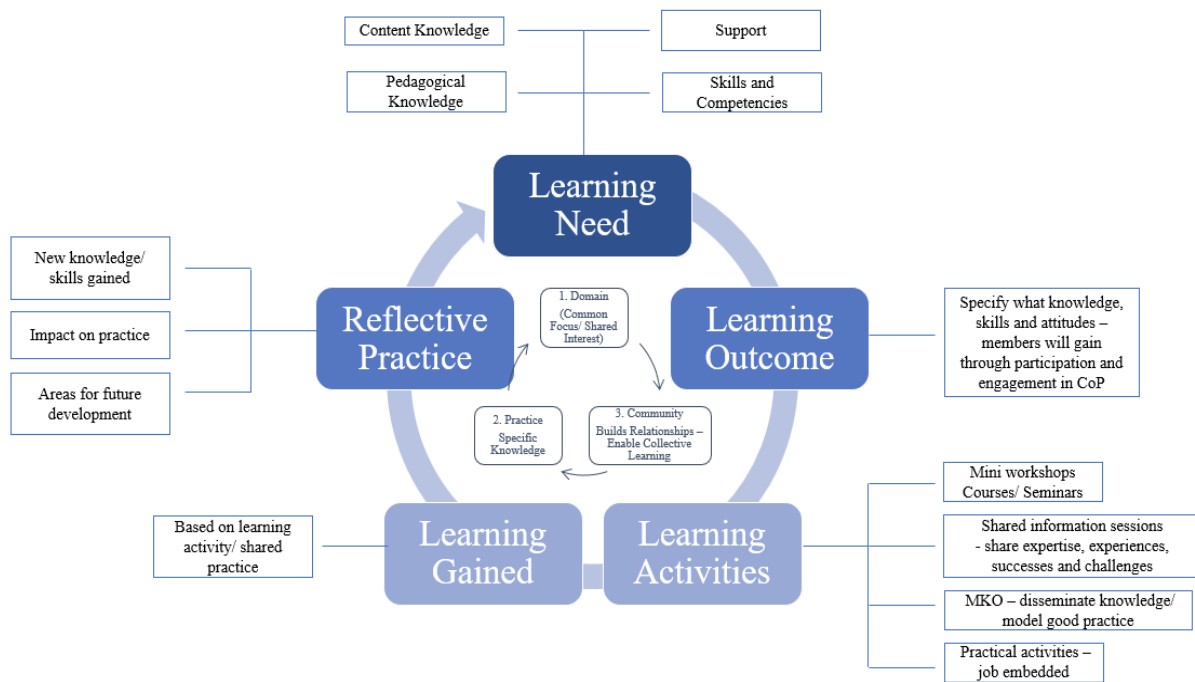


Figure 8.5 Community of Practice as Professional Development Model (Adapted from Ceatha 2018)

Keith acknowledged that while the PDST facilitators were “*very good*” and “*knew their stuff*”, CPD needed to be more practical and specific to their own school context (Guiden and Brennan 2017), which highlights the importance of situated learning within a CoP. Keith also reiterated that too much information was “*crammed*” into one day and that the Department expected too much from teachers:

“I just think there was a lot of talk and teachers were overwhelmed. There was too much information crammed in one day and teachers felt that they were just given the information and it was up to them to make it work. The books alone and the flaps caused more trouble than anything. I think CPD needs to be more hands-on and realistic. What I mean by that is it has to be relevant to the class teachers and their class level. Teachers need to see what it looks like in practice on the ground in their own setting. I know we were shown videos but each school setting is different so that isn't the same”

(Keith, Principal)

Considering Keith’s response above, it is evident that CPD has a significant impact on practice and thus, he desires a more “*hands on and realistic*” approach to be embedded within the school setting (Wang *et al.* 2014). Keith stressed the need for PDST facilitators to model lessons and provide plans so that teachers know exactly what is expected of them. Discourse suggests that for CPD to be effective, teachers need to ‘know what to do, why it should work

and how to gauge the effectiveness of practice' (McGarry 2017, p. 219). Coinciding with the NCCA, Keith concurs that 'a curriculum comes alive only in the very particular social context of schools and classrooms: it must, therefore, be supported in these classroom contexts in order to respond effectively to individual teachers' professional needs and the needs of groups of teachers in particular school contexts' (NCCA 2008, p.216).

While the literature recommends that CPD should be sustained, not intermittent and fragmented (Desimone 2011; Strieker *et al.* 2012; Miller and Stewart 2013; McGarry 2017), data from this study suggest that the delivery of CPD for the PLC was disjointed and therefore, the majority of participants felt it was less than effective. It is evident from Cian's response below that, three days of in-service (approximately eighteen hours) to support teachers in the rollout of a new curriculum is not satisfactory. Likewise, James, a SET, stressed that more is needed due to the staggered rollout of the PLC. The following quote speaks to this:

"I found that in my school, at the start it [in-service] only focused up to second class. Therefore, the third, fourth, fifth and sixth class teachers were like; we will just keep doing what we are doing until it is introduced to our age group, they weren't really engaged as it didn't concern them"

(James, SET)

Throughout interview discussion, James mentioned how he would "love to get training every year" in the PLC, stating, "if I was to go back to the classroom next year, I would probably be out of my depth". James further stressed how he has not been "as involved" in the implementation of the PLC, due to being in a SET position and therefore, highlighted the importance of receiving on-going CPD in the PLC for it to be implemented effectively. Concurring with Wasik *et al.* (2006), Yoon *et al.* (2007) and Banks and Smyth (2011), data from this study would suggest that the amount of CPD provided needs to be increased for CPD to be of real benefit. Wasik and Hindman (2011) suggest that fifty hours of guidance is required for CPD to be truly effective (McGarry 2017). The time allocated for CPD on the PLC and the adaptations to the curriculum "midway through" were noted by the majority of participants as somewhat disconcerting. This is evident in Elana, Angela, and Cian's responses below:

"We were very overwhelmed when we finished it [first CPD] and we set about really getting organised within the school by making some changes and we were probably so diligent in the changes that we brought into the school. And then, when we went to the next set of CPD it felt like everything had changed and they had changed their mind on

what they really wanted and what they expected schools to have done...it was just a bit frustrating”

(Elana, SET)

“We went away after training and collaboratively planned for it [PLC]. Then we received the finalised draft and it had changed. I think, overall morale was down a little bit after nearly a year’s work of planning for it...we got the impression that nobody really knows. It was a strange one. We are doing what we can”

(Angela, SET)

“After three separate days of in-service and countless hours of planning, I am no closer to understanding this unyielding and inaccessible document. Outcomes, goals, objectives and targets are utterly meaningless. I feel that we have been bombarded with language and expected to make sense of a document that has changed considerably from its inception...If they [DoE] want to engage teachers and support the implementation of the curriculum, they need to design a curriculum and then stick to it. Changing it midway through the introduction was a lesson in ineptitude”

(Cian, SET)

The perceived lack of support from the PDST and NCCA, generally, along with the considerable changes to the curriculum, has left the majority of stakeholders, in this study, feeling overwhelmed. Unsurprisingly, data yielded from this investigation highlighted the need for additional CPD in the PLC and a more cohesive delivery of support.

8.4.2 The Need for More CPD in the PLC

Upon analysis of the data, the researcher discovered that most participating principals, class teachers and SETs, in this study, conveyed the need for more CPD in the PLC. As mentioned in the previous sections, stakeholders felt unprepared and under-supported to effectively implement the PLC and thus, requested more “*in-school*”, “*sustained*” and “*meaningful*” CPD in order to combat this issue. Overall, across the twenty-three interviews carried out with principals, class teachers and SETs there were sixty-eight references to ‘confusion around the PLC’, most of which focused on the participant’s doubts regarding how to implement the PLC in their own setting. When the question “would you like more training in the PLC” was posed to the participants, it was evident from their responses that additional CPD was warranted:

“I’d definitely like some more training in the PLC”

(Linda, Class Teacher)

“Yes, I think we do need more training. I think the way it is at the moment it’s quite vague. I think we need practical guidance at this stage”

(Anne, Class Teacher)

“I would definitely like more training... we are still a bit confused with regard to the new curriculum”

(Nicola, Class Teacher)

“Absolutely and I would like it to be on an on-going basis [training]...I think we need something that’s more consistent”

(Cian, SET)

“Yes, I guess I would [like more training]. I think this is definitely from a personal point of view”

(James, SET)

From analysing the interview transcripts, it became apparent that principals, class teachers and SETs alike had significant concerns regarding the planning element of the PLC and therefore, stressed the need for “*more training*”. Referring again to an earlier quote from Alannah, a class teacher, the need for greater CPD in the PLC was strongly conveyed:

“I had endless days where I cried over the PLC. I was fine planning for any other subject. It is saying a lot, but it is not giving you what to teach. There is no content...I feel like the PLC is very airy fairy, and it is all under weird and abstract titles”

(Alannah, Class Teacher)

It can be deduced from Alannah’s response that the lack of CPD provided has caused great confusion, particularly in the area of planning. Alannah revealed that the language of the PLC alone has been problematic and that herself and her colleagues “*were getting bogged down*” with their planning. Alannah stressed the need for more in-school support stating how CPD would be most effective if it was carried out in her own school setting (Harris and Lambert 2003):

“Having someone there to come into us...to show them what we have, and be like how do we transfer this to the new PLC? It needs to be more practical and based on our own school, rather than hypothetical. They [PDST facilitators] were like “we could do this and we could do this”. Show us exactly what to do. It would have to be really

focused on your school...that would be the ideal. It needs to be more focused on your school and how you do your plans and how you run your school”

(Alannah, Class Teacher)

Similar sentiments were expressed by Eileen, a SET, in the mixed school. Throughout interview discussion, Eileen expressed how she perceived additional training to be most effective when it is carried out within one’s own context of practice, stating:

“I would love if they just came into your classroom with the kids and showed you how to implement it. You know you hear these things on the day and you go away and sometimes they go to the back of your head. I think a more practical training is needed. I know they show you an odd video here and there but that’s not realistic, that’s not my class. I’d love to see it in my class. I know that wouldn’t be possible but even if you had it in maybe two classes in a school it might just give you a better idea”

(Eileen, SET)

Considering both Alannah and Eileen’s comments above, the researcher would argue that teachers want to see an enhanced focus on the planning aspect of CPD in the PLC. Eileen expressed a desire to see tailored CPD, that is grounded in the unique culture of her school (Grimmett 2014), however admitted that this may not be feasible as the PDST would need *“the manpower to sustain it”*. While Alannah and Eileen both emphasised the need for effective CPD to be job-embedded and on-site, Keith, a principal, stressed the need to be able to contact the PDST facilitators to *“seek advice”* and to ensure they are *“on the right track”*. The importance of building collaborative working relationships with the experts i.e., the PDST facilitators in this case, reflects the sentiments raised in the previous theme (see Section 8.2.2):

“I think there needs to be a way to contact the facilitators to make sure that we are doing the right thing. Teachers are afraid of doing things wrong and there is a fear of the inspector. So, in order to minimise this pressure there needs to be some way of contacting them to seek advice or even to send them a plan to see if we are on the right track. I know it might not be feasible, but teachers just feel swamped by this curriculum”

(Keith, Principal)

Again, the lack of clarity provided around the planning aspect of the PLC was apparent in Keith’s quote above. Furthermore, the majority of class teachers and SETs remained unclear as to how they should structure their plans in order to achieve the desired outcomes. This

feeling of doubt regarding one's own planning process reflects the urgent need for improved CPD in the PLC. This is evident in Elana, a SET and Ava, a class teachers' responses below:

"I think teachers are still very overwhelmed with like the whole structure and while it's great that there is the overlap with working English and Irish alongside each other, I think the whole concept is very difficult for teachers to really put it into practice and to plan for and there isn't a really clear cut template for us in our planning and I think it leaves people very uncertain of whether they are really doing what they are supposed to be doing or whether they are meeting the outcomes properly"

(Elana, SET)

"I feel like I understand the purpose of the PLC. One area that I struggle with is implementing it in my formal planning, so although I feel like I can deliver what's being asked of me in the classroom, I do struggle with the formal planning of it and as a result I find that my formal planning does not always reflect what I am doing in the classroom. I feel like I kind of undersell myself in my written plans compared to what I am doing in the classroom. So, I think I would like some more training in the formal side of it"

(Ava, Class Teacher)

In agreement with Elana and Ava, Angela and Anne stressed the need for greater structure and support regarding the planning of the PLC. Throughout interview discussion, Angela highlighted how the PDST did not provide definitive guidelines on how to plan for the PLC during the CPD sessions. The researcher would argue that the lack of guidance, such as a "*clear cut template*" or "*sample plan*" is therefore perceived by the participants as an impediment to effective planning. Angela's comment below further highlights this point:

"There was no format for lesson planning either and that was something we were really anxious to get our hands on...even just an example of one lesson plan. If we were to receive something concrete even via email or on the website. I think that would be of benefit as well and be a baseline as to what inspectors might be looking for"

(Angela, Class Teacher)

Moreover, the need for additional CPD in the PLC was highlighted when a discrepancy between the support available to class teachers and SETs was observed by the participants in this study. SETs stressed how the CPD provided was focused mainly on the "*mainstream*" classroom and that very little time, if any, was allocated to support students with SEN. This is evident in the collection of participant's comments below:

“I think the training was more towards the mainstream classroom. It didn’t really touch on how to support these students with additional needs”

(Nicola, Class Teacher)

“I think training up to now has been geared more towards mainstream”

(Anne, Class Teacher)

“I felt it was more based towards the mainstream class”

(Eileen, SET)

“I felt that the training was mostly aimed towards whole class teaching”

(Elana, SET)

“The training was more aimed towards the mainstream class. I think we need more training... more meaningful school-based training. Maybe in smaller groups/class levels”

(Keith, Principal)

Overall, there was a perception among most of the participants, that there was a lack of collaborative, context specific supported provided by the PDST with regard to supporting students with SLCD. The data suggest that additional CPD is needed beyond the “*mainstream*” classroom. As quoted above, participants often noted the need for a greater focus on SEN when partaking in CPD (Ware *et al.* 2011; NCSE 2013). Thus, data indicate that CPD should be more inclusive to support collaborative practice, enabling stakeholders to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD within their own context of practice (Ware *et al.* 2011; Pratt *et al.* 2017; Hansen *et al.* 2020). The dissemination of information regarding curriculum implementation is crucial and therefore, needs to be tailored to a particular setting in which the teacher is placed (Strieker *et al.* 2012). Concurring with Eraut (1994) and Brennan (2017), while CPD fosters the acquisition of professional knowledge, it is important to note the context through which this knowledge is acquired, and subsequently how this knowledge is used hereafter. Thus, the researcher would assert that, teachers should be able to adapt the knowledge they gain during CPD sessions depending on the needs in their classroom.

While planning and CPD regarding the PLC were perceived to be concerns for the majority of the participants, the fear of the inspectorate was equally identified as a concern and was referenced to a total of eleven times by seven participants in varying roles. It can be discerned from the participant responses that the perceived lack of CPD has led to principals and teachers feeling insecure and worried about meeting the requirements of the DoE's inspectorate. This is evident in Angela, Linda and Keith's responses below:

"What would happen if an inspectorate was to come in?"

(Angela, SET)

"You know if an inspector came in...are we doing the right thing with these outcomes?"

(Linda, Class Teacher)

"Teachers are afraid of doing things wrong and there is a fear of the inspectorate"

(Keith, Principal)

Similarly, Conor, a SET, expressed concern when considering the inspectorate's involvement in the assessment of its implementation i.e., the PLC, particularly when it involved incidental or whole school inspections. Throughout interview discussion, Conor emphasised his concern, stating:

"What about when an inspector comes in and they say you are doing your planning wrong? She [the facilitator] said the inspector won't say that... I can guarantee they will say that. They all have different views"

(Conor, SET)

Conor further elaborates that when you teach students a new concept you always give them an example, therefore, he cannot comprehend why the same was not mirrored in the CPD provided by the PDST:

"If you teach a child a new concept, you give them an example. It is education 101. You give an example of what you want someone to do"

(Conor, SET)

It is evident in Conor's opinion that, for CPD to be effective, facilitators need to provide teachers with *"practical examples of how to implement the curriculum"*. Contrary to this, it

could be discerned from a number of participants that the learning outcomes of the PLC ‘support teacher agency in making professional judgements when planning, teaching and assessing all children’ (DES 2019a). It is important to note that, Circular 0045/2019 recognises teachers as ‘skilled professionals with the autonomy to make key decisions about teaching and learning in their own school, to include decisions about what children learn, the sequence in which they learn, the pace at which they learn, and the activities and experiences through which they learn’ (DES 2019a, p.2). Throughout interview discussion, Dave, a SET, emphasised how “*there is no wrong way really*” when planning for the PLC. Similarly, James, a SET highlighted how he perceived there to be greater flexibility and choice within the PLC when planning, in comparison to the previous curriculum, stating, “*there seems to be more autonomy*” enabling teachers to become empowered to make informed and professional decisions. While the participants above expressed their desire for a “*template/sample plan*” it can be deduced from Dave and James’ quotes that there is shift in current policy which places emphasis on teachers exercising their own professional judgement and agency, as outlined in the aims of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA 2020). Conor alludes to this teacher agency approach in his own interview, when he states:

“They [facilitator] didn’t have any examples of what it should look like. We questioned it and they said “we don’t want to influence”

(Conor, SET)

The researcher would suggest that the PDST have taken this approach from the outset to recognise the variety of school contexts and to facilitate dynamic learning environments that support the development of all students. From analysing the participant responses, it could be postulated that this approach needs to be communicated more clearly to the key stakeholders on the ground and that a CoP as Professional Development Model as outlined in Figure 8.5 could be utilised to support this.

From analysing the extracts above, it is apparent that most principals, class teachers and SETs are still struggling to implement the PLC effectively. Such findings suggest that stakeholders on the ground need additional and improved CPD to ensure that all students can access, participate in and benefit from the PLC.

8.4.3 How to Improve CPD

Concurring with the literature reviewed in Chapter Four, the primary purpose of CPD is to support teachers in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms (Grundy and Robison, 2004; de Vries *et al.* 2014; The Teaching Council 2016). While CPD has the ability to ‘unleash new energies, foster fresh enthusiasm, cultivate deeper understanding and fine-hone pedagogical skills’ (Hogan *et al.* 2007, p.i), it is evident from the participant responses that CPD did not receive universal praise. In fact, most participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the CPD provided, particularly, in relation to the planning and implementation of the PLC as mentioned in the previous section.

However, CPD is a very complex intellectual and emotional endeavour (Day and Sachs, 2005; Lawlor 2014), and as witnessed in this study, participants did not realise their desired outcomes from engaging in CPD. Concurring with Ball and Cohen (1999), and given the feedback by the participants in this study, the researcher would assert that when CPD is ‘intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning; fragmented and noncumulative’ (Dikilitaş 2015, p.93) teachers become disillusioned with the CPD journey and subsequently, become disengaged with curricular improvements (Welch *et al.* 2016). Therefore, it is imperative that the voices of stakeholders on the ground are heard when expressing their concerns regarding CPD.

When prompted by the researcher, participants were forthcoming with suggestions on how to improve CPD based on first-hand experiences. Similar to McGarry’s findings (2017), it was apparent from the stakeholder’s responses in this study that CPD is most effective when it is targeted, largely practical, collaborative, continuous and meaningful. Such findings align with Cósán, the National Framework for Teachers’ Learning (The Teaching Council 2016), which states that professional development is most effective when it is ‘continuous and sustained’, ‘closely connected to the work of teachers’ and when ‘it fosters teacher professional collaboration’ (The Teaching Council 2016, p. 7).

From analysing the data, the researcher would suggest that the reason the majority of participants had a negative perception of the CPD for the PLC was due to the traditional, transmissive model in which CPD took place (Smith 2015) (see Section 4.2). Linda, a class teacher, highlighted that the CPD provided was “*like a college lecture*” and thus, stressed the need for improvements to be made regarding the delivery of CPD. In the extract below, Linda

emphasises the benefits of in-school, context specific CPD to enhance teaching and learning, stating:

“I think that we would benefit from more in-school CPD where we can maybe sit in our cohorts and meet a coordinator individually or in our small cohorts and to be able to chat. It would be great to have him or her going through our plans and see where we are at with it [PLC] and what we need to do. Are we meeting our aims and targets? are we where we should be basically...that for me is so important because I want to make sure that we are implementing it correctly”

(Linda, Class Teacher)

Linda’s example above conveys the need for teachers to collaboratively work together in their “cohorts” to develop an inclusive strategy in order to effectively meet the needs of all students. Linda signifies the importance of in-school support, wherein, the facilitator can guide teachers planning of the PLC and assist them with its implementation in their own school setting. This collaborative endeavour is a fundamental component of effective CoPs (see Figure 9.4). Rebecca, Olivia, Elana, and Kathleen, also echoed this sentiment when they explained:

“I think the people who give the CPD should come out to the school and see what happens in the school already before giving the CPD because on the in-service day we were hearing things that were already in place in our school, so it was kind of pointless. And I also think if we were in our school setting, we could have split up into our class levels because on the day of the in-service I was working with a 6th class teacher... we are obviously not looking at the same kind of things within our class levels”

(Rebecca, Class Teacher)

“I do think coming into the school more often would be beneficial. I suppose they come in on a day of course when the children aren’t there, it might be nice if they could see us trying to put the new PLC into action with the children and then get feedback, so if they could nearly assess us on how we are doing and then feed it back at another training day based on what they have seen. I think that would be very beneficial”

(Olivia, Class Teacher)

“I think sometimes it makes more sense when CPD is done in your own setting you can really work with the resources that you have...It would be great to have facilitators come in to support us in our planning and to really help us with the implementation of it [PLC], not just talk to us, but to actually come into the classroom and show us how it can be implemented. And then for them [facilitators] to work alongside the SET, this would provide some suggestions of how to best meet the needs of the children you are working with”

(Elana, SET)

“I would prefer facilitators to come to the school so they can get a sense of what is achievable in terms of space, numbers and to discuss individual school plans with teachers, not vague generic ones, that leave teachers unsure of the way forward”

(Kathleen, SET)

It is worthy to note that, despite the different positions held by the above participants within the school environment, they mutually agree that in-school support would be most beneficial (Harris and Lambert 2003). From the perspective of a principal, Annie believes that there is a need for more in-school CPD to support stakeholders on the ground. Throughout interview discussion she described how schools are simply *“reinventing the wheel”* and missing out on the opportunity to collaboratively work on implementing an effective plan for the PLC. Annie suggests that greater collaborative practice would be achieved through the implementation of a *“mentoring system”* within a CoP i.e., a school environment, whereby principals and teachers work alongside a facilitator to support planning. This could also involve a SLT, to ensure that appropriate support is provided to students with SLCD so that they can access, participate in and benefit from the curriculum. Annie claims that having *“somebody on hand to assist with the planning documentation and to come in and do some CPD with you”* would be very beneficial. She highlights the importance of having a SLT onsite to provide support to both teachers and students, suggesting that SLTs could come in *“once a month”* or *“once a term”* to *“check up on different children...go into classes and build connections”*. Throughout interview discussion, Annie acknowledged that although such practices would be welcomed, she understands that it may not be feasible to assign a facilitator or SLT to each school. Therefore, Annie suggests that a facilitator or SLT could *“work with six or eight schools in a cluster”*. The researcher would suggest that the concept of providing support via ‘clusters’, as witnessed in the Demonstration Project (DES 2018) (See section 2.7.2), could be a model that the PDST adapt in their approach to support the rollout of future curricular and policy reform.

From analysing the responses above, it is apparent that most participants in this study suggest that regular, in-school support from the PDST is needed to support principals, class teachers and SETs alike to overcome the challenges they are currently experiencing with the implementation of the PLC. The researcher would postulate that this form of CPD is the most beneficial, as stakeholders are provided with relevant support based on the individual needs of the schools, as well as instant feedback in the context of one’s own practice (Neuman and

Wright 2010). Based on the data presented in this study, the researcher asserts that face-to-face, in-school CPD has the potential to adopt an interactive approach which enables stakeholders to work collaboratively within their own CoP (Lave and Wenger 1991). It can be deduced, from the participant responses, that stakeholders engage in CPD with the aim to acquire new knowledge, that will assist them in supporting and improving student outcomes (Grimmett 2014; Miller and Stewart, 2013). While in-school CPD was perceived to be the most beneficial and most desired type of support, Olivia alluded above that, with respect to school closures and absent students, real time opportunities for teachers to gauge the effectiveness of their practice and to see the PLC in action were prevented. Thus, it could be argued that such findings may have implications for future CPD to be context specific as advocated in the literature (Grimmett 2014).

The desire to move away from the traditional model of CPD, which focuses on the transmission of knowledge through information-giving sessions (i.e., lecture format), whereby teachers sit passively and listen (LeTendre and Wiseman 2015; Welch *et al.* 2016) (see Section 4.2.3.1) was apparent across most participant responses. Nicola, a class teacher, stressed that the delivery of the CPD for the PLC “*was very much like a lecture*” and that she “*didn’t like that format*”. Nicola asserted that “*it would have been much better if we could have met in our class groups and did some practical tasks that would benefit us in real life*”. Furthermore, Cian, a SET, argues that the model of “*a whole day sitting and listening*” is not productive. Ava, a class teacher, concurs with the above points, stating that in order for CPD to be effective teachers need to be actively engaged. Similar sentiments are reflected in Cosán, which states that ‘effective learning is an active rather than a passive process’ (The Teaching Council 2016, p.7). Therefore, Ava maintains that CPD of the PLC would be most effective if herself and her colleagues were given the opportunity to collaboratively put the PLC into practice, perhaps through role play:

“I think us being more engaged would have benefited us rather than just listening...I think just putting some of it into practice ourselves [PLC] so even some roleplay even if we wrote down our scenarios and another teacher on the staff provided feedback on what they thought we could do and then we could discuss it as a whole”

(Ava, Class Teacher)

The opinions of the participants above are reinforced by Lave and Wenger, in that the greatest learning occurs when teachers learn from one another in a CoP (1991). Therefore, data

suggest that, in order to enhance the delivery of CPD, staff members need to be allocated time to engage in collaborative discussions with their colleagues and outside agencies i.e., SLTs. In the interviews conducted as part of this study, some participants offered their opinions and potential solutions, that would cultivate a collaborative approach to the dissemination and implementation of the PLC. Nicola highlighted that it would be “*more beneficial*” to upskill staff members within the school setting so that continuous support can be provided:

“Even if instructions were provided to perhaps some staff members, they could get questions answered and report back to staff. I think this would be more beneficial in the long road. We have some post holders who have really worked hard in getting their heads around this curriculum and they know our setting so I think if they could feed back the information that would be better. They would be onsite all the time to answer any questions we had”

(Nicola, Class Teacher)

Like Nicola above, Cian stated that in order to support teachers with the implementation of the PLC, teachers i.e., post holders, could be provided with “*proper training*” to assist their colleagues in a “*systematic way*” with the dissemination of the curriculum. In doing so, they would be perceived as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) in a specific area and thus, be in a position to disseminate knowledge within their own CoP (see Section 6.4 and 6.5). Throughout interview discussion, Cian stressed how effective that support would be, given that the teachers would have a solid understanding of the school’s needs:

“I think often times within your own school there are people who are very skilled...maybe if you could up-skill people in the school to understand the curriculum, give them proper training they could disseminate it to the school in a systematic way and you could say “well okay we could target the CPD at the particular level for the next couple of months and give them support with it and then move on”. Like we have people with posts... maybe that’s where their posts could lend them towards doing and I think many would be very willing to do it and then it stops this idea of we have to bring these two experts from outside who don’t really know the school, don’t really know the setting”

(Cian, SET)

Keith, a principal, concurred with Cian’s proposition of upskilling teachers within their own context of practice to support the planning and implementation of the PLC. Keith asserted that this is one way to combat the issue around receiving ongoing and sustained support in schools. Throughout interview discussion, Keith expressed the importance of Middle Management

CoPs i.e., the In-School Management Team (ISMT)¹⁶, to support and guide whole school planning and to disseminate the necessary knowledge regarding the PLC. In his response he highlighted how he seized the opportunity to develop “*curriculum teams*” in his own school, with the help of the ISMT. The logistics of how these teams operate are illustrated below:

“We have a team for the three core subjects...the Gaeilge team and English team were involved in introducing the Primary Language Curriculum. So you would have sort of a cross section of the whole school on these curriculum teams and then a API would coordinate the group. They would get some support materials together and push those out to staff members to try and help them. There is a lot of work involved in terms of even planning and changing of templates. So rather than sending each teacher off into the abyss on their own to reinvent the wheel, the curriculum planning teams came up with new planning templates and again the API would coordinate these being brought into classes”

(Keith, Principal)

Keith believes that the development of such teams enables stakeholders to learn from one another in a meaningful way. From examining the participant response above, it is clear that there is an overwhelming desire among stakeholders to learn from each other in their own context of practice. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) CoP highlights the value of learning as ongoing, socially situated and actively constructed (Grimmett 2014). Therefore, this form of on-site support could act as a solution to overcoming the perceived lack of CPD provided to schools. Upskilling staff members to disseminate information as mentioned by Nicola, Cian, and Keith above, would ensure that the individual needs of the school are accounted for, thus, enabling appropriate professional development to occur within one’s own CoP (Lave and Wenger 1991). Concurring with McGarry such practice would eliminate the focus of professional development as ‘something done to teachers by outside ‘experts’...as something done with and/or by a teacher in response to their pedagogical needs and concerns’ (2017, p.81). In light of such findings, data from this study appear to support the implementation of a Community of Practice as Professional Development Model to enhance CPD as recommended by the researcher (see Figure 8.5).

While a small number of participants posit that CPD through “*online platforms*” has the potential to enhance practice, the majority of participants interviewed stressed that “*face-to-face*” CPD as discussed above, is necessary to improve teacher competence until the PLC

¹⁶ The In School Management Team (also referred to as Middle Management) consists of the Principal, Deputy Principal and Post Holders who work together to provide leadership in learning and management in the school (Circular 0063/2017).

is fully embedded in practice (McGarry 2017). Donna, a class teacher, highlighted that since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a significant shift towards the use of online platforms to support teaching and learning with “*everyone zooming*”. Donna emphasised that:

“Maybe from this [use of online platforms], people will see that this is a positive approach...people can link in with an online facilitator, maybe once a month, on a specific topic or something based on a particular class level, or, if you are a resource teacher it could be based on difficulties your children may have”

(Donna, Class Teacher)

Similarly, Anne, a class teacher, advocated the use of online CPD to enhance practice. In her response, she highlighted how effective CPD needs to be ongoing, sustained and relevant to one’s own classroom. Anne further stated that CPD must be targeted to support the individual student’s needs. This is evident in her quote below:

“Online support I think is quite useful whether it be a workshop... like an hour a week throughout the school year. We all do our courses during the summer, sometimes it just doesn’t mean as much to you then. Whereas, I think if you were able to engage in something during the year it would be more beneficial as you are working with these kids, you have particular kids in mind...and you can try out whatever is suggested”

(Anne, Class Teacher)

While Anne and Donna both highlighted the benefits of online CPD, it must be reiterated that the majority of participants interviewed stressed that in-school support, whereby the facilitator provided face-to-face CPD, is the preferred model of instruction. However, given the challenging situation the PDST found themselves in during the Covid-19 pandemic, educational stakeholders need to realise the limitations in delivering sustained support on a broad scale. While Circular 0045/2019 (DES 2019a) outlined a new three-year cycle of support from 2019/20 to 2021/22 for the PLC, however, it was unavoidably disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to practical challenges regarding school closures, face-to-face CPD was not possible. Although in-school support was off limits, it is important to acknowledge the work of the PDST in preparing online support materials for stakeholders on the ground.

Lynn, a principal, acknowledges that CPD is essential in order to support teachers in effectively implementing the PLC, she believes that a combination of both in-school support i.e., face-to-face CPD and online CPD such as “*mini webinars*” is best. Throughout interview discussion, Lynn explained that there are many advantages to both forms of CPD once support is sustained and collaborative (Strieker *et al.* 2012). Lynn stated that the delivery of CPD

depends on the dynamic of the school environment and how open teachers are to change (Guskey 2002). As reflected in this study, some participants preferred online based learning methods as opposed to face-to-face, and vice versa. While Lynn personally preferred online CPD due to its flexibility, she stressed that the majority of her staff were in favour of in-school support, whereby teachers had the opportunity to work in small groups to “dissect” the curriculum. Lynn emphasised how “*teachers move at different paces in terms of what information they take in and the amount of information they feed out*”. Thus, Lynn stressed that CPD must be tailored to suit the desires and expectations of those implementing the curriculum on the ground.

Based on qualitative data presented in this section, it is warranted to suggest that on-going CPD has the capacity to improve overall instruction (Armitage *et al.* 2012; de Vries *et al.* 2014), while also having a positive impact on teachers’ attitudes, knowledge and skills (Johnson and Johnson 2008). According to James, a SET, CPD plays an important role in a teacher’s career considering the pace of change witnessed in the education system. James stated that as a teacher, “*you are a life-long learner, you need to keep fresh and keep on the move*” (The Teaching Council 2016). Considering teachers ‘are at the fore in making inclusion a reality’ in schools (INTO 2020b, p.16), James emphasised the importance of stakeholders engaging in ongoing CPD to support inclusive practice (Davis 2013). Similar sentiments were also expressed by Olivia, a class teacher. In her response she highlighted how learning is infinite, claiming that “*you can never have enough training, you can always keep learning*”. It is evident from both James and Olivia’s statements that they value CPD and understand the importance of CPD as a ‘lifelong process’ (Villegas-Reimers 2003; Musset 2010; The Teaching Council 2016)

Given the difficulties reported by participants in this study with regard to the dissemination of the PLC, the researcher would assert that those in higher positions within the Department need to actively listen to the stakeholders on the ground who are implementing the curriculum. However, the researcher would argue that there is already evidence that the Department have begun to take on board stakeholder feedback regarding the PLC implementation. There is evidence that the Department have adapted the rollout of the new Primary Maths Curriculum (PMC) to address some of the concerns raised during the PLC roll-out. This is evident in Keith, a principal’s response below:

“I think they [the Department] have learned from the rollout of the PLC in terms of “let’s put the revised maths curriculum on ice until the whole document is ready and let’s just do a whole school introduction”. So ya again the philosophy behind [the PLC]it sounded great ...let’s do this incrementally and let’s build support and build understanding, but it just didn’t work, and I think that’s been reflected now in their change of the introduction of the new maths curriculum in that they are just going to go with a vertical introduction rather than a junior versus senior as they originally planned you know”

(Keith, Principal)

While Keith describes how the dissemination of the Primary Maths Curriculum (PMC) has been adapted following the concerns raised by stakeholders during the rollout of the PLC, the researcher would suggest that the DoE continue to improve their methods of collecting feedback and evaluating the opinions of stakeholders, who are primarily impacted by new curricular rollouts.

The findings in this section with respect to face-to-face and online learning methods, broadly concur with the findings of McGarry (2017) which state that effective CPD should be: ongoing and sustained, job-embedded and on-site, collaborative, and reflective as well as inquiry-based. Such features align with ‘The Seven Principles of Highly Effective Professional Learning’ outlined by the Department of Education and Training (2005) (Appendix 21). Given the outcomes of both this study and McGarry’s study, wherein a majority of participants showed a desire for improved face-to-face CPD, it is reasonable to assert that to improve CPD, we must address the inadequacies of the face-to-face model raised by participants in this study. Figure 8.6 below provides a synopsis of how the findings of this study may contribute to enhancing current CPD.

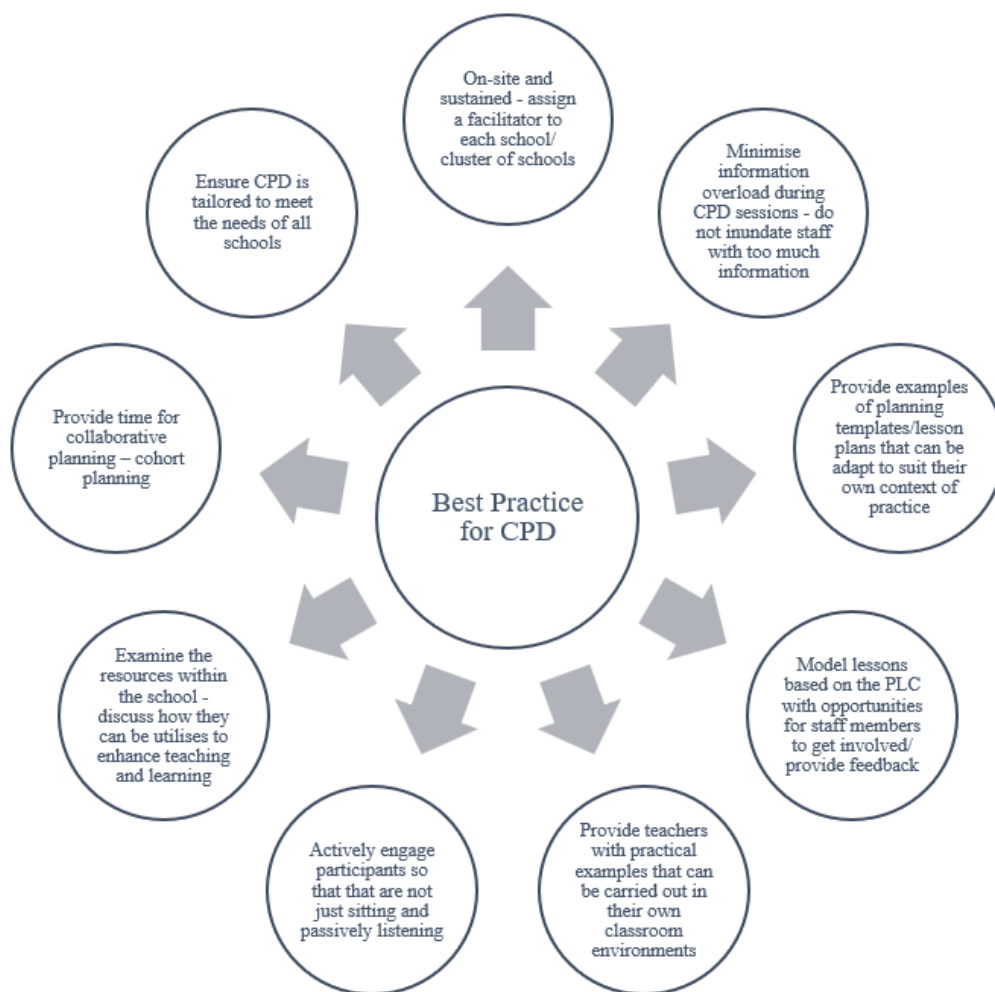


Figure 8.6 Factors that Influence Best Practice for CPD

The findings illustrated in the figure above represent the voices of those planning for and implementing the PLC on the ground, i.e., principals, class teachers and SETs. Such empirical data may contribute to the field and add to the limited research on CPD for the relatively new PLC, which could inform future curricular reform and its necessary CPD. Given the centrality of language in all aspects of development (Law *et al.* 2012; Dockrell *et al.* 2014; Owens 2016), it is important that effective collaborative practice between key stakeholders is undertaken to disseminate and implement the curriculum (McGarry 2017, p. 233).

In summary, this theme revealed the current state of contemporary CPD in Irish primary schools and elicited feedback from the participants with regard to their opinions and perspectives on CPD. Broadly speaking, participants in this study expressed concerns with the current CPD model, relating to the rollout of the PLC and its implication for collaborative

practice within school contexts to identify and meet the needs of all students, particularly those with SLCD. Participants were forthcoming with suggestions on how to improve such practice and therefore, such data may be of value to policy makers when developing and implementing future curricular reform. Considering these suggestions and the existing literature on CPD outlined in Chapter Four, the researcher would assert that to improve CPD we must listen to the participants and the broader community of stakeholders who partake in CPD activities and act on their suggestions. Based on these findings, the researcher will outline her recommendations for improving CPD in the following chapter.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented an interpretation of the findings of the current research study, which investigated collaborative practices between class teachers, SETs and SLTs to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD, in Irish primary schools. Thematic analysis of rich, semi-structured interview data, collected from twenty-seven participants in varying roles captured a realistic representation of contemporary collaboration in the context of practice, as well as its impact on outcomes of students with SLCD. Three major themes were presented and discussed in this chapter, which are illustrated in Figure 8.7. These themes represent a broad spectrum of opinions and insights into collaborative practice in schools. The participant data allowed the researcher to establish what is actually happening on the ground in Irish primary schools and how effective collaborative practice can be developed and sustained. The themes attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice, so that the researcher can draw conclusions and make recommendations in the following chapter, that aim to enhance practitioner efficacy and support curriculum access and participation for students with SLCD.



Figure 8.7 Visual summary of the Three Main Themes and Associated Subthemes Obtained from Thematic Analysis

Chapter Nine

Conclusion and Recommendations

9.1 Introduction

This chapter will conclude the study by summarising the key findings arising from in-depth analysis of collaborative practice between the class teacher, special education teacher (SET) and speech and language therapist (SLT) to identify and meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD), in Irish primary schools. It presents a series of recommendations in order to contribute to the knowledge gap in the field and to unveil what has been learned regarding collaborative practice on the ground in Irish primary schools. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the implications for policy and practice, while also reviewing the limitations of the study and suggesting opportunities for future research.

9.2 Key Findings

Utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) rigorous approach to thematic analysis, three robust themes along with several additional sub themes emerged from the qualitative analysis undertaken (see Section 7.10). These themes were: The Value of Collaboration, The Challenges to Effective Collaboration and The Role of Continued Professional Development in Enabling Stakeholders to Meet the Needs of all Students. Collectively, these themes revealed a common narrative in the participants' perceptions and experiences of collaborative practice. The following section provides a summary of the first major theme which arose from the findings of this study.

9.2.1 The Value of Collaboration

In accordance with this study's theoretical framework, Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger *et al.* 2002; Hoadley 2012; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015), findings from this study highlighted the value of collaboration and inter-professional practice between class teachers, SETs and SLTs to foster inclusive practices and to improve student learning opportunities and outcomes (Ainscow 2016; Mulholland and O' Connor 2016; Wilson *et al.* 2016). While effective collaborative practice can be difficult to achieve (Weist *et al.* 2012), participant data suggest that engaging in such practice enhances the educational experiences of students with SLCD (Law *et al.* 2002; Glover *et al.* 2015;

McKean *et al.* 2017). All teacher and SLT participants made reference to different, but complementary, skillsets that they possess. This reality signifies the importance of those professionals utilising their expertise in a collaborative way to support student learning opportunities and outcomes (Borg and Drange 2019). Due to the increase of students presenting with SLCD in Irish primary schools (McCoy *et al.* 2016; IASLT 2017; Rose *et al.* 2017), participants in this study advocated the need for inter-professional collaboration to be embedded in practice (see Section 5.3), in order to meet the demands of both curriculum and therapy (Glover *et al.* 2015), as witnessed in Demonstration Project (DES 2018) and reported by Lynch *et al.* (2020).

The qualitative findings of this study suggest that inter-professional collaboration has the potential to be transformational in identifying and meeting the needs of students with SLCD (Jago and Radford 2017; Quigley 2018). Therefore, this study concludes that inter-professional collaboration is needed now more than ever to respond to the changing profile of mainstream classrooms in Irish primary schools (Chitiyo 2017; Rose *et al.* 2017). Data revealed that teachers and SETs felt that they were not equipped with adequate knowledge, skills and expertise to appropriately support students with SLCD and therefore, expressed their desire to collaborate with outside agencies i.e., SLTs, the perceived “*experts*” in the field. The study found that teachers and SETs can “*misinterpret difficulties*” that students have and therefore, stressed the importance of collaborating with the SLT to fully understand how to best identify and then, effectively support these students. All class teacher and SET participants emphasised how SLTs have received specialised training to support students with SLCD and are, therefore, in a greater position to provide support to students with such complex needs (see Section 5.5.3). Data showed a desire among teacher participants to work closely with the SLT, with all class teachers and SET participants asserting that they would value the specialised support an SLT could provide, when inter-professional practice is fostered, and collaboration embedded in practice. Participants often alluded to their desire for readily available “*tips and tricks*” along with practical advice and strategies from the SLT to implement within their own classroom setting. Without this “*expert*” advice and guidance from the SLT, the participants perceived that they would be unable to effectively respond to the needs of their students. This speaks to the potential benefits of collaboration within a CoP i.e., a school setting, as class teachers, SETs and SLTs would be able to collaborate in real time, which would undoubtedly assist in addressing students’ needs (see Section 8.2.1). SLTs reciprocated this desire to collaborate with class teachers and SETs within the school environment, with the majority of SLTs expressing

their belief that class teachers and SETs have unique and invaluable insights into students' progress as they know their students' full profile and therefore, best understand their needs (Glover *et al.* 2015). Data suggest that such practice would ensure that learning is reinforced in the school setting. Considering Effron (2008) and Wenger's (1998) argument that knowledge stems from and is diffused through social interactions, it is clear from the findings that enabling class teachers, SETs and SLTs to readily collaborate within the school environment would have a significant impact on student learning and outcomes (MacPhail *et al.* 2014). According to Wenger (2011), successful collaboration in this context would be rooted in the concept of a CoP, wherein collective learning is encouraged, valued and shared. Such practice provides a common focus (domain), establishes relationships (community) and catalyses collective learning (practice), which are the key components that underpin a CoP (Wenger 2004) (see Section 6.3). Such data supports findings from Lynch *et al.* (2020) wherein they state, when therapy is integrated in the school environment, it ensures that the right support is provided at the right time, in context. Therefore, the findings of this study would recommend the full rollout of the Demonstration Project at a system level to bridge the gap between therapy and education services (see Section 2.7.2). Providing structured in-school therapeutic support whereby SLTs, OTs and EPs are employed within the school setting, would enable these stakeholders to engage in joint working practices with principals, class teachers and SETs. In doing so, the researcher believes that effective partnerships can be formed naturally, and the roles and responsibilities of key individuals understood from the onset. Such practice would enhance the educational experiences for students, ensuring that appropriate support is provided to those with SLCD, so that greater student outcomes can be achieved (Law *et al.* 2002; Glover *et al.* 2015; McKean *et al.* 2017). While issues around leadership, governance and accountability were outlined in the Evaluation of the Demonstration Project (Lynch *et al.* 2020), the researcher would claim that if these stakeholders were employed under the one governing body, these issues would not be as prevalent. In agreement with Anaby *et al.* (2018), the qualitative findings of this research suggest the need for a clear organisational and management framework to ensure that service delivery is meaningful and effective. Having the appropriate structures in place enables stakeholders from both departments to combine their areas of expertise and contribute to 'furthering the ambition of more inclusive education for all' (Lynch *et al.*, 2020, p. 131).

Concurring with Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger *et al.* (2002), Lynch *et al.* (2020) identified relationship building, open communication and being immersed in the school environment as the most important factors in establishing effective partnerships. This study

supports such findings but goes on to emphasise the importance of cultivating ‘trusting relationships’. For example, all SLTs in this study, expressed their desire to build effective partnerships with principals, class teachers and SETs, so that they were not perceived as an outsider. All SLT participants referred to an ‘us and them’ culture, wherein they found it difficult to establish mutual trust and openness, which hindered the establishment of effective partnerships, which Lave and Wenger theorises is crucial for the development of effective CoPs (see Section 6.3.2). Thus, it is unsurprising that the majority of participants across all roles i.e., principals, class teachers, SETs, SLTs, viewed the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020) as a potential remedy for the professional isolation they perceived. With the SLT based in the school environment, as seen in the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020), the majority of participants expressed the view that this would remove the perceived barriers to collaboration and allow participants to establish effective partnerships with their colleagues (Lacey 2013). This is reinforced by Sunguya *et al.* (2014), when they explained that effective partnerships through inter-professional practice have the potential to remove silos between disciplines and reduce stereotypes between professions. The findings of this study, which listens to and analyses the voice of SLTs, as well as the literature explored in Section 5.3.1, provide a wealth of evidence supporting the benefits of SLTs being immersed in the school environment. Findings reflect the research of Glover *et al.* (2015), Jago and Radford (2017) and Gallagher (2019), who highlight the need for policy makers to find ways of promoting effective therapist-education partnerships (see Section 8.2.2.3). This will lead to improved outcomes for students with SLCD, as the multi-disciplinary nature of support ensures class teachers, SETs and SLTs are engaging in effective partnerships, learning from one another and improving their ability to respond to student needs (Lacey 2013; Rafferty 2014).

The transfer and sharing of knowledge and skills between teachers and SLTs is a crucial component and was deemed to be one of the major benefits of effective collaboration by all participants (Li *et al.* 2009). The majority of SLT participants, felt that the class teacher and SET had a better knowledge of students’ needs due to their in-class experience working with them on a daily basis. Conversely, all class teachers and SET participants explained that they wanted to be able to approach an SLT and ask for practical information that they could use in their own classroom. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) emphasise the importance of learning within a social structure. Individuals involved in such a learning environment benefit from their engagement in meaningful discussions, joint activities and sharing ideas with one another (see Section 6.3.2). Therefore, it can be deduced from the findings that there is a

need to bring stakeholders from different disciplines together so that they can disseminate information, review and adapt their practice to enhance student learning, within a shared domain (Swan *et al.* 2002; Mortier *et al.* 2010; O’Kelly 2016) (see Section 8.2.3). Wenger *et al.* (2002), Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) and McDonald and Cater-Steel (2016) offer a theoretical basis for such joint work within their construct of CoP. This would enable stakeholders to share their expertise and competencies with one another, through meaningful interactions and conversations. Glover *et al.* (2015) reinforce the findings of this study when they stated that teachers and SLTs who worked together mutually shared knowledge and skills. The findings would support the claim that in order to ensure educational stakeholders are collaborating effectively, we must ensure that they feel empowered to request and share information between one another. Again, many participants expressed their opinion that the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020) would support a culture of knowledge sharing. Furthermore, this culture of sharing and disseminating important knowledge and skills aligns with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) CoP, wherein stakeholders collaboratively review and adapt their practice to enhance student learning (Swan *et al.* 2002; Mortier *et al.* 2010; O’Kelly 2016) (see Section 8.2.3).

The qualitative findings of this study support the full rollout of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018), in that its integrated therapy and school-based provision would support all stakeholders in identifying and meeting the needs of all students within the context of their own classroom environment (Lynch *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, the findings echo international research by Brandel and Loeb (2011), Wilson *et al.* (2015) and Archibald (2017), that highlight the benefits of inter-professional collaboration and establishing effective partnerships within the school setting to support students with SLCD (see Section 5.5.3.1). This study offers a theoretical basis for such policy and practice, as Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger *et al.* (2002) theorise on the effectiveness of stakeholders working together to plan and deliver support. O’ Kelly (2016) maintains that when stakeholders within a CoP engage in ‘synchronous activities’ with other CoP members, it enables them to identify and meet the needs of their students. When collaboration of this nature is embedded in practice, the cultivation of a CoP is further catalysed, and truly inclusive classrooms are fostered. It can therefore be claimed that the Demonstration Project (DES 2018) represents a practical approach to achieving improved student learning and outcomes, wherein stakeholders mutually engage within a shared social structure. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, the researcher would recommend that the Demonstration Project be implemented nationwide. The

findings suggest that the Demonstration Project could mitigate many of the challenges experienced by stakeholders on the ground when collaborating.

9.2.2 The Challenges to Effective Collaboration

Principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs in this study raised issues around the challenges to effective collaboration and provided valuable insights into current and preferred practices. It can be discerned from the qualitative data collected, that the term ‘collaboration’ is very broad and can be interpreted in many ways (Friend *et al.* 2010; Laluevein 2010; Vangrieken *et al.* 2015). Thus, the inconsistency and ambiguity around the term ‘collaboration’ has caused great confusion and has impeded effective inter-professional practice (Reeves *et al.* 2011; Lacey 2013; Quigley 2018) (see Section 5.3.2). The researcher would submit that the primary reason for this is that there is no concrete definition of collaboration at policy level, in Ireland (Fullan 2008; McCarthy 2011). Therefore, data from this study recommend the need for future policy documents to offer a specific definition of collaboration to minimise the lack of conceptual clarity among stakeholders (Hartas 2004; Slater 2004).

All class teachers, SETs and SLTs had varying interpretations of collaboration and what it involved, which is reflected in the literature (Hartas 2004; Lacey 2013; Wilson *et al.* 2015; Weddle *et al.* 2019). These interpretations ranged from formal collaboration, whereby teachers arranged a time to engage in ‘*cohort planning*’ to discuss what is working well, what is not working so well and what they can do to improve practice going forward, to informal collaboration, whereby teachers perceived a ‘*quick chat*’, ‘*check in*’ and ‘*touch base*’ as sufficient collaboration (see Figure 8.3). Despite class teachers and SETs reporting such informal collaboration as effective, current literature (McCarthy 2011; Ware *et al.* 2011; Bush and Grotjohann 2020) argue that consulting with one another ‘briefly’ does not suffice as effective collaboration. Data suggest that participants are doing what they perceive as good collaboration, but in reality, the frequency or speed of collaboration alone does not make it good collaborative practice. Figure 9.1 below, maps Lacey’s continuum of collaboration (2013, p.11) onto a spectrum of collaboration (see Figure 8.3).

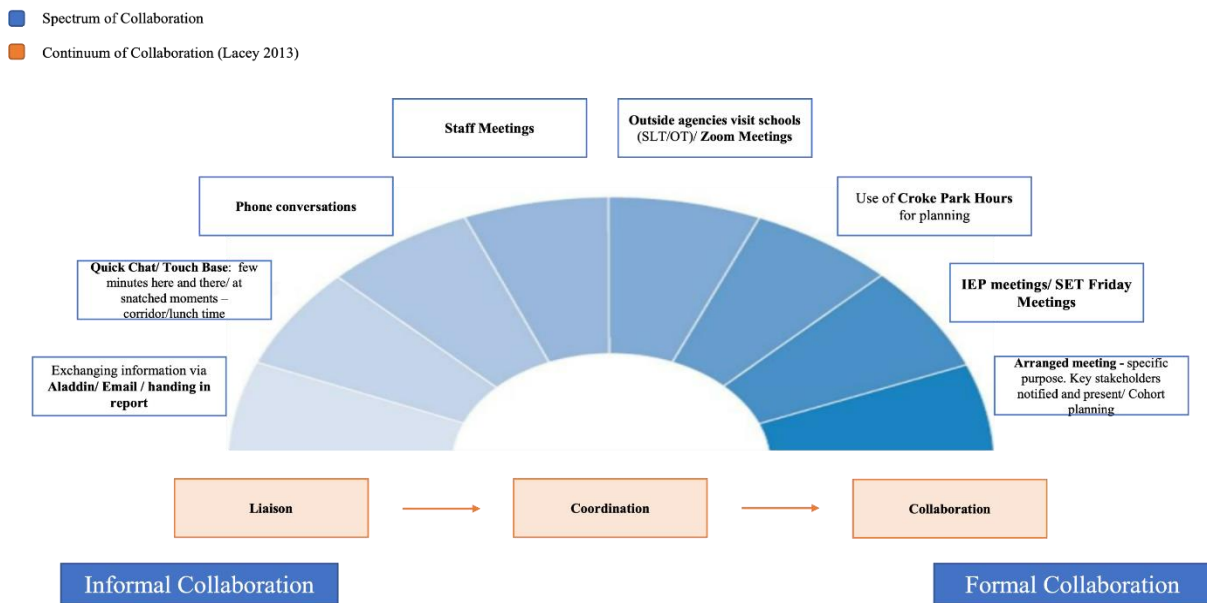


Figure 9.1 Spectrum of Collaboration Emerging from Data, Incorporating Lacey's Continuum of Collaboration (2013)

Lacey's Continuum of Collaboration in Table 5.1 maps onto Figure 9.1 above, which emerged from participant data and together these provide a multi-faceted means of classification with regard to the type of collaboration that is occurring in Irish primary schools (see Section 5.2). Concurring with Barson (2004), once there is evidence of mutual engagement and shared repertoires between stakeholders' (see Figure 6.1), collaboration can be effective in both informal and formal settings, regardless of where one finds themselves on the spectrum of collaboration.

In line with Weddle *et al.* (2019), findings from this study show that stakeholders have varied perceptions of the value and quality of collaborative practice. Therefore, engaging in effective collaborative practice on the ground i.e., in a school environment, is difficult to achieve (see Section 8.3.2). This study concludes that there is a lack of shared understanding among stakeholders around the essence of true collaboration and therefore, a continuum could enable members of a CoP to classify levels of engagement, which in turn would facilitate mutual expectations and allow them to map their journey towards effective collaboration. Such findings may also suggest the need for additional CPD, and the above continuum could be a useful framework for providers of CPD to enhance understanding of the construct for its effective implementation in practice in Irish primary schools. While data suggest the need for mutual understanding and shared repertoires between stakeholders, the inherent disconnect between teachers and SLTs fundamentally disrupts this process (see Section 8.3.2.1).

SLTs play a crucial role in supporting students with SLCD (RCSLT 2011; IASLT 2017). However, data show that despite the mutual desire to collaborate, SLTs find it difficult to engage in collaborative practice with in-school stakeholders. Wilson *et al.* argue that this difficulty arises from services delivery methods that restrict stakeholders from collaborating effectively and ‘blending their respective areas of expertise’ (2015, p.2). Many SLT participants stated that due to their ‘heavy caseloads’, ‘lack of time’ and ‘lack of a common workspace’, effective collaboration was difficult to achieve. Similar findings were presented by Travers *et al.* (2010), Kinsella *et al.* (2014) and Glover *et al.* (2015) as obstacles to working collaboratively in schools. Therefore, coinciding with research undertaken by Law *et al.* (2002), Pring *et al.* (2012) and Ekins (2015), developing collaborative networks and professional working partnerships among key stakeholders to address students’ speech, language and communication needs is crucial. Thus, the researcher would recommend the need for a more cohesive and structured service delivery (Dockrell *et al.* 2017) as seen with the rollout of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020).

All participants perceived there to be a general failing within the current system and procedures in place to support students with SLCD (Travers *et al.* 2010; Wilson *et al.* 2016; Dockrell *et al.* 2017). The qualitative findings would suggest that the logistical difficulties of achieving coordination and collaboration between the Department of Education and the Department of Health is due to both Departments being separate entities (Travers 2021). The fact that teachers and SLTs are employed by different governing bodies, have distinguishable frameworks of operation and do not share a common workspace signifies the challenges faced by these stakeholders in establishing effective inter-professional practice (Law *et al.* 2002; Quigley 2018; Gallagher *et al.* 2019). Concurring with Lindsay and Dockrell (2004), the findings maintain that in order for effective collaboration to be established, the fields of health and education need to converge.

Data show that differences in perspectives across professions (McCartney 1999; Quigley 2018; McLean 2021) and the discrepancy in terminology used has implications for effective collaboration. The researcher would argue that teachers and SLTs having minimal to no contact at an undergraduate level is one of the primary issues causing these difficulties (Wilson *et al.* 2015; McLean *et al.* 2021). Data emphasise that the training teachers and SLTs receive during Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and SLT training programmes is very different and thus, a more integrated approach is needed in order to improve practice (see Section

8.3.2.2). Data indicate that teachers and SLTs would benefit from having greater and more collaborative opportunities to gain practical experiences, share knowledge and skills and learn from one another during ITE and SLT training programmes and during their professional placements (Gallagher *et al.* 2019; Hick *et al.* 2019). As it stands, placement within an education setting for SLTs is not mandatory when training and therefore, not all SLTs are exposed to in-school learning environments. The findings of this study suggest that teachers and SETs lack the knowledge and skills to appropriately meet the needs of students with SLCD and therefore, would also benefit from placement within a SLT setting to improve their own knowledge of how to support students with SLCD. It could be suggested that merging aspects of both training programmes may enhance teachers' and SLTs' ability to provide appropriate support to students with SLCD in all settings. In light of such findings, the researcher recommends that teachers and SLTs engage in shared modules during their respective undergraduate degrees. This would ensure that both stakeholders are made aware of the expectations of each other's chosen professions (D'Amour *et al.* 2008; Lacey 2013; Lynch *et al.* 2020) and are embedded in a culture of collaboration from the onset of their careers. In doing so, the researcher believes that greater collaborative practice will be encouraged, thus, supporting the cultivation of effective CoPs (Lave and Wenger 1991). The researcher would also recommend that such placement in an educational setting be made compulsory for SLTs so that they gain a comprehensive picture of the everyday running of a classroom (see Section 8.3.2.2).

Data suggest that there is a lack of clear structures in place for sharing information between professions, which hinders effective collaborative practice and thus, impedes student progress (Daly *et al.* 2016). Considering Lave and Wenger's CoP framework (1991), it is evident that a CoP cannot be fostered when individuals are siloed from one another and do not communicate for lengthy periods of time. In order for a CoP to be successful, it requires individuals taking collective responsibility for collective learning in a shared domain (Lave and Wenger 1991; O' Kelly 2016). Wenger *et al.* maintain that such interaction, on an ongoing basis, deepens knowledge and expertise (2002). Data suggest that most class teachers and SET participants felt isolated in their effort to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD. Therefore, the Department of Education (DoE) and the Department of Health (DoH), who are responsible for the provision of education and the provision of SLT services respectively, may not be appropriately addressing the needs of a significant cohort of students in Irish primary schools given that services are not being provided in a timely and coordinated manner to

support students with SLCD, which is also reflected in the literature (IASLT 2017) (see Section 3.6). Therefore, the findings of this research would indicate that the type of service provision facilitated by the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020) needs to be rolled out nationally in order to minimise the divide between these stakeholders and improve outcomes for students with SLCD (O' Kelly 2016). This would be catalysed by fostering a more collaborative culture in schools, whereby teachers feel supported and better prepared to effectively meet the needs of all students (Lacey 2013; Lynch *et al.* 2020).

Moreover, according to all participants, time constraints and the need for additional time to collaborate with colleagues were perceived as a major barrier to effective collaboration (see Section 8.3.3). Concurring with Bishop *et al.* (2016), all participants agreed that more collaboration is needed for them to identify, meet and monitor progress of students with SLCD, which is consistent with the SETAM guidelines (DES 2017b). Data suggest that due to the overcrowded curriculum and growing demands placed on teachers, reduced opportunities for collaboration between stakeholders were apparent (Morgan and NicCraith 2015; Chitiyo 2017; Hargreaves 2019). Data revealed that the majority of class teachers felt that '*it was up to them*' to find the time to meet with their corresponding teaching partner or SET to collaborate and that very little time was allocated to planning. The findings concurred with Ware *et al.* in that collaborative planning had to occur in 'snatched moments' (2011, p.129), as there was no official time set aside for collaboration. It became evident from the findings that there is simply a lack of sufficient collaborative planning time embedded within the school day (Blecker and Boakes 2010; Pratt *et al.* 2017).

Therefore, the researcher would recommend that all stakeholders need to be allocated a dedicated time to engage in planning with one another in order to devise appropriate and relevant learning outcomes (DES 2019a) for all students. The researcher would assert that such a dedicated time would improve teachers' ability to collaborate, organise lessons and deliver joint instruction. Moreover, it would encourage the establishment of effective CoPs (Lave and Wenger 1991), whereby collective learning is encouraged, valued and shared (Wenger 2011). Given the limited collaboration and planning time accessible to stakeholders, the researcher would also recommend that class teachers and SETs use the time already embedded within the school week to collaborate with their colleagues (Ware *et al.* 2011). In order to achieve this,

the researcher would submit that existing Croke Park Hours¹⁷ could be better utilised to support collaborative planning. From the qualitative data collected, the researcher would recommend that schools dedicate an increased number of their thirty-six Croke Park Hours (Circular 0042/2016) (DES 2016) each year towards the facilitation of collaborative planning among stakeholders. Providing this time would increase the number of hours stakeholders have to collaboratively plan and thus, further incentivise collaboration. In doing so, class teachers are provided with the opportunity to engage in collaborative planning with their corresponding SET, a corresponding class teacher (i.e., cohort planning), or a SLT. Emerging from the data, Figure 9.2 below suggests a shared model of collaboration, illustrating how both in-school and external stakeholders can be part of a CoP and therefore, allowing them to engage in collaborative planning with their fellow stakeholders.

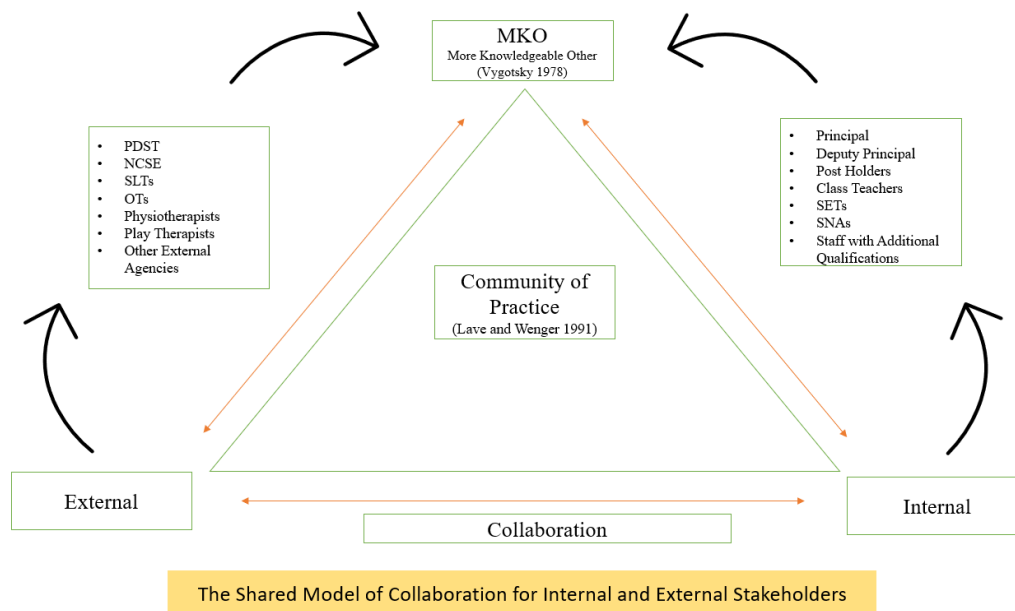


Figure 9.2 Shared Model of Collaboration for Internal and External Stakeholders

The shared model of collaboration promotes and encourages professional learning to occur amongst the stakeholders involved, and inherently values the knowledge and skills they bring to the community, allowing them to learn from one another to meet the needs of all students. When the above shared model of collaboration is coupled with sustained CPD, the

¹⁷ Under the Croke Park Agreement primary school teachers are required to work an additional 36 hours a year. These are often referred to as Croke Park Hours. These hours are used for parent teacher meetings, staff meetings, school planning and CPD. Croke Park Hours take place after school hours when the students go home so that tuition time is not affected (DES 2016).

transfer and sharing of knowledge and skills within and across disciplines, has the capacity to improve practice and thus, positively impact student outcomes.

9.2.3 The Role of Continued Professional Development in Enabling Stakeholders to Meet the Needs of all Students

According to extant literature, CPD plays a crucial role in improving instructional practices, pedagogies and ultimately student outcomes (McGee 2004; Day *et al.* 2007; Drudy and Kinsella 2009; Armitage *et al.* 2012; de Vries *et al.* 2014) and has become a major policy priority both nationally and internationally (OECD 2005; Banks and Smyth 2011; Teaching Council 2016). Aligning with Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of CoP, effective CPD occurs when members are situated within their own context of practice and deepen their knowledge and expertise through consistent, on-going interactions (Wenger *et al.* 2002). All principals, class teachers, SETs, and SLTs acknowledged the importance of engaging in professional development through initiatives such as the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020). Data suggest that SLTs specifically are impeded from engaging in CPD with principals, class teachers and SETs as they are seen as separate entities and do not share a common work environment (see Section 8.3.2.1). Data indicate that if SLTs were co-located with their fellow stakeholders (i.e., principals, class teachers and SETs), professional learning communities would be sustained and embedded in practice (Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2009). Lave and Wenger (1991) theorise that, in such a context, the transfer and sharing of knowledge and skills across disciplines would support the establishment of a CoP and enable these stakeholders to engage in ongoing collaborative practice, which would intrinsically lead to continuous improvement for all involved (Jones *et al.* 2013; O' Kelly 2016). Furthermore, such practice would facilitate in-school professional development so that all stakeholders are enabled to respond to the diverse needs of students (Fullan 1993; Steyn 2017), while also meeting policy standards and curricular demands. Therefore, the researcher would recommend on-site, collaborative CPD for all stakeholders, by providing individual and sustained support within one's own context of practice.

Data yielded from this study highlighted the difficulties surrounding the implementation of the PLC, placing emphasis on the method in which CPD was delivered. Despite the efforts of Department of Education support agencies, such as the PDST and NCSE to facilitate the PLC rollout, the majority of principals, class teachers and SETs felt that they lacked the requisite knowledge to implement the PLC successfully (Fraser *et al.* 2007; Murchan

et al. 2009). Furthermore, these stakeholders reported that the CPD provided was not tailored to support the individual needs of the school and therefore, these stakeholders perceived the CPD they received to be inadequate (Guiden and Brennan 2017). Moreover, the majority of principals, class teachers and SETs reported that the CPD they received was aimed “*more towards the mainstream classroom*” and that “*it didn’t really touch on how to support those with additional needs*”. In particular, the majority of SETs reported that the CPD provided was not tailored to their specific context. The discrepancy between the support available to class teachers and the support available to SETs highlighted the need for the PDST to provide additional training beyond the mainstream classroom (Ware *et al.* 2011; NCSE 2013). Therefore, data suggest that CPD should be more inclusive to support stakeholders in identifying and meeting the needs of all students (Travers *et al.* 2010; Ware *et al.* 2011). The researcher suggests that such practice may be improved by fostering a CoP in which the SLT is embedded, thus allowing them to take part in the CPD process (see Figure 9.3 below). The findings recommend that in order for CPD to be effective, CPD needs to reflect both the personal needs of the individual stakeholder as well as the needs of the school as a whole. Therefore, the researcher would posit that a ‘one size fits all’ (Smith 2012, p.2) approach to CPD is inadequate, as no two schools are the same. In light of such findings, the researcher asserts that all stakeholders need access to greater supports that are grounded in the unique culture of one’s own community i.e., a school environment (Grimmett 2014; The Teaching Council 2016).

Moreover, the qualitative findings signified that the time allocated to the CPD of the PLC i.e., three in-service days, was insufficient to fully meet the needs of principals, class teachers and SETs. All principals, class teachers and SETs stressed the need for ongoing and sustained support in order to plan for and effectively implement the PLC, so that all students can access, participant in and benefit from the curriculum. The majority of principals, class teachers and SETs emphasised how the planning element of the PLC was most problematic and stressed the need for PDST facilitators to provide more in-school support to guide and assist teachers with their planning. One principal suggested that the implementation of a ‘mentoring system’, whereby principals, class teachers and SETs alike could work alongside a facilitator in a meaningful way, would be very beneficial. The researcher would concur that such practice would foster learning within a CoP (see Figure 9.2). It is evident from the findings that CoPs catalyse professional growth through the creation of learning environments wherein stakeholders are socially situated and learn from one another (Wenger *et al.* 2002; Hadar and

Brody 2010). Concurring with Barak *et al.* (2010) and MacPhail *et al.* (2014), data suggest that learning within a CoP is ‘considerably more powerful’ than individual learning (see Section 6.4). Therefore, the researcher would recommend that providing support via ‘clusters’, as shown in the Demonstration Project (DES 2018; Lynch *et al.* 2020), could be a model that the PDST adapt in their approach to support the rollout of future curricula and policy reforms. The researcher posits that such practice would ensure that CPD is tailored to support the individual needs of the school, so that stakeholders have the opportunity to reflect on their own practice, seek clarification on the challenges that they encounter and address any concerns that they may have within their own CoP (Strieker *et al.* 2012; Grimmert 2014; The Teaching Council 2016).

Additionally, the study recognised the benefits of utilising post holders who work within the school environment to “drive” curriculum implementation. The qualitative findings suggest that teachers often learn more from their colleagues, in comparison to outside professionals, as they are more comfortable discussing challenges and sharing concerns with those they are familiar with (Nieto 2003). Data suggest that upskilling a number of staff members to disseminate knowledge and provide ongoing support within one’s own context of practice could enhance overall policy and curricular implementations. In order to combat the lack of ongoing and sustained support, the researcher, based on data presented in this study and in line with Ceatha (2018), adapted a CoP as Professional Development Model to enhance CPD, seen below in Figure 9.3.

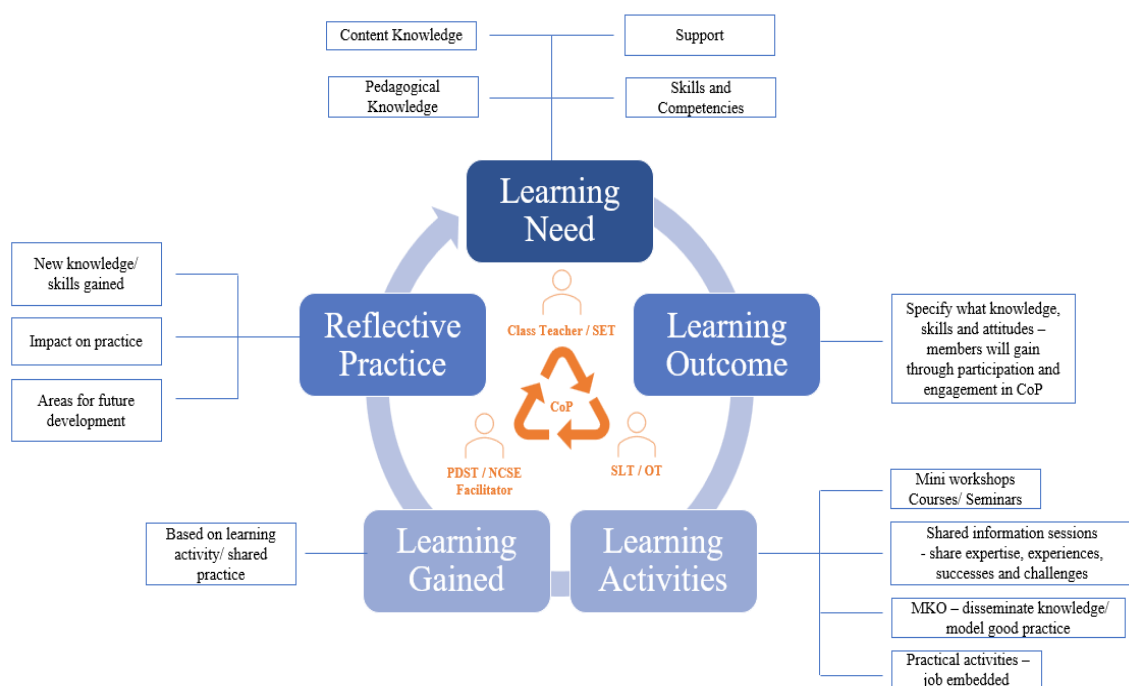


Figure 9.3 Community of Practice as Professional Development Model to Support on-going CPD

The CoP, as a Professional Development Model, encourages stakeholders to coalesce around a common focus (learning need), establish and strive towards attaining shared learning outcomes, through defined learning activities while retrospectively analysing the knowledge that they have gained (learning gained and reflective practice). The model enables all stakeholders i.e., principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs who hold specific expertise in an area to share their knowledge amongst the community and guide learning. Each stakeholder within the CoP is therefore, seen as a MKO in their own right. This is particularly beneficial when we consider the role that external stakeholders i.e., SLTs, play in such a community, wherein their expertise is not common knowledge and thus, could mitigate the perceived policy-practice divide. The researcher would suggest that the CoP as Professional Development Model promotes the development of CoPs, whereby the three components i.e., domain, community and practice (see Figure 6.1) are inherent to the process of learning as a community (Wenger *et al.* 2002). The researcher would suggest that the form of CPD outlined in Figure 9.3 would enable stakeholders who work within the school environment as well as those who work outside the school environment, to develop improved working partnerships with the goal of enhancing instruction and achieving greater student outcomes (Lacey 2013). Therefore, the researcher recommends that in order to enhance professional development, all key stakeholders need to be provided with opportunities to share their expertise, experiences, successes and challenges, as well as observe and model initiatives and interventions within their own CoP. Considering the pace of change witnessed in the education system in recent years (Rose *et al.* 2017; Kenny *et al.* 2020), the findings recommend that a more collaborative, on-going and sustained approach to CPD is required to ensure that the individual needs of all schools are met. Thus, the researcher would recommend a more practical and collaborative form of CPD, that can be transformative in practice (Teaching Council 2016), as illustrated in Figure 9.3.

9.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes a unique contribution to the limited research that exists, adding to the knowledge base with regard to the value and challenges of interdisciplinary collaboration within the Irish context. The study is one of the first of its kind to analyse collaborative practice between class teachers, SETs and SLTs to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD, within a variety of school contexts, through the lens of Lave and Wenger's Community of

Practice (1991). The study provides a comprehensive insight into the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders, in relation to current collaborative practice and what collaboration looks like on the ground in contemporary Irish primary schools. Moreover, the study unveils the views and opinions of those at the centre of curricular implementation capturing the issues and factors that influence their experiences. Such data holds significance, as it may influence the methods by which future curricular rollouts are implemented in Ireland. Given that this research was carried out at a time of important educational reform, particularly in the area of special education as well as the introduction of a revised PLC (DES 2019a), the scholarly significance of this research is that it offers an insight into the lived experiences of stakeholders as they adapt to new curricular change and reform in inclusive education settings. The findings of this study, may therefore, be useful in determining how collaborative practice and CPD can be improved to support instruction and the provision of students with SLCD. The CoP framework, emerging from analysis and theorising of the data, offers a theoretical basis for inter-disciplinary collaboration. As illustrated in Figure 9.3, the CoP as professional development model has the capacity to enhance the DoE's delivery of professional development for future curricular developments and overall CPD in a meaningful, context specific and sustained manner. The researcher firmly believes that such a model, provides members of the CoP with ample opportunities to engage in inter-professional collaboration 'reinvigorating their practice through new knowledge and skill development' (Lawlor 2014, p.43). Moving forward, the researcher argues that this model could act as a template for the DoE to support inter-disciplinary collaboration and to enhance service delivery to identify, address and monitor the needs of a significant cohort of students in Irish schools.

The need for inter-professional collaboration to be embedded within the education system was recently highlighted by the Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion, Josepha Madigan, in a recent press release (DES 2021). Minister Madigan stressed the importance of continuing to develop and expand the range of supports that are provided to students with special educational needs in schools by 'increasing the kind of interactions between educational and therapy services' to support instruction and overall student outcomes (DES 2021). According to Minister Madigan (DES 2021), the primary aim of the Demonstration Project (DES 2018) is to create stronger and more effective working partnerships between parents, teachers and SLTs, which was evident in the Evaluation of the In-School and Early Years Therapy Support Demonstration Project (Lynch *et al.* 2020). Given the desire among all stakeholders in this study to adopt collaborative practice to support

students with SLCD, this study provides a lens through which one can understand the realities of inter-professional collaboration on the ground, the challenges these stakeholders face as well as their desires to utilise collaboration to improve the outcomes of their students. The researcher would submit that understanding these realities and integrating the findings of this study in future curricular and policy reform, may enable policy makers to bridge the gap between education policy, practice and therapy services.

From analysing the findings through the lens of Lave and Wenger's CoP (1991), the researcher established seven key components which are necessary for effective CoPs to be cultivated within a school environment (see Figure 9.4). These components align with Blankstein's (2004) six principles for developing and sustaining professional learning communities (see Figure 6.4). The findings of this study highlight how the establishment of effective CoPs in schools can ensure that teachers and other stakeholders no longer feel isolated in their profession and understand the value of engaging in effective collaborative practice to identify student need, effectively address such need and to monitor student progress and outcomes.



Figure 9.4 The Seven Components of Effective Communities of Practice

The study examines how greater outcomes for all students, especially those with SLCD, can be achieved when principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs work together within their own context of practice. Effective partnerships are formed and the professional walls between disciplines begin to break down (McKean *et al.* 2017). Such practice has the capacity to change individual attitudes and reduce stereotypes that exist between stakeholders (Sunguya *et al.* 2014). The findings of this study reveal that effective inter-professional collaboration can address the challenges of inclusion and support the establishment of truly inclusive schools. For schools to develop as successful CoP, teachers and other relevant stakeholders who work within the school environment as well as those who work outside the school environment i.e., SLTs, OTs and psychologists, must be provided with real time opportunities to engage in collaborative endeavours whereby they can share and review practice in meaningful ways. Building on the NCSE’s Demonstration Project, this independent study, which celebrates the

voice of key stakeholders in identifying and meeting the needs of students with SLCD, fully supports the integration of in-school therapeutic services nationwide so that inter-professional collaboration can occur more effectively and efficiently. In doing so, the researcher maintains that students with SLCD will be provided with appropriate support in real time. Table 9.1 below, provides an overview of the main recommendations that have been identified throughout this chapter, based on the qualitative findings presented in Chapter Eight.

Contribution to Policy and Practice Underpinned by the Theoretical Framework of Community of Practice	
National rollout of ongoing, in-school support as seen in the Demonstration Project (DES 2018), to enable inter-professional collaboration and support students with SLCD	Ongoing and sustained CPD so that stakeholders can reflect on their own practices, seek clarification and address concerns that they may have (CoP as Professional Development Model)
Concrete definition of collaboration outlined at policy level to remove the ambiguity in terminology between stakeholders	Adoption of a more practical and collaborative form of CPD that can be transformative in practice as opposed the current traditional model
Identification of areas where ITE and SLT training programmes can overlap, achieve common goals and ensure students are embedded in a culture of collaboration from the onset of their career	Establishment of a mentoring system and support provided via ‘clusters’ as evidenced in the Demonstration Project
Mandatory placement within a school setting/clinic setting to ensure students gain a comprehensive understanding of each others’ professions	Regular in-school support provided by the PDST and NCSE to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively implement the PLC
Allocation of designated planning time within the school day to promote collaboration between class teachers and SETs	Further training of staff members i.e., post-holders to disseminate knowledge and provide sustained support within their own context of practice to enhance overall policy and curricular implementations
Allocation of increased number of Croke Park hours each year towards the facilitation of collaborative planning between class teachers and SETs	

Table 9.1 Contribution to Policy and Practice Underpinned by the Theoretical Framework of CoP

The researcher maintains that the data presented in this study and the recommendations that have been offered herein, will offer a unique insight into contemporary inter-professional collaboration between in-school and external stakeholders. Considering the theoretical framework which underpins this research, CoP (Lave and Wenger 1991), one must fully understand the three components: the domain, community and practice (see section 6.3), which are considered essential in establishing effective CoP (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner

2015). The researcher would hope that having outlined the benefits of cultivating CoP within one's own context of practice, that this study may inform other researchers and policy makers and guide them in the development and implementation of effective collaborative practice within CoP.

9.4 Limitations and Implications for Further Research

Like all studies of this kind, the researcher was able to identify several limitations of her research. Given the small-scale nature and short time frame of this study, the researcher was aware that longitudinal research to examine collaborative practice between class teachers, SETs and SLTs to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD, in Irish primary schools may be beneficial. The researcher believes that such investigation would enhance current practice and inform future policy, while also supporting the establishment of effective CoPs within the school environment. Moreover, as this study explored stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of the dissemination and implementation of the PLC (DES 2019a) to support students with SLCD, and whether such change has enhanced collaborative practice on the ground, research at a larger scale may hold significant implications for future policy reform.

While the researcher made every effort to ensure that the participants interviewed represented different contexts (i.e., girls' school, boys' school, mixed gender school) and various socio-economic backgrounds (DEIS and non-DEIS) as mentioned in Section 7.8, the researcher acknowledged that a more contextual analysis of the different school types would have enhanced this research investigation. For example, the researcher did not explicitly highlight the differing experiences of those working in a small school to those working in a large school setting. Nor did she differentiate among participants with respect to their levels of experience i.e., the experiences of NQTs versus more experienced teachers. Moreover, the researcher recognised that all schools were based in the greater Dublin area. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised nationwide. Thus, it is important to note that this study sought to uncover particularisations rather than generalisations (Neilsen 2009). The qualitative nature of this study aimed to gather rich descriptive data based on the 'contextualised understandings of human experience through the intensive study of cases' (Polit and Beck 2010, p.1452). The researcher believes that extending the dataset beyond the scope of this research i.e., to include more rural schools, would capture a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. While Schofield (2007) proffers that multi-site studies can potentially increase the generalisability of qualitative research, the researcher acknowledged that her findings were limited to the four

main cluster groups outlined in this study and were not indicative of all school types in the Irish context.

Moreover, this study did not seek to ascertain the views of parents on current practices, but rather investigated parental involvement according to principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs. The researcher initially considered interviewing parents, however, she decided to keep the scope of this investigation limited to those working professionally in the fields of education and health. Therefore, a future study including these valuable stakeholders may be useful to gain additional perspectives of the phenomenon.

While the researcher acknowledged the merit of conducting educational research in the most naturalistic setting possible, the school, the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic forced the researcher to carry out several remaining interviews using online platforms. It is also necessary to acknowledge the impact school closures had on Government support agencies referred to throughout this study i.e., the PDST and NCSE, given that they were unable to provide schools with in-school support and CPD in relation to the implementation of the PLC, as planned in Circular 45/19 (Section 8.4.3).

9.5 Conclusion

This study examined collaborative practice between class teachers, SETs and SLTs to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD, in Irish primary schools. A social constructivist paradigm was adopted by the researcher to ensure that the various perspectives and multiple realities of participants were identified and validated (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Flick 2009; Creswell and Poth 2018). The researcher adopted a qualitative research design wherein she conducted semi-structured interviews and maintained a research diary. Through interviewing principals, class teachers, SETs and SLTs, the study was able to gain an insight into the realities of collaborative practice in contemporary Irish schools, and whether such practice enables stakeholders to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD. Given the limited research that exists with regard to collaborative practice between the aforementioned stakeholders, the study provides a comprehensive insight into the lived experiences of the participants interviewed. This study unveiled the many benefits that effective collaboration can provide for the teaching and instruction of students with SLCD. It also showed the many challenges stakeholders face when attempting to collaborate with other in-school and external stakeholders. Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of on-going and effective CPD

and recommended ways in which the current model of CPD delivery can be improved to support curricular implementation. Considering the timely nature of this research topic, the researcher would assert that the findings and recommendations of this study could inform and enhance future policy, inclusive practice and curricular change.

'Schools will never realise the fundamental purpose of helping all students achieve at high levels if the educators within them work in isolation'

(Dufour et al. 2004)

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APPENDIX 1

Example of Semi-Structured Interview (Pilot)

Class Teacher

Section 1: Introduction

1. You're teaching X years, tell me a little bit about your experience teaching language and literacy to date?
2. How many children are in your class?
3. Out of that figure, how many children have speech language and communication difficulties?
4. How many of these children have a diagnosis?
5. Do you have a special needs assistant in your class?

Section 2: New Primary Language Curriculum

6. How are you implementing the new Primary Language Curriculum in your school as a whole?
7. Are you using the progression continua to support your teaching and learning?
8. Has your planning adjusted to facilitate this change? If so, how?
9. What is your opinion on the milestones in the new Primary Language Curriculum?
10. How has the implementation of the new Primary Language Curriculum effected your planning? Explain.
11. How are you assessing the children in your class to identify where they are on the progression continua? Did you find this process challenging?
12. Are the progression continua useful? Tell me a little more about that.
13. Can you identify any strengths of the new Primary Language Curriculum?
14. Can you identify any limitations of the new Primary Language Curriculum?
15. In general, what are your opinions on the new Primary Language Curriculum?
16. What are your opinions on the former revised Curriculum?
17. Comparing both curricula, what are your main concerns in relation to the new Primary Language Curriculum as a mainstream class teacher?

Section 3: Collaboration and Planning

18. How does the special education teacher support you and the children in your class- especially those with speech, language and communication difficulties?
19. Do you plan together?
20. Why/why not?
21. If you do plan together, how do you collaborate?
22. What initiatives/resources are in place to support children with speech, language and communication difficulties? How does this support you as the class teacher?
23. How often do you engage in collaborative planning with the special education teacher? Are you given allocated time to do so? Do you find this helpful?
24. How important do you think it is to collaborate with the speech and language therapist to support the children with speech, language and communication difficulties in your class.

25. Have you had the opportunity to meet with the speech and language therapist to discuss interventions that he/she may be implementing with children in your class who have a diagnosis?
26. Does collaborative planning occur within your school amongst staff and other outside professionals (i.e., class teacher, parents, SET and SLT)?
27. How would you rate collaborative planning in your school on a scale of 1-5 of 1 is poor, 2 fair, 3 good, 4 very good and 5 excellent? Give a reason for your answer?
28. Does either curriculum facilitate collaboration to identify and meet the needs of children with speech, language and communication difficulties? Can you tell me a little more about your opinion here?

Section 4: CPD

29. How did the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) benefit you in the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum?
30. Having attended the seminars provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), can you comment on how you felt about this form of professional development?
31. How would you rate this training on a scale of 1-5 if 1 is poor, 2 fair, 3 good, 4 very good and 5 excellent? Give a reason for your answer?
32. Would you like more Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in this area?
33. How could Continuous Professional Development (CPD) be improved?

APPENDIX 2

Research Diary

The Research Diary was used to record the researcher's beliefs, thoughts, and insights throughout her research journey. The extracts below show a variety of entry types.

Wednesday 5th December 2018
As I'm currently teaching 4th class I feel that this has enabled me to be more objective in my examination of the roll out of the PLC. Class teachers from Junior Infants - 2nd Class have started the process in my school, however, since I'm up in the senior end, I have not had to use it as of yet in my planning. Hopefully this will support me/as I will be undertaking the interviews with a neutral stance.

Research Diary
- Reflecting on coding
After some practice I think I have the hang of coding. Printing my transcripts off and using different highlighters to do line by line coding really helped. I know I may be doubling up on my workload, but doing it this way - I ~~feel I know~~ ^{now} I am more familiar with the data! Once I did a few manually, I looked back over the support videos on NVivo 12 (online). This supported me in using the NVivo 12 software - when creating codes.

Research Diary

* Notes to self after completing interviews in DEIS school

- 314 students enrolled → 45 different Nationalities
- 22 Teachers (2 EAL teachers)
- 4 SNAs
- High EAL population

Important comment!

Language difficulties - more common - EAL (can be difficult to differentiate between both as a result) - Is the child just not understanding / has difficulty communicating because English is their second language or is there a SLCD?

This school differs to the others → different initiatives in place - ~~Sensory~~ ^{Nature} Room

Room used in school

to support everyday situations

- language learning
- social skills

Monday 18th January 2021

• NVivo 12 Training with Ben - Advance Training (online)

I felt I really needed this training - I had forgotten how to use all of the functions in NVivo 12 and needed to ask Ben a few questions regarding the next stage of the process. The handbook that was provided was very beneficial - I think this will be my Bible for the next few months!!

APPENDIX 3

MIREC Approval



Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee

MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form

APPLICATION NUMBER:

A18-003

1. PROJECT TITLE

Teachers' Perspectives on the New Primary Language Curriculum and How it Facilitates Collaborative Practice for Inclusion.

2. APPLICANT

Name:	Ciara Concannon
Department / Centre / Other:	Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education
Position:	Postgraduate Researcher

3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR

	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required.
	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
✓	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary.
	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.
	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required.

4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

A18-003 - Ciara Concannon - *Teachers' Perspectives on the New Primary Language Curriculum and How it Facilitates Collaborative Practice for Inclusion.*

Re: Application A18-003 - Ciara Concannon - I am satisfied that this application now fulfills MIREC requirements and is, therefore, granted approval.

5. DECLARATION (MIREC CHAIR)

Name (Print):	Dr Áine Lawlor
Signature:	
Date:	5 th February 2018

APPENDIX 4

Board of Management Letter of Information



An Investigation into Collaborative Practice between the Class Teacher, Special Education Teacher (SET) and Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) to Identify and Meet the Needs of Students with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD) in Irish Primary Schools.

Letter of Information

Dear Chairperson,

My name is Ciara Concannon, and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. I am completing a PhD by research in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education under the supervision of Dr Margaret Egan. The current study will form part of my thesis.

This study aims to investigate collaborative practice between Class teachers, Special Education Teachers (SET) and Speech and Language Therapists (SLT) to identify and meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD) in Irish primary schools. The perspectives and experiences of principals, class teachers and SETs who have been working with and adjusting to the new Primary Language Curriculum will be explored.

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will enhance our understanding of collaborative practice on the ground and guide future policy and practice so that stakeholders can effectively identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD in their own school environment.

What is involved if I take part?

This study will involve the principal and a number of class teachers and SETs in your school to participate in a semi-structured interview that will last approximately 20 minutes. They will be asked questions based on their own perspectives of the new Primary Language Curriculum and collaborative practice. These interviews will be held outside of school hours and will be conducted in your school setting. The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and will be transcribed and later analysed by the researcher.

Right to withdraw:

The anonymity of all participants i.e., principal, class teachers and SETs from your school is assured, and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will data be used?

What will happen to data after research has been completed?

The data from these interviews will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Summary data only will appear in the thesis, individual participant data will not be shown. In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

How will my confidentiality be kept?

Your anonymity is assured, and all data collected are only accessible to the researcher and her supervisor. A pseudonym will be generated for each participant, and it is that participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study, my contact details are as follows:

Name: Ciara Concannon

Email: Ciara.concannon@mic.ul.ie

Contact no: 087-7587899

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:
MIREC Administrator, Research and Graduate School, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick. Telephone: 061-204980 / E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie

Signed:  _____

APPENDIX 5

Participant Information Sheet

The Information Sheet was provided to each participant prior to their involvement in the study.



Participant Information Sheet

What is the purpose of the Study?

The purpose of this study is to investigate collaborative practice between the class teacher, Special Education Teacher (SET) and Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) to identify and meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD), in Irish primary schools. It investigates teachers' experiences of implementing the new Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (DES 2015) to support students with additional needs to access, participate in and benefit from the curriculum.

Who is undertaking the study?

My name is Ciara Concannon, and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. I am completing a PhD by research in the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education under the supervision of Dr. Margaret Egan. The current study will form part of my thesis.

Why is this study being undertaken?

The Department of Education have identified a need to foster collaborative practice to support student language acquisition in Irish primary schools. The researcher has a particular interest in this field and thus, feels that the data from her research may inform future collaborative practices in education, approaches to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continued Professional Development (CPD) for all

stakeholders in Irish primary schools.

What are the benefits of the Study?

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will enhance our understanding of collaborative practice on the ground in Irish primary schools and guide future policy and practice so that stakeholders can effectively identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD in their own school environment.

What is involved if I take part?

This study will involve one to engage in an interview that will last approximately 20 minutes. He/she will be asked questions based on their own perspectives of Primary Language Curriculum and collaborative practice. These interviews will be held outside of school hours and will be conducted in your school setting. The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and will be transcribed and later analysed by the researcher.

Right to withdraw:

Your anonymity is assured, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will data be used?

What will happen to data after research has been completed?

The data from this research will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Summary data only will appear in the thesis, individual participant data will not be shown. In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

How will my confidentiality be kept?

Your anonymity is assured, and all data collected are only accessible to the researcher and her supervisor. A pseudonym will be generated for each participant, and it is that participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study, my contact details are as follows:

Name: Ciara Concannon

Email: Ciara.concannon@mic.ul.ie

Contact no: 087-7587899

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:
MIREC Administrator, Research and Graduate School, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road,
Limerick. Telephone: 061-204980 / E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie

APPENDIX 6

Participant Informed Consent Form

The Informed Consent Form was signed by all participants prior to the commencement of the semi-structured interviews



Participant Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

As outlined in the participant information sheet the current study will investigate collaborative practice between the class teacher, special education teacher (SET) and speech and language therapist (SLT) to identify and meet the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties in Irish primary schools.

Details of what the study involves are contained in the participant information sheets. The participant information sheet should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the study.

Your anonymity is assured, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years at which time it will be destroyed. Anonymised research data may be held indefinitely or as required by the Researcher.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understand the participant information sheet
- I understand what the project is about
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason
- I am aware that my results will be kept confidential
- I am over 18 years of age

Name (PRINTED): _____

Name (Signature): _____

Date: _____

Principal Researcher: _____

APPENDIX 7

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule – Principal

Section 1 (Introduction)

1. You're the principal here for X number of years, can you tell me a little bit about your experience to date.
2. How many students are in your school?
3. Out of that figure how many students would have a diagnosis?
4. Is there a particular speech and language therapist that you work with?
5. Do you work with other speech and language therapists?
6. Can you tell me a little bit about this relationship or give an example?

Section 2 (Identify Needs)

7. Can you tell me about the introduction of the new Primary Language Curriculum to your school?
8. What are the benefits of the new Primary Language Curriculum?
9. What are the challenges of the new Primary Language Curriculum?
10. How are you negotiating this in your school for children with speech, language and communication difficulties?
11. The Primary Language Curriculum is all about starting from where the child is at. How do you identify needs for the children with language difficulties? Tell me a little bit about that...
12. How does the class teacher/special education teacher support children with speech, language and communication difficulties in your school?
13. How often does the class teacher and special education teacher engage in collaborative planning? Are they given allocated time to do so? Do you think this is important? Is it helpful...?
14. Do they collaborate with the speech and language therapist, can you give me examples?

Section 3 (Address/Monitor)

15. What assessments are administered with the students in your school and how are these assessments used to support children with speech, language and communication difficulties/ additional needs?
16. When we talk about children with speech, language and communication difficulties, what needs pose the greatest challenge for your teachers?
17. What initiatives/ resources are in place to support children with speech, language and communication difficulties? Do these initiatives/ resources enhance their learning? Can you give me an example?
18. On the ground - what resources work best for the teachers in your school to support students with speech, language and communication difficulties?

19. Does the class teacher and the special education teacher engage in collaborative practice to identify and address needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties/ additional needs? If so, what does that collaborative practice look like in your school?
20. Is the speech and language therapist involved in this collaboration (how??) or (would it be helpful if they were? How could this be facilitated?).
21. How important is it to collaborate with the speech and language therapist to support the children with speech, language and communication difficulties in your school?

Section 4 (Support)

22. From your own experience, who is best able to provide support to children with speech, language and communication difficulties?
23. The Demonstration Project that was rolled out in a number of schools over the course of the 2018/19 school year piloted a model of in-school therapy supports by providing speech and language and occupational therapy services on-site. What is your opinion on this?
24. How do you think this type of support with therapist may be sustained?
25. How would this type of support help you as the principal as well as the staff within your school?

Section 5 (Continuous Professional Development)

26. Do you feel you received adequate Continuous Professional Development in the Primary Language Curriculum? Was it useful for identifying, addressing and monitoring needs for children with speech, language and communication difficulties? Explain.
27. Having attended the full day seminars provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), can you comment on how you felt about this form of Continuous Professional Development?
28. What form of Continuous Professional Development would be the most effective in your opinion? How could this be facilitated?
29. Would you like more support/ Continuous Professional Development in the Primary Language Curriculum? Explain your answer?

APPENDIX 8

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule - Class Teacher

Section 1 (Introduction)

1. You're teaching X years, tell me a little bit about your experience teaching language and literacy to date?
2. How many children are in your class?
3. Out of that figure, how many children have speech, language and communication difficulties?
4. How many of these children have a diagnosis?
5. Is there a particular speech and language therapist that you work with?
6. Do you work with other speech and language therapists?
7. Can you tell me a little bit about this relationship or give an example?

Section 2 (Identify Needs)

8. How are you implementing the Primary Language Curriculum in your school as a whole? In particular, how are you negotiating this in your school for children with SEN?
9. The Primary Language Curriculum is all about starting from where the child is at. How do you identify needs for the children with language difficulties? Tell me a little bit about that.
10. In accordance with the new allocation model of support how does your school identify need? How are hours dispersed?
11. How does the special education teacher support you and the children with speech, language and communication difficulties?
12. How often do you engage in collaborative planning with the special education teacher? Are you given allocated time to do so? Do you find this helpful?

Section 3 (Address/ Monitor)

13. What assessments are completed with the children in your class, and how are these assessments used to support children with speech, language and communication difficulties (address needs?)
14. When we talk about children with speech, language and communication difficulties, what needs pose the greatest challenge for you?
15. As the class teacher what support do you need in addressing and monitoring children with speech, language and communication difficulties? And what form of support do you think works best?
16. What initiatives/ resources are in place to support children with speech, language and communication difficulties? How does this support you as the class teacher?
17. On the ground - what resources work?
18. How do you monitor progress?
19. Have you had the opportunity to meet with the speech and language therapist to discuss interventions that he/she may be implementing with children in your class who have a diagnosis?
20. How important do you think it is to collaborate with the speech and language therapist to support children with speech, language and communication difficulties?
21. I notice that the speech and language therapist talk about learning goals and then, as class teacher, I talk about learning outcomes and then, the special education teacher is working towards targets, and these are what we write up in the student support plan (SSP). Is this a bit confusing, what are your opinions on this? Can you give me some examples?

Section 4 (Support)

22. From your own experience, who is best able to provide support to children with speech, language and communication difficulties?
23. The Demonstration Project that was rolled out in a number of schools over the course of the 2018/19 school year piloted a model of in-school therapy supports by providing speech and language and occupational therapy services on-site. What is your opinion on this?
24. How do you think this type of support with therapist may be sustained?
25. How would this type of support help you as special education teacher?

Section 5 (Continuous Professional Development)

26. Do you feel you received adequate Continuous Professional Development in the Primary Language Curriculum? Was it useful for identifying, addressing and monitoring needs for children with speech, language and communication difficulties? Explain.
27. Having attended the full day seminars provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), can you comment on how you felt about this form of Continuous Professional Development?
28. What form of Continuous Professional Development would be the most effective in your opinion? How could this be facilitated?
29. Would you like more support/ Continuous Professional Development in the Primary Language Curriculum? Explain your answer?

APPENDIX 9

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule – Special Education Teacher

Section 1 (Introduction)

1. You're teaching X years, tell me a little bit about your experience teaching language and literacy to date?
2. How many children do you work with?
3. Out of that figure, how many children have speech, language and communication difficulties?
4. How many of these children have a diagnosis?
5. Is there a particular speech and language therapist that you work with?
6. Do you work with other speech and language therapists?
7. Can you tell me a little bit about this relationship or give an example?

Section 2 (Identify Needs)

8. How are you implementing the Primary Language Curriculum in your school as a whole? In particular, how are you negotiating this in your school for children with SEN?
9. The Primary Language Curriculum is all about starting from where the child is at. How do you identify needs for the children with language difficulties? Tell me a little bit about that.
10. In accordance with the new allocation model of support how does your school identify need? How are hours dispersed?
11. How do you support the class teachers and the children with speech, language and communication difficulties?
12. How often do you engage in collaborative planning with the class teacher? Are you given allocated time to do so? Do you find this helpful?

Section 3 (Address/ Monitor)

13. What assessments are completed with the children that you teach, and how are these assessments used to support children with SLCD/ address needs?
14. When we talk about children with SLCD, what needs pose the greatest challenge for you?
15. As the special education teacher what support do you need in addressing and monitoring children with speech, language and communication difficulties? And what form of support do you think works best?
16. What initiatives/ resources are in place to support children with speech, language and communication difficulties? How does this support you as the special education teacher?
17. On the ground - what resources work?
18. How do you monitor progress?
19. Have you had the opportunity to meet with the speech and language therapist to discuss interventions that he/she may be implementing with children that you work with - who have a diagnosis?
20. How important do you think it is to collaborate with the speech and language therapist to support children with speech, language and communication difficulties?
21. I notice that the speech and language therapist talk about learning goals and then, as a class teacher, I talk about learning outcomes and then, the special education teacher is working towards targets, and these are what we write up in the student support plan (SSP). Is this a bit confusing, what are your opinions on this? Can you give me some examples?

Section 4 (Support)

22. From your own experience, who is best able to provide support to children with speech, language and communication difficulties?
23. The Demonstration Project that was rolled out in a number of schools over the course of the 2018/19 school year piloted a model of in-school therapy supports by providing speech and language and occupational therapy services on-site. What is your opinion on this?
24. How do you think this type of support with therapist may be sustained?
25. How would this type of support help you as special education teacher?

Section 5 (CPD)

26. Do you feel you received adequate Continuous Professional Development in the Primary Language Curriculum? Was it useful for identifying, addressing and monitoring needs for children with speech, language and communication difficulties? Explain.
27. Having attended the full day seminars provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), can you comment on how you felt about this form of Continuous Professional Development?
28. What form of Continuous Professional Development would be the most effective in your opinion? How could this be facilitated?
29. Would you like more support/ Continuous Professional Development in the Primary Language Curriculum? Explain your answer?

APPENDIX 10

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule – Speech and Language Therapist

1. You're a speech and language therapist for the past X years, can you tell me a little bit about your experience to date (working with students with speech, language and communication difficulties?)
2. Can you describe the consultation process or referral process for children with speech, language and communication difficulties? (Is there a common point of entry?)
3. Can you describe your involvement with primary schools?
 - How many: schools, students do you work with on average annually (what is your exposure to classrooms?)
 - Type of work: observing or demonstrating or both (are you collecting information so that you can advise a plan or are you going into the classroom modelling strategies or a bit of both)
 - Observing = checklists, recordings
 - Demonstrating = modelling strategies
 - The process of review – who's involved and who's leading the collaboration (weight of responsibility)
4. What does collaborative practice mean to you? (How would you define it?)
5. Do you feel you engage in effective collaborative practice with the class teacher or SET or both?
 - If so, how? - what does this collaboration look like?
 - How often does it occur?
6. What are the benefits of collaboration?
7. What are the barriers to collaboration?
8. Would you say from your experience that you have an accurate understanding of how a classroom works?
9. Are you familiar with the Continuum of Support framework?
10. Describe your role if any in the planning process in meeting the educational needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties in schools?
11. Do you think current practice between speech and language therapists and educators are effective in meeting the needs of students with speech, language and communication difficulties?
 - What works well?
 - How can practice be improved?
12. Do you work closely with the families of your students? How do you support them? Can you give me examples?
13. The Demonstration Project that was rolled out in a number of schools over the course of the 2018/19 school year piloted a model of in-school therapy supports by providing speech and language and occupational therapy services on-site. What is your opinion on this?
14. How do you think this type of support may be sustained?
15. What are the benefits of the Demonstration Project?
16. How would this type of support help principals, class teachers and special education teachers in schools?

APPENDIX 11

Example of the Role of Integrated Annotations (NVivo 12)

templates again then the API would coordinate these being brought into classes. We started at the infant levels focusing on the juniors first and then we expand to 1st and 2nd classes after that and now of course we are up onto the senior school end of the school now.

7. What are the benefits of the new primary language curriculum?
The philosophy behind it not having a distinction between the 2 main languages I mean that certainly is a benefit in terms of the teaching and learning. That consistency across the two languages, the same structure, the same stands and so on that certainly was a benefit of it. A lot of focus on oral language and again in particular given our demographic here that has been a huge positive as well and then sort of an acknowledgment for ticking the hat to the language learning that goes on in preschool and the Aistear programme that they were sort of able to incorporate that. So it was more relevant to what's actually happening on the ground than the previous one and again the learning outcomes, the developmental milestone They're very clear.
They also trimmed it back quite abit as well, so you know there's less learning outcomes. The constant objective in the previous curriculum so yeah there's a lot of positives , it's a different way of thinking but even the fact that you know the children can be identified of where they are and then the expectation that they can progress at their own pace now that can be very challenging for a teacher but ideologically you know it's a great idea its over to the teacher on how you manage it so I would say a very sound philosophy behind the programme and a lot of positives but again it was such a shift from maybe the old programme that that obviously brought challenges just in its implementation and I'm not too sure were teachers ready for this whole change, your too young to remember this Ciara but when I qualified like the revised curriculum of 99 when I trained in st pats we were trained in the old curriculum and then we graduated and we came out then and immediately then the 99 revised curriculum was launched and it was an entirely new curriculum across the board so you reengaged in CPD for a number of years so it was 2nd nature sort of like where are we going today and what subject are we doing

– Stage 1 – Familiarisation – an example of annotation used to integrate contextual factors such as coding assumptions, field notes and observations and researcher's thoughts and ideas while becoming familiar during initial reading of interviews.

Item	Content
1	Given the demographis of the school, Keith was happy that Oral Language was the primary focus

APPENDIX 12

Audio Files (Semi-Structured Interviews)

The screenshot displays a software interface for managing audio files. On the left, a file explorer shows a hierarchy: 'Boys' School' > 'Audio Files' > 'Boys' School'. A label 'Audio Files (Semi-Structured Interviews)' points to this folder. The central pane lists recordings: 'Alannah Recording', 'Angela Recording', 'Anne Recording', 'Conor Recording', 'James Recording', 'Neasa Recording', and 'Nora Recording'. A label 'Audio File' points to the 'Alannah Recording' entry. The right pane shows a detailed view of the 'Alannah Recording' with a waveform at the top and a transcription table below. A label 'Written Transcription' points to the text in the table.

Timespan	Content
1 0:00.0 - 0:56.0	<p>You're teaching 3 years, tell me a little bit about your experience teaching language and literacy to date?</p> <p>I started teaching three years ago. My first job was actually as an SEN teacher so I've had quite a lot of students with speech and language difficulties. Then, in the last two years, I've had two classes with a range of difficulties and abilities in the class. I've taught senior infants this year and then last year, it was senior infants and first class, so it was a mixed class.</p>
2 0:56.0 - 2:00.2	<p>How many children are in your class? and out of that figure, how many children have speech, language and communication difficulties?</p> <p>I have twenty two children in my class. There is one in particular, but he is not diagnosed. He has an issue communicating his needs. I have no EAL students this year. Last year, I had two. I have one boy ASD, but he is very mild, so he is well able to communicate. He wouldn't be able to communicate his emotions as much. His reading ability and oral language is quite good.</p>
3 2:00.2 - 2:39.3	<p>Is there a particular speech and language therapist that you work with?</p> <p>Not this year, but last year I had a child with quite severe speech and language difficulties and he had a private SLT so I was on the phone to her a couple of times. Then in my first year teaching in SEN, I was speaking to another private SLT but no one like designated to our school in particular.</p>

APPENDIX 13

School Profile Sheet

Each principal completed the school profile sheet prior to the semi-interviews.

Principal Name: _____
School Name: _____
DEIS/ Non-DEIS _____
Administrative Principal <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching Principal <input type="checkbox"/>
No. of Pupils: _____
No. of Mainstream Class Teachers: _____
No. of Special Education Teachers: _____
SEN Co-ordinator: _____

APPENDIX 14

Case Classifications – Participant Attributes

Case Classifications		Interview Participants			
Search Project		A : Gender	B : Stakeholders	C : Years	D : School Type
1 : Ailbhe	Female	SLT	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	
2 : Alannah	Female	Class teacher	3	Boys' School	
3 : Ameila	Female	SET	12	DEIS School	
4 : Angela	Female	SET	6	Boys' School	
5 : Anne	Female	Class teacher	10	Boys' School	
6 : Annie	Female	Principals	20	DEIS School	
7 : Ava	Female	Class teacher	3	Mixed School	
8 : Cian	Male	SET	14	Mixed School	
9 : Conor	Male	SET	12	Boys' School	
10 : Dave	Male	SET	1	DEIS School	
11 : Donna	Female	Class teacher	5	DEIS School	
12 : Eileen	Female	SET	15	Mixed School	
13 : Elana	Female	SET	15	Girls' School	
14 : Ellen	Female	Class teacher	2	Girls' School	
15 : James	Male	SET	12	Boys' School	
16 : Jessica	Female	SLT	Not Applicable	Unassigned	
17 : Kathleen	Female	SET	35	Girls' School	
18 : Keith	Male	Principals	23	Mixed School	
19 : Linda	Female	Class teacher	13	Girls' School	
20 : Lynn	Female	Principals	16	Girls' School	
21 : Neasa	Female	SLT	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	
22 : Nicola	Female	Class teacher	9	Mixed School	
23 : Nora	Female	Principals	24	Boys' School	
24 : Olivia	Female	Class teacher	3	Mixed School	
25 : Rebecca	Female	Class teacher	2	Girls' School	
26 : Robyn	Female	Class teacher	5	DEIS School	
27 : Rosie	Female	SLT	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	

APPENDIX 15

Qualitative Codebook – Phase Two (Generating Initial Codes)

Phase Two - Generating Initial Coding involved deconstructing the data from its original chronology into an initial set of non-hierarchical codes.

Stage 2 – Generating Initial Codes (78 codes identified at stage 2)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded	Stage 2 – Generating Initial Codes (78 codes identified at stage 2)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Am I doing the right thing	17	39	Human resources	25	79
ASD & DS	10	18	Buddies	1	2
Assessments	16	40	waiting lists	4	8
formal assessments	8	14	Identifying Need	13	31
informal assessments	14	29	Importance of collaboration	13	16
check in touch base	11	26	improve practice	2	2
Child safety and confidence	17	40	Informal collaboration	11	13
Bullying	1	1	Quick Chat	5	5
Empathy for child	3	3	information and knowledge	26	68
enjoyment	4	9	inspector	7	11
Collaboration	26	83	Isolation	7	9
bake the cake	4	7	leadership	9	13
barriers	3	6	New Allocation Model	8	8
Cohort planning	10	14	Principal and SET team allocate hours	5	5
No collaboration between CT and SET	3	4	no formal diagnosis	9	10
paper swap	9	13	Overwhelmed	12	23
pass the parcel	7	14	Parents	16	36
Relationships	2	3	PLC confusion	20	68
SLT support	10	29	anger	7	12
Team sport	12	19	Benefits to PLC	2	3
continuity	11	13	thematic approach to PLC	2	4

Stage 2 – Generating Initial Codes (78 codes identified at stage 2)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded	Stage 2 – Generating Initial Codes (78 codes identified at stage 2)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
CPD	12	18	reliance on CT	9	16
in school support CPD	9	12	reliance on RT	3	3
More training	14	16	Same page	6	7
Demonstration Project	18	29	Spoon feeding	9	14
Support SET&CT	4	4	Station teaching	11	19
Sustainability	8	8	support for students	11	17
Disconnection	15	47	in-class	3	4
Consistency	7	12	Withdrawal	13	22
Breakdown in communication	5	9	Teacher confidence	21	49
Training disconnection	2	5	team teaching	7	9
EAL	6	8	Technology	15	30
Early Intervention	6	9	This is just the way it is	5	5
External Support-Outside Agencies	18	33	Time	27	100
Fear	8	13	Tips and Tricks	13	20
change	2	5	top down	6	9
flying solo	11	25	Under the radar	7	7
Google	6	6	Using SNA as a child mentor	9	12
			visuals	6	11
			Whole school approach	11	15

APPENDIX 16

Qualitative Codebook – Phase Three (Searching for Themes)

Phase Three – Searching for Themes involved merging, renaming, distilling and clustering related codes into broader categories of codes to reconstruct the data into a framework that makes sense to further the analysis.

Stage 3 - Searching for themes (78 initial codes collapsed into 16 core categories of codes)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
CHILD SAFETY AND CONFIDENCE	17	40
COLLABORATION	26	83
CPD	12	18
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT	18	29
DISCONNECTION BETWEEN DEPT OF HEALTH & DEPT EDUCATION	15	47
EAL	6	8
EXTERNAL SUPPORT - OUTSIDE AGENCIES	18	33
IDENTIFYING NEED	13	31
LACK OF RESOURCES	25	79
LEADERSHIP	9	13
OVERWHELMED	12	23
PLC CONFUSION	20	68
RELIANCE ON CLASS TEACHER	9	16
SUPPORT INITIATIVES FOR STUDENTS	11	17
TEACHER CONFIDENCE	21	49
TECHNOLOGY	15	30

APPENDIX 17

Qualitative Codebook – Phase Four (Reviewing Themes)

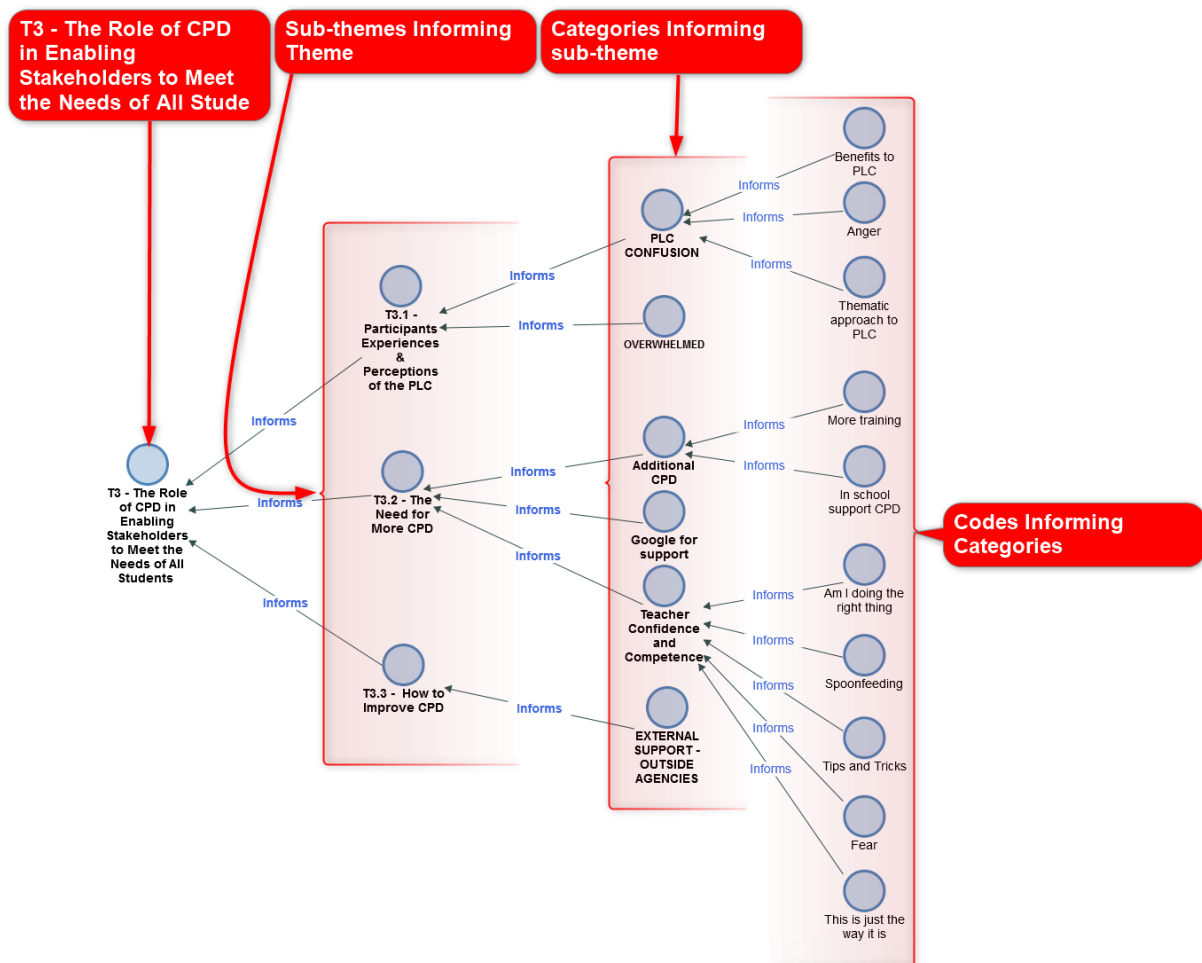
Phase Four – Reviewing Themes involved breaking down the now reorganised categories into sub-categories to better understand the meanings embedded therein.

Stage 4 - Reviewing themes (16 core categories reduced and consolidated to 10 at stage 4)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
CHILD SAFETY AND CONFIDENCE	17	40
COLLABORATION	26	83
CPD	12	18
DISCONNECTION BETWEEN DEPT OF HEALTH & DEPT EDUCATION	15	47
EXTERNAL SUPPORT - OUTSIDE AGENCIES	18	33
IDENTIFYING NEED	13	31
LACK OF RESOURCES	25	79
LEADERSHIP	9	13
SUPPORT INITIATIVES FOR STUDENTS	11	17
TEACHER CONFIDENCE	21	49

APPENDIX 18

Example of Flow from Codes to Categories to Themes

Example of process of conceptually mapping codes to categories to themes for Theme 3 – The Role of CPD in Enabling Stakeholders to Meet the Needs of All Students



APPENDIX 19

Qualitative Codebook – Phase Five (Defining and Naming Themes)

Phase Five – Defining and Naming Themes involved conceptually mapping and collapsing categories into a broader thematic framework.

Stage 5 - Defining and naming themes (3 themes defined and named in stage 5 with 9 sub-themes or elements)	Interviews Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
T1 - The Value of Collaboration	28	349
T1.1 - Improving Student Learning Opportunities and Outcomes	26	131
T1.2 - Establishing Effective Partnerships	22	80
T1.3 - Transferring and Sharing of Knowledge and Skills	27	138
T2 - The Challenges to Effective Collaboration	28	434
T2.1 - Stakeholders Epistemological Understanding of Collaboration	18	63
T2.2 - Breakdown in Communication and The Lack of Collaboration between Services	21	77
T2.3 - Availability of Time to Collaborate	28	294
T3 - The Role of CPD in Enabling Stakeholders to Meet the Needs of All Students	26	316
T3.1 - Participants Experiences & Perceptions of the PLC	22	91
T3.2 - The Need for More CPD	26	192
T3.3 - How to Improve CPD	18	33

APPENDIX 20

Example of the Role of Analytical Memos (NVivo 12)

Stage 5 - Defining and naming themes

Name	Files	References
T1 - The Value of Collaboration	28	349
T1.1 - Improving Student Learning Opportunities and Outcom	26	131
T1.2 - Establishing Effective Partnerships	22	80
T1.3 - Transferring and Sharing of Knowledge and Skills	27	138
T2 - The Challenges to Effective Collaboration	28	434
T2.1 - Stakeholders Epistemological Understanding of Collabor	18	63
T2.2 - Breakdown in Communication and The Lack of Collabor	21	77
T2.3 - Availability of Time to Collaborate	28	294
T3 - The Role of CPD in Enabling Stakeholders to Meet the Needs	26	316
T3.1 - Participants Experiences & Perceptions of the PLC	22	91
T3.2 - The Need for More CPD	26	192
T3.3 - How to Improve CPD	18	33

Theme One: The Value of Collaboration

The value of collaboration is often underestimated (Connor 2004; Mulholland and O' Connor 2016; Mora-Ruano *et al.* 2019). Concurring with Anaby (2016), effective collaboration has the potential to foster inclusive practices, support students and respond to learner diversity. This sentiment was further reiterated by all participants in the study. They espoused the value of effective collaborative practices to identify and meet the needs of students with SLCD. From analysing the interview transcripts, it became apparent that inter-professional practice between teachers and SLTs is warranted in order to meet the demands of both curriculum and therapy and to further promote optimum student learning (Tollerfield 2003; Wright and Kersner 2004; Glover *et al.* 2015; Mulholland and O' Connor 2016). Concurring with the literature outlined in Chapter Five, Jessica, a SLT, reported that due to the rising number of students needing specialised support in Irish primary schools (Law *et al.* 2001; Shevlin *et al.* 2013), engaging in collaborative practices "is the only way to go". In keeping with current literature, findings presented in a study carried out by Jago and Radford (2017) highlighted that, "without collaborative practice the needs of the child cannot be fully met" (p.210). Jago and Radford (2017) posit that in order to meet the needs of students with SLCD joint target setting needs to be a priority. They believe that SLTs and teachers need to be given opportunities to collaborate, focusing on pedagogical approaches and assessment methods to support student language learning within the curriculum (DES 2019). Similarly, Kathleen, a SET emphasised the importance of such practice, stating that "sometimes the needs of the child are beyond our experience and specialist input is needed." This coheres with Ava, a class teacher's assertion that in order to provide appropriate support to students with SLCD the class teacher, SET and SLT must work together "it has to be a joint effort". In essence, these findings echo longstanding sentiments expressed by researchers such as Anaby *et al.* (2018) and Borg and Drange (2019). Borg and Drange (2019) believe that due to the increasingly complex challenges that schools are facing, in relation to the student population, different professionals could utilize their expertise to support student

– Stage 6 – Creating the Report - analytical memos were used to conduct a systematic review of the thematic framework developed in phase 5 to analyse, report and ask questions of data. Memos were used to reduce the data from series of coded themes to a series of documents explaining outcomes of analysis of themes identified. Later, memos themselves were reduced through editing out overlapping and less important content to cohere findings into a cohesive findings chapter

APPENDIX 21

The Seven Principles of Highly Effective Professional Learning

Department of Education and Training (2005)

